

## **Joint Core Strategy – Examination In Public**

### **Matter 3b – Old Catton, Sprowston, Rackheath, Thorpe St Andrew growth triangle [JCS policies 9 & 10, and Appendix 5]**

#### **Issue 5 – the JCS and the NDR - Closing Statement by GNDP**

The examination dealt with Matter 3b on Wednesday 17 November 2010. The Inspector has agreed that the GNDP can make its closing statement on issue 5 in writing (given the lack of time to do so on the day).

The case for the Northern Distributor Road (NDR) has been made to the Department for Transport. Copies of the County Council's Major Scheme Business Case (document ref T12) submitted to the Department for Transport in December 2008 and the subsequent sensitivity work requested by the DfT (ref T14) are part of the Evidence Base and are available in the Examination Library. This and the evidence supplied in documents EIP88 and T17 show the integral part the NDR plays in delivering overall NATS objectives. NATS objectives are set out in document TP6 page 9, para 4.5.

Key existing problems the NDR resolves are:

- Relieving existing congestion and delay on radial roads and the inner and outer ring roads. At the session, participants specifically referred to current traffic problems with Wroxham Road being cited as a problem that provides anecdotal support for the technical evidence.
- Combating increasing rat running, particularly in north and eastern suburbs. Again, reference was made at the session by a local representative to problems on Green Lane in Thorpe St Andrew.
- Improving Bus journey times and their reliability. These are notably worse to the north of the city when compared with the south. Reference was made at the examination (including by NNTAG) about the benefits that the A47 southern bypass provides in enabling better provision for buses on southern radial routes.

Other benefits of the NDR can be summarised as:

- Enabling public transport priority and reliability enhancements on key radial routes to the north and northeast of Norwich.
- Enabling city centre enhancements to encourage more walking and cycling that can only be progressed with a reduction in traffic using the inner ring road and radial routes.
- Giving a significant reduction in cross-city car journeys in combination with the city centre measures proposed in NATS.

#### **The NDR and its Major Scheme Business Case (MSBC)**

The NDR has been the subject of rigorous analysis by DfT. This included an appraisal of the original MSBC submission (T12) and a series of further

sensitivity tests. These details have been available on the County Council's website since December 2009 and this has a link via evidence document T14 on the GNDP website. The statements made at the session, by NNTAG and Cllr Boswell, implied that they have not had access to this information however it has been previously provided. The information on the sensitivity tests (now labelled T14) was provided directly to NNTAG by DfT in December 2009.

Having completed their own analysis of the information provided by the County Council in support of the NDR, the DfT granted it Programme Entry status in December 2009 and it is now in the Development Pool. This shows that the DfT are satisfied that the scheme offers value for money. NNTAG and Cllr Boswell raised the need for an independent assessment of the information supporting the MSBC. The GNDP concludes that it is not necessary for there to be a further independent assessment as the DfT are the experts in appraising MSBC submissions and modelling and it is their guidance that must be complied with. The County Council has satisfied DfT's requests for information and this concludes an extensive and detailed appraisal process.

### **Benefit Cost Ratio and Assessment of the NDR and the 'half route'**

The benefit cost ratio (BCR) has changed as work on the NDR has progressed. The original MSBC submission (T12) gave a BCR of 2.7. Subsequent assessment work, that moved away from modelling proxy measures to more properly representing the NATS implementation plan and meet DfT requests for further information, resulted in an improved BCR to 6.1 (see T14, Main Report). Cllr Boswell quoted a BCR of 1.6, suggesting a mistake in the original submission. The most up to date BCR as verified by the DfT is 6.1.

NNTAG suggested that funding was only provided for the NDR from the A47 to the A140. The GNDP points out that the County Council remains committed to promoting a '¾ NDR' from the A1067 in the west to the A47 at Postwick. This is the proposal shown on the Joint Core Strategy key diagram. DfT requested some specific analysis of what has been referred to in the examination as the 'half route' to satisfy themselves that funding this element still offered value for money. The analysis carried out by the county council shows a half route has a Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) of 4.6 (4.7 was incorrectly quoted on the day) as compared to the ¾ routes higher BCR of 6.1. To put this in context, projects with a BCR of 2 or more are judged by DfT to offer high value for money. The DfT decided that they could only afford to fund to the A140 junction. Details of these tests and BCRs can be found in T14.

There was a suggestion at the meeting (by SNUB and Cllr Boswell) that the section from the A140 to the A1067 costs £36m. This is incorrect and the actual cost is significantly less than this (around half this amount). The cost will depend on the final form of the A140 junction. The DfT, as part of their programme entry letter of December 2009, has requested the County Council review this.

## **Current funding position**

The DfT announced in its document 'Investment in Local Major Transport Schemes' that the NDR is within a 'Development Pool' of 22 projects. DfT confirmed in that document that they recognised that all projects in that Pool offer high value for money. The development pool funding is at least £600m. Of the projects in the pool (for which DfT funding totals £913m) the NDR already has a lower proportion of government funding contribution when compared to the average provided to other projects in the pool (68% compared with an 82% average).

The NDR cost is £127.2m made up of £19m for Postwick Hub and £108.2m for the NDR. Set against that total cost, Norfolk County Council has committed to underwrite £39.7m and a further £1m is committed from Growth Point Funding. The County Council reaffirmed its commitment to underwrite the £39.7m at its Cabinet meeting of 6 April 2010. (EIP9 & EIP10).

