

**TAUNTON TRANSPORT STRATEGY CONSULTATION MEETING
NOTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 6TH SEPTEMBER 2018
AT 8.30AM, STAPLEGROVE VILLAGE HALL**

PRESENT:

Nick Bryant (TDBC officer) – left 10am	–	NB
Jackie Calcroft (RoSAG)	–	JC
Cllr Michael Clark (SPC) – Chair	–	MC
David Lausen (RoSAG)	–	DL
Mike O’Dowd-Jones (SCC officer) – left 10.15am	–	MODJ
Sunita Mills (SCC officer)	–	SM
Michael Pitt (RoSAG)	–	MP
Chris Rix (RoSAG)	–	CR
Cllr Ian Talbot (SPC)	–	IT
Cllr John Williams (TDBC)	–	JW
Cllr Rod Williams (SCC) – left 10am	–	RW

RoSAG – Residents of Staplegrove Action Group
SCC – Somerset County Council
SPC – Staplegrove Parish Council
TDBC – Taunton Deane Borough Council

Clerk: Helen McInnes (SPC)

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllrs. Richard Parrish, Andrew Sully, Nick Townsend and Caroline Tucker (TDBC), and Cllr John Woodman (SCC).

2. Introduction

MC introduced those present.

3. Extension to the spine road

MC asked MODJ about the decision making process regarding the position of the junction of the proposed spine road with Staplegrove Road. MC felt that the spine road should connect with the junction at the northern end of Silk Mills Road. MODJ noted that SCC can only assess the proposals put forward by the developer and is not in a position to require a specific location for roads if the proposal put forward meets the standard assessments.

MC responded that he could not accept this, as the current proposal committed SCC to maintaining a complex and expensive junction and several sets of traffic lights. NB noted that the promoters had considered joining the spine road to the roundabout at the northern end of Silk Mills Road at one point, but this had now been altered. CR stated that the reason given for the change was that the roundabout would have had to be enlarged and was considered to be ‘too big’ as it would be larger than other roundabouts in Taunton. It was now to be a traffic light controlled junction. MODJ agreed to find out what the reason for the change of location was, and to report back.

JW noted that if SCC is presented with a scheme that is ‘sensible and safe’, it is hard to counter this without the risk of a successful appeal. He recognised that this is often also the cheapest option for the developer. MC acknowledged this but reiterated his point that it does commit SCC to maintaining an undesirable right/left extension to the existing Silk Mills roundabout with an expensive and complicated set of synchronised traffic signals covering three junctions (Cross Keys, Silk Mills and the spine road). The construction of the west end of the spine road would be

much more complicated than at Silk Mills, and is likely to cause extensive congestion to the A358 during its construction. It also means that there would be six sets of traffic signals in a length of only 750 metres of Staplegrove Road.

MC asked the meeting to look at copies of the slides which had been shown at the previous presentation meeting arranged by SCC Highways. He highlighted slide no.14 which shows the model flow comparison during the 2033 morning peak hour for Option 1. He noted that this option shows an increase in traffic on Kingston Road, Eastwick Road and Selworthy Road towards Nerrols Drive and the A3259 through Monkton Heathfield, but does not show any increase in traffic going towards junction 25 of the M5 and Nexus25 where many of the occupants of the new houses will find employment.

Option 2 (the spine road plus the extension) shows an increase in traffic going north to the A38 and a significant decrease in traffic on the above listed estate roads.

MODJ noted that the document from which these maps were taken were designed for the lay person, and gave an indication of traffic movements based on current data. He recognised that concern has been raised about the lack of a strategic route across the north of Taunton, however, SCC's modelling has shown that there would not be a major improvement in traffic flow from the creation of a northern ring road.

MC stated that a recent traffic survey carried out locally of Manor Road shows that traffic levels are higher now than those shown on the documents, therefore he was concerned about the accuracy of the figures on the document. CR noted that the spine road had been presented to SCC by the developers as 'providing relief' to Manor Road and Corkscrew Lane. He added that their own traffic surveys had shown at least 50% of traffic exiting Corkscrew Lane, goes straight across to Hope Corner Lane. Hence it was felt that Manor Road/Corkscrew Lane was being used as a northern relief road already, but was not fit for this purpose. MP noted that the current spine road will end at a position close to the end of Corkscrew Lane, and if the spine road were extended it would create a very sensible through route to the motorway and the east.

JW stated that the proposal for a northern ring road was dropped by SCC: however, he is in favour of a ring road and supports the proposal for the spine road to be extended.

