

Individual Executive Member Decision

Title of Report:	A4 Calcot Widening Improvements
Report to be considered by:	Individual Executive Member Decision
Date on which Decision is to be taken:	16 December 2013
Forward Plan Ref:	ID2743

Purpose of Report: To report the feedback from the consultation. To gain approval to proceed to detail design and construction, and agree any alterations to the scheme design as a result of the consultation responses.

Recommended Action: That the scheme detailed in Appendix 2 proceeds to detail design and construction subject to further consultation and public meeting with residents to review the scheme detail.

Reason for decision to be taken: To proceed with the delivery of this key project.

Other options considered: As detailed in the body of the report.

Key background documentation: Kennet North/South Study 2008
Accon A4 Calcot Noise Regulations Assessment 2013.

Portfolio Member Details	
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Implications

- Policy:** This project is in line with the Council's policy of improving traffic flow and reducing congestion.
- Financial:** This project has been subject to a successful bid to the DfT for funding. The total scheme cost is £2.9m. The DfT grant is £2m the remaining £0.9m comprises of LTP grant funding, S106 contributions and and contribution from IKEA as detailed in the body of the report.
- Personnel:** This scheme can be delivered with existing resources. Consultants will be engaged to deliver specialist elements which is included in the scheme budget.
- Legal/Procurement:** This project will be advertised on the Official Journal of the European Union and subject to a competitive tender. The procurement strategy has been approved by the Council's Procurement Board.
- Property:** None
- Risk Management:** A costed risk register has been developed for this project and is regularly reviewed by the Project Board.

Is this item relevant to equality?	Please tick relevant boxes	Yes	No
Does the policy affect service users, employees or the wider community and:			
• Is it likely to affect people with particular protected characteristics differently?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Is it a major policy, significantly affecting how functions are delivered?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Will the policy have a significant impact on how other organisations operate in terms of equality?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Does the policy relate to functions that engagement has identified as being important to people with particular protected characteristics?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Does the policy relate to an area with known inequalities?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Outcome (Where one or more 'Yes' boxes are ticked, the item is relevant to equality)			
Relevant to equality - Complete an EIA available at www.westberks.gov.uk/eia			<input type="checkbox"/>
Not relevant to equality			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Consultation Responses

Members:

- Leader of Council:** Councillor Gordon Lundie – to date no response has been received, however any comments will be verbally reported at the Individual Decision meeting.
- Overview & Scrutiny Management Commission Chairman:** Councillor Brian Bedwell: 'As Chairman of the OSMC I do not object to the scheme and it should improve traffic flow along the A4, which is after all the busiest road in the District.'

Ward Members: Councillor Peter Argyle supports the recommendation.
 Councillor Manohar Gopal supports the recommendation.
 Councillor Brian Bedwell: 'As Ward Member I believe that what is proposed should make a big difference and improve the traffic flow along the A4 particularly during the morning rush hour, my only concern is that there could be a problem with drivers coming out of the petrol station, hotel and Sandown Avenue and wanting to turn right, maybe keep clear signs on the road could help.'

Opposition Spokesperson: Councillor Keith Woodhams had no comments to the report

Local Stakeholders: As detailed in Appendix 3.

Officers Consulted: Mark Edwards, Jenny Graham, Mark Cole.

Trade Union:

Is this item subject to call-in?	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No: <input type="checkbox"/>
If not subject to call-in please put a cross in the appropriate box:		
The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval		<input type="checkbox"/>
Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council		<input type="checkbox"/>
Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position		<input type="checkbox"/>
Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission or associated Task Groups within preceding six months		<input type="checkbox"/>
Item is Urgent Key Decision		<input type="checkbox"/>
Report is to note only		<input type="checkbox"/>