The County Council is responding to the DfT call for expressions of interest (RF33 & RF34) and a decision on funding is expected in December 2011.

## **Whether the Postwick Hub improvements can proceed ahead of the NDR**

In its 9 November 2010 letter (RF32) the DfT clearly confirmed that the Public Inquiry (PI) into the Side Road Orders (SRO) for Postwick Hub can be progressed on its own. What they also stated is that the Orders would not be confirmed by the Secretary of State until the funding for the junction improvement was confirmed. This means that the Public Inquiry can be resolved and there is the scope to deliver Postwick before the rest of the NDR. NNTAG suggested that the SRO PI for Postwick Hub cannot be detached from the NDR. This is incorrect and does not reflect the DfT published position. It is also worth noting that there are no statutory objections to the SROs.

It was suggested that options for Postwick Hub without the NDR have not been analysed. The GNDP do not agree, as a proposal made by NNTAG and an Highways Agency-derived suggestion were also reviewed by the Highways Agency as part of the DfT NDR appraisal process. The DfT provided programme entry for the NDR in December 2009 and at the same time confirmed funding for Postwick Hub.

No evidence has been provided through the Public Examination to show that Postwick Hub cannot proceed ahead of the NDR. The junction improvement already has planning consent.

## **The County Council's position**

The GNDP refer to the answers from Graham Plant, the County Council Cabinet Member for Travel and Transport, given to two public questions

raised at Norfolk County Council Cabinet that have been provided to the Inspector Ref EIP111.

The joint position of the GNDP Leaders, which includes the County Council, is provided below (a signed version of this statement can be provided if required):

*"The GNDP Leaders have asked the Inspector to note that the delivery of Postwick Hub is a number 1 priority for the partnership. We recognise that this investment in essential infrastructure is vital as it releases important strategic employment land close to the proposed housing development in the north east. It will enable continued development of Broadland Business Park that is well located to serve G. Yarmouth, Norwich Airport, North Norfolk, in addition to recognising good road links to the A140, Ipswich and Harwich. As well as ensuring the best possible business case is made to the DfT to secure public funding, we are also committed to exploring all funding opportunities open to us, including the introduction of CIL/tariff receipts (following the adoption of the JCS), New Homes Bonus, support from Home and Communities Agency, Regional Growth Fund, Tax Increment Finance - as well as exploring Capital Assets, Council borrowing, European Funding and any other new opportunities."*

### **Assessment of the 'Plan B' proposal**

At the session we heard from the Highways Agency that they have been working with the County Council to develop the Postwick Hub junction proposal. Their assessment of the junction was that any alternative proposal would be of a similar scale and cost. The advantages of the County Council's proposals for the Postwick Hub are that it resolves key constraint issues, offers the future proofing potential to accommodate the NDR, has planning consent and is ready to go (subject to resolving the side road orders Public Inquiry).

The Highways Agency summarised the three major constraints at the junction, which are:

- The Wensum viaduct just west of the junction and the reduced length of the eastbound off-slip
- The need for another bridge and the topography of the location
- An existing major high pressure gas main just to the east of the site

An initial assessment of the layout proposed by Create Consulting for Barton Wilmore does not resolve the eastbound off-slip problem, nor does it provide an additional bridge that is considered necessary to provide sufficient capacity. In particular it is not considered viable in engineering terms and capacity to simply provide traffic signal operation on the existing roundabout. The proposal also raises an additional constraint regarding land ownership (and the need for a CPO), which would not be easy to resolve. No modelling data has been provided as part of the sketch proposal and therefore it is not

been shown that the 'plan B' proposals put forward would overcome capacity constraints at Postwick Junction.

On the basis of this high level assessment, the evidence submitted by Barton Willmore does not demonstrate resolution of fundamental issues associated with the junction which would be necessary for the scale of growth proposed.

The Postwick Hub proposal of the NCC is a deliverable solution with planning permission that has been shown to deliver at least 1600 homes and open up commercial land in the North East and provide a link to the trunk road for the NDR. The alternative proposal has not demonstrated its effectiveness in overcoming the junction capacity constraints to deliver the scale of housing promoted and it is not clear that land is available to deliver the improvement.

In summary it has not been shown that the alternative proposals are deliverable and could be brought forward more cheaply and more quickly than the Postwick Hub proposal.

The other part of the 'Plan B' proposed by Barton Willmore involved the construction of what they refer to as the inner relief road. This includes the need for a link between Salhouse Road and Plumstead Road which they consider is available "through the proposed allocation of development in the area and as a result of land sitting in the ownership of development organisations waiting to move forward and deliver sites". For the purposes of the strategic consideration of the JCS, the GNDD consider that this part of their Plan B (the inner relief road) could still proceed with the NCC's Postwick Hub improvements. But GNDD's reason for suggesting that 1600 dwellings could then be built before the NDR is required, rather than 3200 dwellings, is because a more conservative assessment of the constraints has been taken.

This issue under Matter 3b particularly raises the issue of the likely funding of the NDR from a number of sources. As matters currently stand, there is a reasonable prospect of its delivery within the timescale suggested. A reasonable level of development can be delivered in advance of the NDR as a result of the proposed Postwick Hub improvements.

The Examination has considered the issue of the NDR under several headings and matters. Although the road has been the particular focus of certain objections, it should not be considered in isolation from the complementary measures proposed and the NATS as whole.