



Northumberland

County Council

CABINET

09 JULY 2019

BLYTH RELIEF ROAD

Report of: Paul Johnston, Interim Executive Director of Place

Cabinet Member: Cllr Richard Wearmouth, Portfolio Holder for Economic Development

Purpose of report

To provide Cabinet with:

- An overview of progress to date on the development of the business case for a new relief road for Blyth;
- A recommendation for the preferred route for more detailed development based on the outcome of appraisal to date and an extensive stakeholder consultation exercise;
- An update on the emerging opportunity to fund the scheme as part of the Major Road Network.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- Note the progress of the project to date;
- Confirm Route 3 as the preferred route to take forward to detailed design and planning;
- Note the costs and programme for taking the scheme forward as detailed in paragraphs 14-19; and
- Approve the proposed match funding totalling £3.332m to support the Major Road Network (MRN) National Roads Fund application.

Link to Corporate Plan

This report is relevant to the “connecting” and “thriving” priorities included in the NCC Corporate Plan 2018-2021.

Key issues

Significant growth in traffic is expected across the Blyth network associated with the delivery of the Local Plan. The transport network, in its current form, does not have the available capacity to accommodate the future levels of growth.

Detailed design and appraisal work over the past 4 years has identified Route 3 (A new link road from Princess Louise Road to the existing A192 / A189 “Three Horseshoes” interchange) as the best performing option. This opinion has been validated by an extensive stakeholder consultation exercise.

The National Roads Fund for the Major Road Network has emerged as a viable opportunity to fund delivery of the scheme.

