



Northumberland

County Council

CABINET

12 APRIL 2022

BLYTH RELIEF ROAD

Report of: Rick O'Farrell, Interim Executive Director of Regeneration

Cabinet Member: Councillor Wojciech Ploszaj, Portfolio Holder for Business

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 which will significantly improve access to the town by all modes.
- A recommendation for the preferred route alignment to be taken forward to a public engagement exercise.
- An update on the business case which includes emerging costs, benefits and programme for the scheme.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- **Note the progress of the project to date**
- **Confirm the revised Route 5 as the preferred option to take forward to a public engagement exercise**
- **Endorse sign off by the s151 Officer of the Outline Business Case noting the required County Council match funding commitment and future approval gateways as set out in paragraphs 13 to 15**

Link to Corporate Plan

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

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 this growth.

Following further design and consultation on the previous preferred alignment, a series of risks have materialised that would prevent route 3 from being taken forward.

The recommendation is that Route 5 (the realignment of the existing A1061 Laverock Hall Road to provide a direct dual carriageway connection between the A192 Three Horse Shoes Roundabout and the A193 South Beach; with a new complementary link proposed between Chase Farm Drive and Ogle Drive, also joining up with Tynedale Drive) is identified as the preferred route alignment.

The National Roads Fund for the Major Road Network has emerged as a viable opportunity to fund delivery of the scheme. An Outline Business Case will be submitted to the Department for Transport in April 2022.

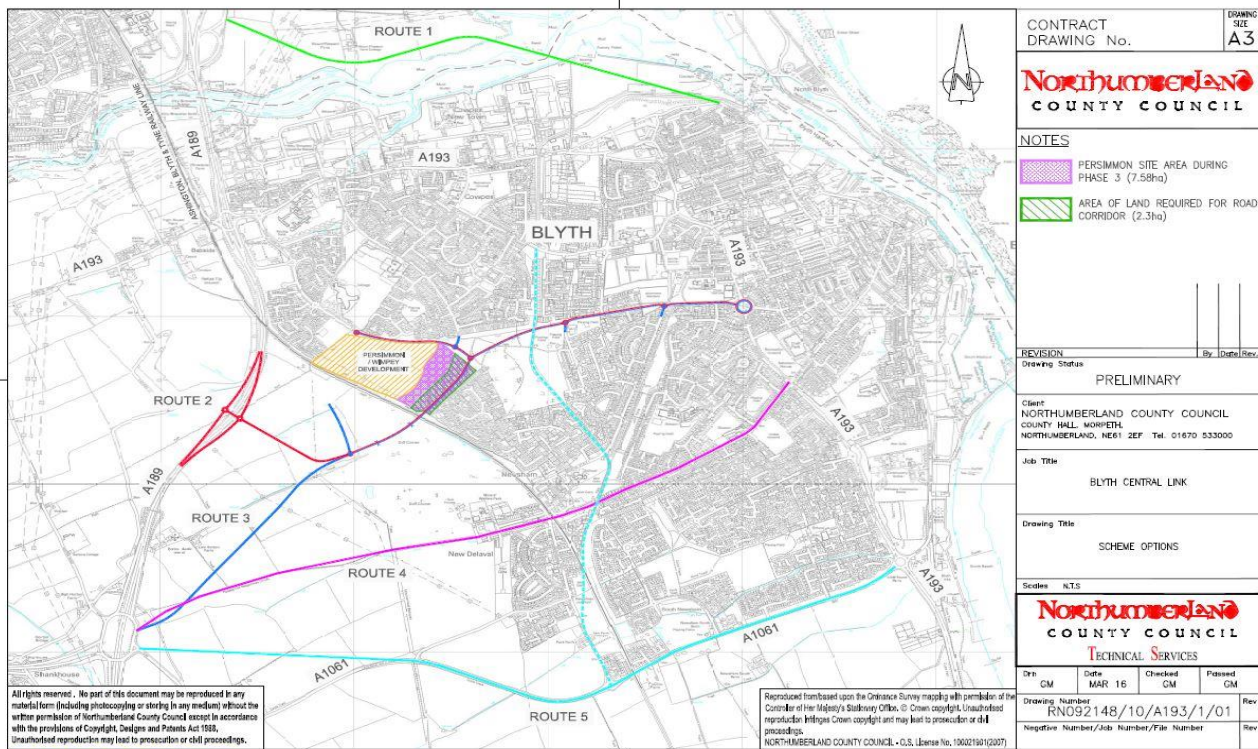
Blyth Relief Road has been included in the Forward Plan as a key decision for the council.

