

TO: **All members of Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Our reference CB
Your reference N/A
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1 September 2021

Dear Councillor

Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Thursday 2 September 2021

I am now able to enclose, for consideration at the Thursday 2 September 2021 meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the following Appendix which was unavailable when the agenda was printed.

Agenda No **Item**

8. **Consideration of Councillor Call for Action (Pages 1 - 4)**

Report number: **OAS/WS/21/016**

Appendix 7 – SCC Officer Response to Councillor Beckwith

Yours sincerely

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West Suffolk
Council

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Appendix 7

SUBJECT:	Transport issues raised by Cllr Beckwith – West Suffolk Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee
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AUTHOR:	Kerry Allen (Principal Transport Planner) and Clive Wilkinson (Project Engineer)
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DATE:	31 August 2021
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PURPOSE	Information
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SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cllr Beckwith has been advised that the Parish Council can progress a Traffic Regulation Order for Orttewell Road. • High traffic demand during the peaks creates congestion on Bedingfeld Way and other arterial routes into Bury St Edmunds Town Centre. • Suffolk County Council continues to identify funding that can improve transport links between Moreton Hall and Bury St Edmunds Town Centre. • Cllr Beckwith should address any planning concerns with the planning team at West Suffolk Council. 	

Suffolk County Council has been in regular discussion with Cllr Beckwith regarding Orttewell Road and Bedingfeld Way since 2018. There has also been previous correspondence with Cllr Beckwith that took place prior to the construction of the Eastern Relief Road, which opened in September 2017.

Orttewell Road

In e-mail correspondence to Cllr Beckwith in October 2020, Suffolk County Council’s Speed Safety Management Engineer, David Chenery, explained that Orttewell Road is developed to HGV standard. This means that the road has segregated walking and cycling routes and signalised crossings and underpasses to remove conflict between pedestrians and vehicles. Mr Chenery also commented that houses are set back from the highway and advised that no injury collisions have been reported between 1 March 2015 and 1 March 2020 when the road was last assessed.

In addition to this, Mr Chenery advised Cllr Beckwith that a Traffic Regulation Order could be put in place on Orttewell Road, which could either be permanent or experimental to allow monitoring of the order. The Experimental Traffic Regulation Order would allow a better understanding of how HGV traffic would disperse onto other roads and any issues that this could cause.

Cllr Beckwith has been informed that the Parish Council can apply for a Traffic Regulation Order, but this will be subject to public consultation and could attract objections. The cost to carry out the work to develop a Traffic Regulation Order for a weight restriction is between £5k and £10k. The effectiveness of the order is dependent upon the Police to enforce it.

In the same correspondence to Cllr Beckwith, Mr Chenery provided further explanation on the need to keep the single-lane arrangement under the rail bridge to the south of Orttewell Road, which is to prevent HGVs from striking the bridge. Mr Chenery explained that examples from other areas shows that signage does not prevent drivers from continuing to drive under low bridges – recent examples involved a double decker bus having the roof torn off when the driver ignored signs and drove under a low bridge. Given that the bridge over Orttewell Road forms part of an active railway line, it would not be possible to remove the restrictions at the bridge.

In relation to the Berkeley Homes development to the southeast of Orttewell Road, Luke Barber (Principal Planning Officer at Suffolk County Council) has stated his objection to the development based on the current highway mitigation proposals, which are inadequate to address the projected safety and traffic impacts of the development.

Housing Development

Suffolk County Council is not the Local Planning Authority and therefore does not have a role to dictate how much housing or commercial development is required in an area. It does have a role as the Highways Authority to advise about the impact on county roads and Suffolk County Council must comment within the rules set out in the 2021 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The NPPF states that development can only be refused on highway grounds " *where there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.*" The level of traffic that constitutes severe is not defined by the NPPF or Planning Policy Guidance – it is usually left to the Planning Inspectorate to decide.

The Core Strategy, which sets out the housing and commercial sites contained within the Bury Vision 2031, has been subjected to extensive public and stakeholder consultation and was examined by an independent Planning Inspectorate in 2010. The Planning Inspectorate concluded that the current level of growth was acceptable and found the Core Strategy sound. In paragraph 13.15 of his report, he stated: "*Taking all these factors and the recommended changes into account, I conclude that the strategy for Bury St Edmunds, including the strategic growth locations, is soundly based and deliverable.*"

The key principles of NPPF are based on mitigation and so if mitigation can be provided, development cannot be refused. If Cllr Beckwith is unsatisfied with the level of development proposed around Bury St Edmunds, it is suggested that he speaks to the planning team at West Suffolk Council.