BACKGROUND

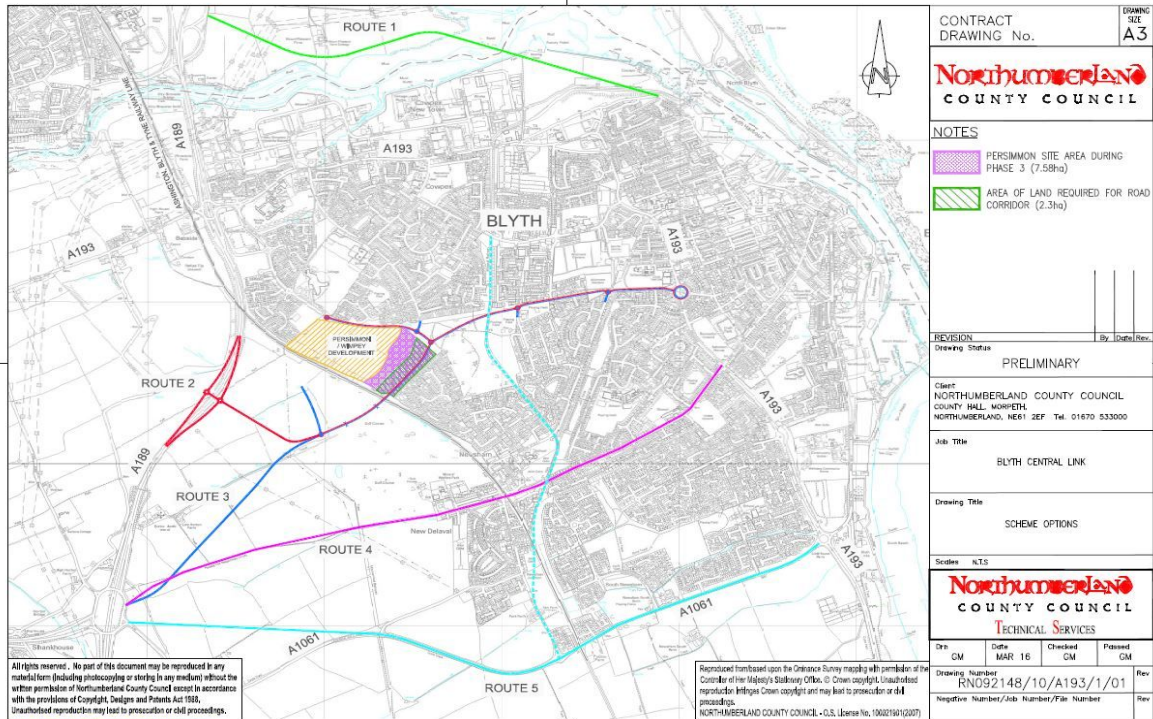
Progress to Date

1. Northumberland County Council has been aware of traffic problems entering and leaving Blyth for a number of years. The two main roads into Blyth, the A193 Cowpen Road and A1061 Laverock Hall Road are heavily trafficked with over 20,000 vehicles a day on each road and have both been identified as suffering from congestion during peak periods. In the long term, significant growth in traffic is expected across the Blyth network associated with the delivery of the Local Plan. The transport network, in its current form, does not have the available capacity to accommodate the future levels of growth.
2. This congestion adversely affects the economic growth of the area, the movement of people and goods, particularly to and from the Port of Blyth, and also has a harmful effect upon the environment through exhaust emissions from vehicles. The reliability of buses is also being affected, particularly during peak hours, with the existing roads into Blyth highlighted by bus operators as causing delays to services.
3. A Blyth Transport Study in 2015 noted several long term options, including additional radial capacity, which seek to tackle future transport challenges by adding new capacity to the network. Further work was carried out to look at the feasibility of a number of options and develop an Outline Business Case for the provision of a new relief road.
4. Based on the outcome of early feasibility work, three east-west routes were selected, from an initial shortlist of 5, for detailed appraisal as follows:

Table 1 - Blyth Relief Road Shortlisted Options

Route	Description
3	A new link road from Princess Louise Road to the existing A192 / A189 "Three Horseshoes" interchange
4	A new link road from Plessey Road to the existing A192 / A189 "Three Horseshoes" interchange
5	Dualling of the existing A1061 Laverock Hall Road

5. A new internal North South route, largely following the route of the disused mineral rail line, was also included for consideration in the study. This could potentially reduce congestion on the A193 Rotary Way.



6. Results from the assessment showed that Route 3 provides the greatest benefit in terms of improving internal connectivity within Blyth and providing congestion relief for both the A193 Cowpen Road and the A1061 Laverock Hall Road.
7. However, all three east-west routes have significant risks to delivery as set out below.

Table 2 - Route Option Delivery Risks

Route	Delivery Risks
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The route passes through Low Horton Farm and it will be necessary to secure land from this farm to deliver the scheme. The route passes through the committed residential development (Persimmon) at the southern end of Chase Farm Drive. The eastern part of the route off Broadway Circle passes through existing allotments between Ogle Drive and Princess Louise Road. This will be of concern to Blyth Town Council.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The route runs along Ogle Drive, which is relatively narrow and has on street parking serving the residential properties along this link and may lead to local stakeholder objection. • Route 3 also runs through the Blyth Golf Course and would result in the loss of 2-3 holes.
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The route passes through Low Horton Farm and it will be necessary to secure land from this farm to deliver the scheme. • The requirement to bridge the Northumberland Rail line in a tightly constrained location adjacent to the junction of Newcastle Road / Plessey Road. This will require a number of adjacent properties to be demolished; • The significant number of frontage properties along Plessey Road (particularly west of Newcastle Road) and associated on street parking which would likely lead to constrained traffic flow and local objection.
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requirement for land acquisition on parts of its length. • The Benefit to Cost Ratio (BCR) is considerably lower than for the other route options as there is minimal benefit to A193 Cowpen Road

Stakeholder Consultation

8. It was important to obtain the views of a broad range of stakeholders to validate work done to date and steer the direction of the project going forward. A consultation process was undertaken that had the following objectives:
- To involve the public in shaping the future of Blyth;
 - To gather ideas on what people want;
 - To understand how our proposals may affect the public;
 - To inform a decision on the preferred route to take forward.
9. The public consultation exercise was carried out in the early Spring of 2019. This involved:
- A drop-in session on 30th January 2019 for local County Councillors and Blyth Town Councillors;
 - Two public drop in sessions (Croftway Primary Academy and Bede Academy) on 20th and 21st February;
 - A presentation to Blyth Town Forum on 4th April;
 - Meeting with Blyth Town Council on 16th April.