Supporting Information

1. Background

- 1.1 The A4 at Calcot between Langley Hill and Royal Avenue is a single lane road which provides a strategic link between west Reading and the M4 junction 12. The road carries approximately 29,000 vehicles per day and is one of the busiest non-trunk roads in the District. To the south of the A4 are residential properties, none of which are accessed directly from the A4. To the north is a mixture of residential properties and businesses. Cranbourne Avenue accesses directly onto the A4 from the north along with a petrol station, Calcot Priory (retirement apartments) and the Calcot Hotel.
- 1.2 Highway improvements on the A4 between Langley Hill and Royal Avenue have long been an aspiration of the Local Highway Authority, with proposed widening schemes and protected lines dating back to the mid 1980's. More recently the Kennet North/South Study completed in 2008 identified improvements to Langley Hill and widening the A4 as the most cost effective solution to improving traffic flow between Tilehurst, Calcot and west Reading and M4 junction 12. The Langley Hill improvements recommended as part of the report were completed in 2011.
- 1.3 In February 2013 the Department for Transport (DfT) announced the creation of a Pinch Point fund worth £170 million to remove bottlenecks on the local highway network. This fund is specifically aimed at schemes that can be delivered quickly with immediate impact.
- 1.4 In response to the DfT's invitation to bid for funding West Berkshire Council submitted a bid to widen the A4 between Langley Hill and Royal Avenue. The project involves widening the A4 to the south to allow the construction of an additional westbound traffic lane (towards the M4) and lane improvements eastbound. The eastbound improvements include extending the merge lane from Royal Avenue by 200 metres and lengthening the left turn slip lane on the approach to Langley Hill. Appendix 1 details the existing layout and Appendix 2 details the proposed scheme. The scheme involves widening into land under the ownership of the Highway Authority.
- 1.5 The pinch point fund attracted 180 bids nationwide which totalled approximately £400m. All the schemes were assessed on value for money, project delivery and risk management. The DfT's national guidance for the modelling and appraising transport improvements was used to assess the value for money (VfM) delivered by the proposal. The scheme has been extensively modelled as part of the Kennet North/South Study, which was updated for this bid and passed to the DfT to use as part of their VfM assessment. In May 2013 it was announced that the A4 Calcot widening bid had been successful in attracting £2m of pinch point funding due to the excellent value for money that it would deliver.
- 1.6 If approved to proceed, the scheme is currently programmed to commence on site in July 2014 and will take approximately 9 months to complete.

2. IKEA

- 2.1 A planning application for a new IKEA store on Pincents Lane adjacent to M4 Junction 12 was approved in 2012. The IKEA planning application was approved

with a transportation package of some £5 million that include highway improvements being implemented prior to the store opening. This involves improvements to the M4 Junction 12 and to A4 / Pincents lane / Dorking Way Junctions. Most of the traffic to and from the proposed store is projected to be via the M4, so therefore relatively minor improvements are proposed to the A4 between Langley Hill and Royal Avenue.

- 2.2 The DfT's pinch point funding contributes a maximum of 70% towards the overall scheme cost, with the Council making up the shortfall from other sources. As part of the application process it was agreed with IKEA that rather than construct their improvements between Langley Hill and Royal Avenue, the works would be costed and IKEA would contribute this amount towards the Council's larger scheme. This proportion of the IKEA contribution will therefore form part of the Council's 30% funding towards the scheme and Council engineers are currently in discussion with IKEA regarding the valuation of their contribution.
- 2.3 The current timescale for the IKEA improvements is unknown however it is anticipated that their Highway Improvement programme will commence in 2015 following the programmed completion of the Council's A4 improvements.

3. Consultation

- 3.1 The consultation period commenced on 17th September and concluded on 1st November 2013. Letters were sent to approximately 4000 properties in Tilehurst/Calcot area inviting residents and businesses to visit a drop in session which was held at the Beansheaf Centre on Wednesday 2nd October. Plans of the scheme were on display at the drop in session and scheme drawings were also available on the Council's website. Drawings were also available to view at West Berkshire Council's Calcot Office. Council Officers also attended meetings of Tilehurst and Holybrook Parish Councils and a meeting with the residents at Calcot Priory.
- 3.2 84 residents visited the drop in session and a total of 116 responses were received to the consultation. Following requests for further information a public meeting was arranged on Friday 25th October at the Calcot Centre hosted by Alok Sharma MP and attended by Council Officers and the Highways Portfolio Holder. This was attended by approximately 60 residents.

4. Consultation Responses

- 4.1 A summary of the comments received along with an Officers response can be seen in Appendix 3.
- 4.2 Responses to the consultation were mixed and the drop in session and public meeting saw a high proportion of local residents with properties directly adjacent to the proposed improvements. Clearly many local residents who live immediately to the south of the A4 are concerned about moving the road closer to their properties and the impact of increased noise and associated effect on the value of their property. They were also concerned about the removal of trees/bushes to the rear of their properties leaving their gardens exposed introducing potential security issues.