MODJ indicated that SCC's data showed that most traffic was going to Taunton, rather than through Taunton. MC countered that this was mainly due to the way that the data was collected, with 'Taunton' encompassing much more than the town centre and being virtually all of the built up area associated with Taunton.

MC stated that work carried out in the 2003 Taunton Transport Strategy had shown that a northern relief road would 'attract 1100-1200 vehicles (2way) in peak hours and a high proportion of longer trips'. It is most likely that these figures must now have increased.

The current proposal leaves a 500m gap between the end of the spine road and Cheddon Road. MODJ responded that SCC was not ruling out the addition of the 500m extension, but added that it would not make a strategic difference. He went on to outline how SCC's data is collected and compiled, noting its robustness. MC referred to his letter sent 14th February 2018 which pointed out the lack of any Traffic Counts north of Greenway and Priorswood Roads able to identify which was local or through traffic and hence he doubted the accuracy of these figures. MODJ stated that he had corresponded with MC on the matter and felt that this had been adequately explained.

JC asked what modelling had been done with reference to Taunton's 'Garden Town' status. MODJ replied that modelling has taken place with regard to changes in people's travelling behaviour. NB added that 'Garden Town' status makes little change to the existing planned growth, on which the modelling had taken place. The only possible change is the effect of any development of Norton Manor Camp when this becomes vacant. Hence, the modelling that has taken place is viable and applicable to Taunton as a 'Garden Town'.

MC noted that there was an emphasis on encouraging people to use buses, and the creation of Key Proposal 3 was '*connecting the garden communities and Nexus25 with high-quality bus services*'. He added that the spine road extension would enable this bus corridor to link to the North Taunton Development which was not possible with the current proposal. MODJ agreed that this was a valid point.

MC went on to consider the maps for Option 3 (spine road, extension and Nerrols Drive extension) which again show a decrease in traffic on the above mentioned estate roads, with increased movements through Monkton Heathfield but again, no traffic wishing to go to the M5 and Nexus 25.

However, it is the intention of Key Proposal 4, listed on Map 1, to '*Implement A3259 corridor strategy for bus, walking and cycling infrastructure to connect Monkton Heathfield garden community*' and hence the increased movements will actually have to make use of the Monkton Heathfield Western Relief Road (Key Proposal 16) to connect with the A38. At this junction the choice will be to turn left for the A38 northbound or right for a short connection to the M5.

Hence, eastbound traffic from the North Taunton Development and beyond, would have a strategic route that avoided, and thereby reduced, the identified congestion hotspots of the Kingston Road gyratory junction, the roundabouts north and south of the Obridge viaduct, and would also lessen the major problem of the east/west congestion traffic at Creech Castle.

MODJ reiterated that the maps were created from robust data and standard modelling. SM highlighted the possibility that traffic using the proposed northern relief road might send people to already congested junctions, such as Creech Castle.

CR agreed that drivers will usually opt for the easiest (rather than shortest) route. He added that drivers leaving the North Taunton Development would be most likely to use the spine road, and then to continue on to its extension. By not adding the extension, congestion would be caused on Kingston Road.

SM noted that traffic modelling provides a 'best assumption' and cannot be 100% accurate. MODJ added that while the spine road and extension might provide local relief, it would not improve traffic at congested junctions as the number of vehicles using it would be too small.

MC asked for the movement figures for SCC's current proposals, Option 4, which has not been received in the information sent from the presentation meeting arranged by SCC Highways.

JC asked if the modelling that has been done has taken the proposed closure of Manor road/Corkscrew Lane (to all but local traffic) into consideration. If not, the number of vehicles using the spine road and extension would be considerably higher than shown. SM and MODJ were not sure, and agreed to check this and report back.

CR said he had twice e-mailed Helen Vittery to ascertain Highways' position over the lack of street lighting to be provided with proposed drop down road along Corkscrew Lane. MODJ agreed to follow this up.

JW highlighted that while proposals can be added to a plan, it does not guarantee that they will be realised. Due to funding considerations, only developments that can be shown to have a strategic impact are likely to go ahead.

MODJ reiterated that he is prepared to add the spine road extension to the modelling and plan, so its impact can be further explored. However, it must be accepted that it does not provide a strategic solution. MC maintained that the traffic model does not accurately provide that information.

CR noted that there is a need to safeguard the land on the proposed route of the spine road extension, so it cannot be developed in the interim.