10. Material presented at the consultation can be found at <https://northumberland.gov.uk/blythroad> and the outcome of the consultation is set out in more detail in 'Blyth Relief Road - Consultation Report'. In summary:
- 153 No. paper copy feedback questionnaire forms were received at the public consultation events and 622 No. feedback questionnaire forms were returned online, thus 775 No. responses in total;
 - 91% of respondents agreed that Blyth would benefit from the creation of a new relief road and recognised the wider accessibility and economic benefits that this would bring;
 - After reviewing the proposed options, 59% of respondents agreed with the County Council's proposal to proceed with Route 3;
 - Of the alternative options, 13% of respondents favoured Route 4 and 18% favoured Route 5;
 - The opportunities presented by the north-south route were acknowledged.
11. The above feedback shows agreement with Northumberland County Council's view that 3 Route should be the preferred route on which to progress the scheme.
12. There were however a number of concerns raised about the impact that Route 3 may have. These are set out in detail in the Stakeholder Report and summarised below along with the potential options to mitigate these concerns.

Issue Raised	Potential Mitigation
Localised congestion	<p>Cowpen Road and Laverock Hall Road will remain as the strategic access routes for Blyth and this will be supported by an appropriate signing strategy. The volume of traffic on the new link is not anticipated to be extensive enough to create significant congestion, although localised mitigation will be provided as appropriate.</p> <p>The impact on Ogle Drive is significant due to the proximity of the route and the change in the type and number of vehicles using the existing highways. Amendments to the route in the Ogle Drive /Albion Way/Princess Louise Road could reduce some of the major concerns.</p>
Loss of allotments	Route 3 will mean the loss of allotment land to the east of Ogle Drive. The design process will look at alignments to avoid the allotments land. If this is not possible, alternative allotment facilities will be provided.
Loss of holes on golf course	The proposed route 3 will result in the loss of 2-3 holes at Blyth Golf Club. The council will work with the golf club to look at opportunities for alternative provision.

Noise and air pollution	Appropriate screening will be considered as part of the design process to minimise the impact of noise Air quality impact should become less of an issue in the future with the move to electric vehicles
Parking	The provision of alternative parking spaces will be a key consideration of the design process.
Play park	Route 3 will pass through a play park proposed as part of the Persimmon development to the south of Chase Farm Drive. The provision of alternative play park facilities will be considered as part of the design process.
House prices	The potential negative impact on housing prices may be mitigated by other factors associated with the relief road such as improved access and improved economic benefits to Blyth.
Viability of Low Horton Farm	Significant objections were received from a tenant farm/equestrian business in relation to the financial impact caused by loss of land. The council will work with all affected stakeholders to find the optimum design solution which minimises the impact.

13. Based on the outcome of the assessment work carried out to date and feedback from the consultation exercise it is recommended that Route 3 should be progressed as Northumberland County Council's preferred route. Further design and assessment work should be carried out to determine suitable mitigation measures to address the risks and concerns raised, followed by further public consultation.
14. The current cost estimate for route 3 is **£22.213m** and demonstrates **very high value for money** with a **BCR of 4.91**. The project programme sets out the following key milestones:
- Submission of planning application - April 2021
 - Determination of planning decision - September 2021
 - Full Business Case submitted to DfT - December 2022
 - Start of Construction - March 2023
 - Scheme open to public - March 2024

Major Road Network Funding

15. The Major Road Network (MRN) will form a middle tier of the country's busiest and most economically important local authority 'A' roads, sitting between the national

Strategic Road Network (SRN) and the rest of the local road network. A specific new funding stream has been dedicated to major improvements on MRN roads.

