

## **Farnham Infrastructure Programme**

### **Farnham Board Meeting**

#### **AGENDA ITEM 06**

**DATE: 22 DECEMBER 2021**

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**REPORT OF: TIM OLIVER – BOARD CHAIR**

**LEAD OFFICER: ELAINE MARTIN – PROGRAMME MANAGER**

**SUBJECT: WESTERN LINK ROAD AND WRECCLESHAM RELIEF ROAD POLICY ALIGNMENT**

#### **SUMMARY OF ISSUE:**

The Western Link Road and Wrecclesham Relief Road have been reviewed by the Programme Team in terms of their alignment with current national, regional, and local policies, which is summarised in this paper.

The review indicates that neither road project (if considered on stand-alone merits alone) would fully align with current national, regional, or local policies. It is therefore questionable if either scheme, when considered as stand-alone projects to build new roads, would be able to secure central government funding at this time. This is because these policies prioritise new infrastructure which encourages people towards using more sustainable travel.

The two schemes address different connectivity and place issues within Farnham and should therefore be considered as separate projects.

The Western Link Road has been promoted by stakeholders for a number of years and was identified in the 2008 Scott Wilson report as a potential major scheme that could provide opportunities for significant enhancements to the pedestrian experience within the Town Centre strategy. This concept was highlighted by stakeholders during the development of the Optimised Infrastructure Plan (OIP) as one that could form part of a package of solutions addressing movement and place issues and problems in Farnham Town Centre and North Farnham. There is currently insufficient technical evidence to assess the scheme in detail, but the balance of potential impacts against potential benefits indicates that it would not have a strong policy case as a stand-alone scheme.

The Western Link Road could be considered as part of a package of measures to reduce traffic, enable improvements to quality of place, and support modal shift in Farnham. However, it is unlikely that such a scheme would enable benefits of a sufficient scale to

justify the cost and environmental impacts of the scheme. This is particularly the case given that there are currently very mixed views amongst stakeholders on the extent of 'place' improvements that are considered appropriate in Farnham town centre. Therefore, the policy case remains weak.

The Wrecclesham Relief Road has been promoted by stakeholders as a potential solution to the safety issues and environmental impacts associated with traffic passing along the A325 through Wrecclesham village. The Wrecclesham Relief Road was last investigated in detail by the 2002 Mouchel report. It is currently within a reserve list of schemes in the Transport for the South East investment pipeline and was also identified as a possible scheme by stakeholders during the development of the OIP. However, although there is insufficient technical evidence to assess the scheme in detail, the balance of potential impacts against potential benefits indicates that it would have a weak policy case as a stand-alone scheme. When considered as a potential intervention as part of a wider policy package to address the traffic challenges in Wrecclesham, the case would improve, although it would remain a significant challenge for the scheme to support wider policies. This in turn would suggest that attracting funding for a new relief road would remain a challenge.

#### **DETAILS:**

1. A policy alignment review of the Western Link Road and Wrecclesham Relief Road has been carried out by the Programme Team (Executive Summary included as Annex A). The policy alignment review was carried out against key current policies, including the 2008 Climate Change Act (2050 Target Update), Department for Transport's Transport Decarbonisation Plan, and local policy including Surrey's Climate Change Strategy and Local Transport Plan 4 (Emerging).
2. The review of relevant national policies highlights the requirement to promote sustainable transport, to support strong, vibrant, and healthy communities with a strong, responsive, and competitive economy and to contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment. Typically, this would require aligning growth and infrastructure whilst also limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes. The local policies, mirroring national policies, outline the importance of land use planning in improving local neighbourhoods to provide attractive environments for people and providing sustainable transport choices.
3. It is recognised in the EM3 Local Industrial Strategy that a lack of infrastructure development in the area is holding back the region's potential for economic growth and industrial development. However, any such development would need to reflect national policies on sustainable transport whilst maintaining the open spaces that characterise the area and contribute to the region's attractiveness to live and work in.
4. It is unlikely that central government funding would be secured for either scheme if they are promoted as stand-alone road schemes with no complementary measures. Current policies have a strong emphasis on improving the quality of local places, promoting modal shift and in reducing the need to travel. These policies would not be supported by stand-alone road building schemes. The policies would only be supported if it can be shown that the road schemes are required to promote and achieve mode shift through more sustainable travel behaviours and support placemaking by reducing traffic.
5. Central government will only provide funding for schemes if they are consistent with policies. It is, therefore, highly unlikely that central government funding would be forthcoming for these schemes, if promoted as stand-alone projects.

6. In the absence of central government funding, Surrey County Council, as Highways Authority, and by default the Farnham Infrastructure Programme, would not be able to proceed with either stand-alone scheme.
7. In summary, the policy alignment review has indicated that there are inherent policy difficulties associated with building stand-alone bypass schemes to the west of Farnham and Wrecclesham at this time.
8. Before the programme commits more resources on these projects, this Board is asked to consider the following options:

#### **Western Link Road**

- a. Cease work to develop and investigate the Western Link Road, but periodically review against any emerging national, regional, and local policies to see if the position has changed.
- b. Carry out initial cost and environmental feasibility work on the Western Link Road and report the conclusions and options to the Board.
- c. Following the traffic modelling outcomes for the wider area; look at the opportunity to develop a smaller package of measures for Farnham town centre and North Farnham that seek to address the negative safety and environmental impacts of traffic.

#### **Wrecclesham Relief Road**

- a. Cease work to develop and investigate the Wrecclesham Relief Road, but periodically review against any emerging national, regional, and local policies to see if the position has changed.
- b. Carry out initial cost and environmental feasibility work on the Wrecclesham Relief Road and report the conclusions and options to the Board.
- c. Following the traffic modelling outcomes for the wider area; look at the opportunity to develop a smaller package of measures for Wrecclesham that seek to address the negative safety and environmental impacts of traffic.

#### **CONSULTATION:**

9. There are no other implications in respect of this report. Public views on both the Wrecclesham Relief Road and the Western Link Road were sought during the recent consultation on the Optimised Infrastructure Plan.

#### **RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:**

10. The Board has no statutory powers and as such any decisions requiring approval by the responsible authorities, in this case Surrey County Council, will have individual risk assessments.

#### **FINANCIAL AND VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS**

11. The cost and value for money in respect of the works will be identified within the Surrey County Council Report.

#### **SECTION 151 OFFICER COMMENTARY**

12. As proposals are developed that require necessary Surrey County Council approval, individual S151 approvals will be sought.

**LEGAL IMPLICATIONS – MONITORING OFFICER**

13. The Board has no executive powers. Any decisions made would require Surrey County Council to follow its own legal advice and its approval procedures.

**EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY**

14. A Programme-level Equality Impact Assessment was carried out in August 2021. This was approved by the Programme Team at the September Programme Board and indicated that there are currently no substantive concerns associated with the Programme’s proposals based upon the level of information available.

**OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

15. There are no other implications in respect of this Report.

**WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:**

16. Programme activity will continue in line with the decisions made by the Board.

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