Bedingfeld Way

The new Southeast Bury St Edmunds development will deliver a relief road and is based on previous traffic studies, which have identified that 40% of traffic on Rougham Road travels south towards the A134 Sicklesmere Road to Sudbury. The new relief road will improve traffic flow between Bedingfeld Way and Southgate Green roundabout by allowing traffic to travel south without waiting at Southgate Green Roundabout, as it currently does which in turn is a primary cause of congestion on Bedingfeld Way. As part of the development, additional traffic lanes between Moreton Hall Interchange Roundabout and the A134

Rougham Road Roundabout will be constructed alongside signalisation of the two roundabouts on Rougham Road. This means that the flow of traffic can be better managed, but it does not mean that congestion will be eradicated – this is due to high vehicular demand all converging in one place at the same time.

As set out in correspondence with Cllr Beckwith in October 2018, where possible, the County Council is replacing traffic signal equipment in Bury St Edmunds with Intelligent Transport Systems. However, the traffic intervention measures, which are set out in the Draft Transport Strategy for Bury St Edmunds, are not solely based on smart traffic signals being the answer to traffic congestion across the town - the introduction of smart traffic signalling equipment needs to be accompanied by other interventions. The County Council has installed smart traffic light systems using Microprocessor Optimisation Vehicle Actuation (MOVA) in some locations across the town, which can detect vehicles and change staging accordingly - Spread Eagle junction is an example of this equipment, and County Council officers have seen and received reports from motorists that traffic is moving more efficiently than it was under the fixed-staged system. These smart methods of signal control can make the most of the efficiency available until demand on junction capacity becomes physically constrained by its layout and size.

The traffic lights at the junction between the A14, Rougham Road and Bedingfeld Way have undergone an update to the system, which has helped to move traffic through the signals quicker.

Eastern Relief Road

In answer to the question raised by the Committee: **Do you / SCC think it acceptable that the adverse consequences on the residential community of a £20m project to build a new road and upgrade Junction 45 of the A14, were not anticipated and mitigation measures implemented?**

The purpose of the Eastern Relief Road is not to cause adverse impacts on the residential community and evidence collected by Suffolk County Council suggests that the Eastern Relief Road has reduced traffic impact on local roads. The Bury St Edmunds Eastern Relief Road was constructed to support the growth of the Suffolk Business Park (meeting the objectives of West Suffolk Council's growth ambitions) and to reduce the impact of traffic flow on Junction 44. Officers have investigated the impact of the Eastern Relief Road and have looked at data, which has captured the number of vehicles using Bedingfeld Way over an 18-hour period. The data used was based on a five-day average amount of vehicles in 2018, which was 13,581 (as a two-way flow) and this was compared with the 17,329 vehicles recorded in 2013. The data comparison for this period was used to understand the numbers of vehicles using Bedingfeld Way before and after the opening of the Eastern Relief Road. The figures above show that as a percentage based on a 5-day average there has been a 21% reduction in traffic.

Conclusion

Over the past couple of years many officers have met with Cllr Beckwith to discuss his concerns regarding Bedingfeld Way and Orttewell Road. With regards to Orttewell Road, Cllr Beckwith has been provided with information on pursuing a Traffic Regulation Order, as set out in this response. It is suggested that Cllr Beckwith works with the Parish Council to pursue the Traffic Regulation Order, but as previously explained, the Traffic Regulation Order may cause issues on other unsuitable roads; can be difficult to enforce; and may lead to a number of local objections.

Suffolk County Council understands the peak time capacity issues that exist at Moreton Hall, as well as on a number of other routes across Bury St Edmunds. However, as previously discussed with Cllr Beckwith, resolving the issues requires funding. Suffolk County Council has applied (and continues to apply) to many funds but has not been successful in achieving funding for this specific peak time congestion issue.

In light of the Government's decarbonisation agenda, there is a move away from building more roads that will inevitably attract more traffic in favour of implementing walking and cycling schemes. Suffolk County Council will continue to work to secure funding for improving the highway network for all road users in Moreton Hall.

As Suffolk County Council is the highways authority, any concerns that Cllr Beckwith has regarding housing and commercial development should be taken up with West Suffolk Council's planning team.