BACKGROUND

Progress to Date

1. The town of Blyth plays a key role in the regional economy, with the £70 million 'Energising Blyth' programme of investment aimed at making Blyth a thriving UK and international centre of renewable energy and advanced manufacturing growth and innovation. The proposed investment presents a real opportunity to grow the economy of Blyth and the wider area. To ensure this economic growth becomes reality, it is essential that the links are in place to ensure the safe and efficient movement of people and goods and to facilitate more sustainable transport solutions, such as improved walking and cycling links and better access to the proposed Northumberland Line railway stations.
2. Northumberland County Council has been aware of traffic problems entering and leaving Blyth for several years. The two main roads into Blyth, the A193 Cowpen Road and A1061 Laverock Hall Road are heavily congested with over 20,000 vehicles a day on each road. In the long term, an increase 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 this growth.
3. Congestion adversely affects the economic potential of the area, the movement of people and goods, particularly to and from the Port of Blyth, and has a harmful effect upon the environment through exhaust emissions from vehicles. The reliability of buses is also affected, particularly during peak hours, with the existing roads into Blyth highlighted by bus operators as causing delays to services. Congested roads also impact on the attractiveness of Blyth as a place to walk and cycle.
4. A Blyth Transport Study in 2015 noted several options, including additional radial capacity. Based on the outcome of early feasibility work, three east-west alignments (Routes 3, 4 and 5) were selected from an initial shortlist of 5, for detailed appraisal (shown on Map 1).

Map 1 – Route Option Alignments



5. In July 2019, Cabinet approved Route 3 as the preferred route to take forward to detailed design and planning, with a recommendation to support a Major Road Network (MRN) National Roads Fund application. However, subsequent design work and consultation on this scheme identified several major project risks, the most significant being the construction of houses on the route alignment to the east of the railway line. The outcome of this process is that the project team do not now believe that Route 3 is deliverable.

6. Route 5, the realignment and dualling of the existing A1061 Laverock Hall Road to provide a direct dual carriageway connection between the A192 Three Horse Shoes Roundabout and the A193 South Beach, has been identified as the next best performing option as shown in Map 2. A new complementary link is also proposed between Chase Farm Drive and Ogle Drive, also joining up with Tynedale Drive. This was previously part of Route 3 and allows for congestion relief along Cowpen Road.

Map 2 – Preferred Route Alignment – Route 5



7. The key components of Route 5 will include:

- New dual carriageway and upgrade of existing carriageway to dual carriageway with junction improvements between the A192 Three Horse Shoes Roundabout and the A193 South Beach.
- A 3 metre wide segregated cycle path along the length of the new route.
- Dualling of a proposed bridge over the Northumberland railway line (a single carriageway bridge will be constructed as part of the Northumberland Line scheme).
- Additional new link tying Chase Farm Drive, Tynedale Drive and Ogle Drive.

Outline Business Case

8. The Outline Business Case (OBC) for the scheme has been updated to reflect the new road alignment and is scheduled to be submitted to the Department of Transport later in April 2022. The OBC demonstrates that the following four strategic objects will be achieved by the scheme:

- Journey time reliability: Improved journey time reliability across the local highway network in Blyth, particularly along the A193 Cowpen Road and the A1061.
- Road safety: Reduced road traffic accidents amongst all vehicle users on the local highway network in Blyth.
- Air quality: Improved air quality in Blyth by reducing traffic congestion; and

- Development: Facilitates economic and housing development by removing barriers to growth.
9. The current cost estimate for route 5 is **£43,929,091** and demonstrates high value for money. The project programme sets out the following key milestones:
- £ Submission of planning application – July 2023
 - £ Determination of planning decision – July 2024
 - £ Full Business Case submitted to DfT – July 2024
 - £ Start of Construction – November 2024
 - £ Scheme open to public – February 2026

Major Road Network Funding

10. 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 funding stream has been dedicated to major improvements on MRN roads.
11. 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.
12. Transport for the North (TfN) has worked with partners across the north to compile a list of priority MRN investments across the TfN area for the period April 2020 to March 2025. Blyth Relief Road has been included on this priority list given 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.
13. The County Council budget, approved in February 2022, includes a four-year allocation of £2,690,000 from the Council. In addition, there is a further allocation of £25,593,000 identified in paragraph 145 of the budget report for financial year 2026/27 which extends beyond the period of the current administration. Of this additional allocation, £3,899,363 is required as NCC funding meaning a total NCC contribution of £6,589,363 towards the project. This meets the 15% local match funding contribution which is a condition of accessing the National Roads Fund. The National Roads Fund contribution will be capped at £37,339,728.