16. At the Budget in October 2018, the Government announced the National Roads Fund (NRF) would be £28.8 billion between 2020-2025, £3.5 billion of which is expected to be spent nationally on major improvement schemes on those local roads designated as part of the MRN.
17. Transport for the North (TfN) is working with partners across the north to compile a list of up to ten top priority MRN investments across the TfN area for the period April 2020 to March 2025. Blyth Relief Road is well placed to be prioritised within the TfN top 10 list in that it:
 - Meets many of the MRN central objectives (it would reduce congestion; support economic growth and rebalancing; support housing delivery; and support all road users);
 - Is eligible for MRN funding (it provides a new alignment on the MRN alleviating congestion and making through journeys quicker, safer and more reliable);
 - Falls within the funding envelope (£20m to £50m) of the MRN;
 - The scheme is at Outline Business Case level so is well developed.
18. The project has been submitted to TfN for consideration as part of the prioritisation process with a final decision on the top 10 schemes to be submitted to the DfT for approval is anticipated at the end of July 2019. The project as submitted is for the delivery of route 3. Given the requirement for 15% match funding, delivery of the north-south route is not included and will be considered for future phases of funding.
19. A total of £3.332 million has been identified in the Council capital programme that was approved by the County Council on 20 February 2019 (£1.218m is allocated to the end of 2021/22 and £2.114m was identified as a project that was included in the Capital Programme that will complete in either 2022/23 or 2023/24) and this can be used to meet the required 15% match funding for any bid submission. In advance of a final submission to the DfT at the end of July, Section 151 Officer sign off will be required confirming the availability of this match funding, including the £2.114m funding provisionally allocated in the council capital programme for 2022/23.

IMPLICATIONS

Policy	The Northumberland Local Plan, as submitted for examination in May 2019 states explicit support for the delivery of a relief road for Blyth.
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Finance and value for money	<p>The current cost estimate for route 3 is £22.213m and demonstrates very high value for money with a BCR of 4.91. This cost estimate contains risk appropriate to the stage of development and the risk allowance has been increased given the strength of the business case. The scheme for route 3 will require land acquisition and until there are detailed discussions with the land owner this will remain a risk to the overall cost.</p> <p>A total of £3.332 million has been identified in the council capital programme (£1.218m is allocated within the MTFP to the end of 2021/22 and £2.114m was identified as a project that was included in the Capital Programme that will complete in either 2022/23 or 2023/24) and this can be used to meet the required 15% match funding for any bid submission.</p>
Legal	Legal orders will be required to support scheme delivery. Early engagement has commenced with NCC Legal team.
Procurement	The Council's procurement team will be consulted on the procurement route which would be necessary to undertake the next phase of the project.
Human Resources	In house design resources will be utilised as the scheme is developed.
Property	N/A
Equalities	<p>(Impact Assessment attached)</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No X N/A <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>This will be considered as part of the detailed design of the scheme.</p>
Risk Assessment	Scheme costings contain an allowance for risk appropriate to the current stage of scheme development. A detailed risk register will be developed as part of the next stage.
Crime & Disorder	None at this stage.
Customer Consideration	A detailed stakeholder consultation exercise was carried out in the Spring of 2019. Further consultation will take place as the scheme develops.
Carbon reduction	<p>The declaration of a climate emergency demonstrates the council's commitment to responding to climate change.</p> <p>However this also recognises that improvements and additions to the road network will also still be considered albeit in the light of future anticipated demand within a low carbon context. In the immediate future, priority will be given to removing pinch points and addressing congestion where there is a detrimental impact on air quality.</p> <p>Cowpen Road in Blyth is one example where the flow of traffic is such that the air quality levels at peak times reaches unacceptable levels. Various traffic management solutions have been introduced but the</p>

	problems persist. The Council therefore considers it necessary to ease traffic flows through the construction of a new relief road for Blyth.
Wards	All wards within Blyth will be affected by this proposal.

Background papers:

None

Report sign off.

Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:

	initials
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