4. Connections to the town centre and hospital (cycling, walking, bus inc. Park and Ride)

CR reported that Taunton Area Cycling Campaign (TACC) have been in discussion with the developers about proposed cycle routes. During these discussions, an impression was given that SCC's preferred route was along Gypsy Lane rather than Clifford Avenue (the route preferred by TACC). It was noted that although both routes cross Greenway Road the Clifford Avenue option is opposite Leslie Avenue which connects to the cycle bridge across the railway thus making it a more direct route. MODJ reported that he didn't think there was a preferred route, and agreed to note the preference for Clifford Avenue and take this forward.

CR noted the need for additional secure bike parking in Taunton town centre; ideally at least some of this should also be covered. JW reported that the pedestrianisation of Taunton town centre is going to go ahead at the beginning of 2019. This will be phased in, with St James Street likely to be one of the first areas, and East Street likely to be later on. Access to East Street has been an extremely complex issue. SM noted that pedestrianisation would allow more space for larger areas of cycle parking and that she had been looking at a variety of solutions. These would initially be temporary to allow for usage to be monitored.

MC asked if cycle parking for rail commuters and town centre workers was being considered. SM replied that employers generally provided cycle parking, and that additional cycle parking at the station would have to be raised with Great Western Railway. Commercial cycle parking seen at larger stations would depend on demand and viability.

MP asked how traffic that normally uses St James Street and East Street will be expected to leave the town centre once they have been pedestrianised. SM reported that it is hoped that more traffic will use Trenchard Way, and SCC will provide a programme of education and encouragement. In addition, changes to the phasing of traffic lights at key junctions will also allow freer movement of traffic. For example, as there will be very little traffic entering or leaving East Street onto East Reach, the traffic lights will be adjusted to prioritise traffic on the A38.

IT noted that there was a possibility of increasing congestion at the junction of Station Road and Priory Bridge Road. Again SM noted that this could be addressed through alteration of the traffic light phasing. She highlighted that one of the reasons that the pedestrianisation was being phased in was to allow monitoring of its effects, with alterations being made where possible.

SM reported that the Local Implementation of Walking and Cycling plans were still in development, but were linked closely to the Taunton Garden Town plan. Initially this will focus on 'quick wins', ie making improvements for current users, and then will look longer term at encouraging new users. This will include the creation of quick, direct routes, and crossing points with the removal, where possible, of pinch points.

CR suggested a way forward re encouraging walking into town was that such routes should be clearly signed at all pedestrian junctions.

It was noted that both the Taunton Transport Strategy and Garden Town documents highlight the importance of the Park and Ride schemes, and outline improvements to be made to them. However, there is currently a proposal from SCC that these should both be closed. JW noted that SCC are obliged by law to fund statutory services, but that everything else is having to justify its funding, including the Park and Ride sites. He added that one of the statutory areas was Children Services which was running with a huge monthly overspend. Plans are being considered as to how this can be limited, but services in this area must be provided by law.

5. Approving Clifford Avenue rather than Gypsy Lane as the main cycling route to town; and upgrading parking for cycles in the town centre.

This item was covered in discussion of item 4 above.

6. Ensuring suitable access for the spine road construction without the need for a drop down road onto Corkscrew Lane/Manor Road

MC asked for confirmation that the spine road would be completed before construction of the North Taunton Development begins. This would mean that large construction vehicles would not use Manor Road/Corkscrew Lane for access. It was highlighted that Manor Road/Corkscrew Lane were both well used by pedestrians and cyclists, as a route into town and for access to the Academy, Staplegrove Primary School and Taunton School as well as the many adjacent sports facilities. At points there was no pavement, and the pavement was often very narrow. The addition of extra vehicles using the road, particularly large vehicles is considered to be of great danger to existing road users.

It has also been proposed that once the spine road has been built, Manor Road/Corkscrew Lane should have a 20mph speed limit and be closed to all but local traffic. MODJ agreed to take these ideas forward, but acknowledged they were part of the detailed planning stage, and would be subject to funding from the developers. JC asked if site access from the abattoir road (towards TA2 6PX) could be considered, rather than use of Manor Road/Corkscrew Lane. Again, the SCC officers agreed to consider this.

7. Speed limits and traffic calming in Staplegrove Village

This item was covered in discussion of item 6 above.

8. Funding issues and the impact on key outcomes as listed in the Transport Strategy

It was agreed that in the current climate, the key challenge in delivering developments/improvements is funding. SCC is in an extremely difficult financial position and most funding will have to be accessed through applications for grants from Central Government, such as the Housing Infrastructure Fund. This is why it is imperative that projects can be shown to have a strategic impact. Other funding sources include the Community Infrastructure Levy. It was noted that developers will only action works in the immediate proximity of their site.

9. Any other Business

There was no other business.

The meeting closed at 11.00am