14. Council endorsement of the Outline Business Case is required in the form of a separate letter from the S151 officer. This sign-off will acknowledge the requirement to maintain the 15% local match funding contribution to the project to access the National Roads Fund and that the NRF contribution to the project will be capped at £37,339,728. This is not a full commitment to deliver the project. Any future cost increases, should they arise, will be considered in a future report to the council where a funding strategy, including options to secure the additional funds will be set out.
15. Further approval gateways will be required Cabinet at key project milestones including prior to submission of the planning application (July 2023) and prior to submission of the Full Business Case (July 2024).

Stakeholder Engagement

16. A public engagement exercise was carried out in the early Spring of 2019, at the time of the consultation Route 3 was the preferred route. The public consultation supported proposals for extra road capacity in the town with agreement that Route 3 should be the preferred route on which to progress the scheme.
17. It is therefore proposed further public engagements should take place with Route 5 as the preferred route to obtain views on this option. It is anticipated that this takes place both online and face to face and will commence in June 2022.

IMPLICATIONS

Policy	<p>The Northumberland Local Plan, as submitted for examination in May 2019 states explicit support for the delivery of a relief road for Blyth.</p> <p>The North East Transport Plan identifies Blyth Relief Road as a scheme for delivery in the next five years.</p>
Finance and value for money	<p>The current cost estimate for Route 5 is £43,929,091 and demonstrates high value for money. This cost estimate contains risk appropriate to the stage of development.</p> <p>A standard level of inflation has been assumed with any inflation uncertainties captured in the quantified risk assessment.</p> <p>The County Council budget approved in February 2022 includes a four-year allocation of £2,690,000 from the Council. In addition, there is a further allocation of £25,593,000 identified in paragraph 145 of the budget report for financial year 2026/27 which extends beyond the period of the current administration. Of this additional allocation, £3,899,363 is required as NCC funding which sums to a total NCC contribution of £6,589,363 towards the project. This meets the 15% local match funding contribution which is a condition of accessing the National Roads Fund.</p>

	County Council endorsement of the Outline Business Case is required in the form of a separate letter from the S151 officer. This sign-off will need acknowledge the requirement to maintain the 15% local match funding contribution to the project to access the National Roads Fund. This is not a full commitment to deliver the project and any future cost increases, if they arise, will be set out in a future report for consideration by Cabinet.
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	(Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No X N/A <input type="checkbox"/> This will be considered as part of the detailed design of the scheme.
Risk Assessment	It is important to note that the successful delivery of this scheme will be dependent upon several key factors. A number of possible constraints exist, and these have been summarised below and are supported by a detailed risk register. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic issues, for example changes in Government transport policy and funding landscape could impact delivery of scheme. • Change in appraisal guidance, or in gaining formal 'sign-off' from funding decision makers may delay delivery. • Changes in the outturn costs of the scheme could impact on the value for money of the scheme. • To date limited environmental surveys have been undertaken and this could identify new habitats or wildlife that need to be considered in the scheme development. • Public consultation outcomes. • The scheme has only been developed to feasibility stage and detailed design could highlight further issues. • Problems could be encountered when seeking the necessary approvals to construct the scheme. • Option 5 requires the purchase of land and discussions with landowners are ongoing. • A bridge over the railway is being constructed as part of the Northumberland Line scheme. However, this will need to be dualled as part of the Blyth Relief Road proposals. This will need to be undertaken to minimise disruption to the railway network.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Option 5 would affect utilities at several locations.
Crime & Disorder	None at this stage.
Customer Consideration	A detailed stakeholder consultation exercise was carried out in the Spring of 2019. Further public engagement will take place in June 2022 supported by a communication plan for the scheme.
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 problems persist. The Council therefore considers it necessary to ease traffic flows through the construction of a new relief road for Blyth.</p> <p>A Carbon Management Plan will be developed alongside the business case for the scheme.</p>
Wards	All wards within Blyth will be affected by this proposal.

Background papers:

[Cabinet Report July 2019](#)

Report sign off.

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

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