- 4.3 As part of the design process acoustic experts Accon have been employed to model the impact of the proposed scheme. As part of their modelling they anticipated that a number of properties would experience an increase in noise above the threshold that would mean they would be entitled to a sound insulation scheme under the Noise insulation Regulations (1975). In light of this and the comments from residents about security an Acoustic barrier has been introduced into the design. This will be a 2 metre high close boarded fence which will, following completion of the scheme, reduce the noise from the A4 to a level well below that currently experienced.
- 4.4 Responses have also been received from a number of residents of Charrington Road/Dorking Way and Royal Avenue concerned about the existing rat running problem and that this will be exacerbated during the construction of the scheme. When constructed, every effort will be made to maintain two way flow on the A4 by using the current central hatch area as a running lane. This should limit the number of motorists seeking alternative adjacent routes. One consultee has suggested that temporary weight restrictions be placed on Charrington Road/Dorking Way and Royal Avenue to prevent large vehicles from using these routes to avoid the A4. This will be taken forward and implemented during the construction phase.
- 4.5 Origin and destination traffic surveys have also been commissioned in Royal Avenue and Charrington Road to establish the extent of the existing rat-running problem. The surveys took place on 19th and 22nd November and the results will be shared with the Local Ward Members before discussing possible traffic management options with residents.
- 4.6 In addition to the concerns expressed by local residents there were many residents and road users that expressed their support for the scheme. Some even thought the scheme was not going far enough to address the congestion issues in this part of the network. The main query centred on 'why is the road not being dualled in both directions?' Unfortunately there is not enough available highway land to provide two lanes in either direction without completely removing the central hatching and right turn lanes for Cranbourne Avenue and the other business. Due to road safety concerns the removal of the right turn lane would require a complete ban on right turns along this part of the A4 which would have a significant impact on businesses.
- 4.7 Consideration was also given to dualling the eastbound lane rather than the westbound lane. However modelling and observations on site demonstrate that the morning peak westbound congestion tends to be considerably worse and less predictable than the afternoon eastbound congestion. From surveys undertaken in September 2013, the average 24 hour weekday flow eastbound is 12,500 vehicles, whereas westbound 16,700 were counted. In conjunction with the westbound dualling, the eastbound lane improvements will also make significant journey time improvements.
- 4.8 Many other responses to the consultation were received and many concerns will have to be addressed during the course of this major project. A summary of all the consultation responses can be seen in Appendix 3 and is cross referenced to a selection of Frequently Asked Questions (Appendix 4) which have also been posted on the Council's web-site.

5. Equalities Impact Assessment Outcomes

- 5.1 A description of the consultation carried out can be seen in section 3.1 and 3.2. Discussion has taken place with elderly residents of Calcot Priory and their request for a bus stop on the A4 will be considered as part of the design. Detailed discussion will also take place with Calcot Schools to look at alternative safe routes to school during the construction.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 Widening the A4 is a major project and schemes of this nature will always be controversial with those that feel they are injuriously affected both during the construction and once the scheme is completed. This is reflected by the consultation responses which can be seen to be both in support and against the proposal.
- 6.2 The main objections posted during the consultation are by those residents that are directly affected by the works, many of which can be addressed and mitigated against during the design process. A further public meeting will take place with residents to consider the detail design and appearance of the works in the immediate vicinity of their property and they will have a further opportunity to comment. This will also give other residents an opportunity to view the detail of the scheme and discuss measures to minimise the impact during the construction.
- 6.3 The scheme itself will provide journey time improvements and congestion reduction for approximately 29,000 motorists that use this part of the A4 on a daily basis. In conjunction with the proposed IKEA improvements to A4/Pincent's Lane and at M4 Junction 12 this part of the network will see significant improvement over the coming years. When considered along with the Highways Agency's proposal to introduce Smart Motorways (managed motorways and hard shoulder running) between junctions 3 and 12 to improve traffic flow on the M4 from 2015, this is a unique opportunity to provide significant benefits for existing and future demand in this part of the District.

7. Recommendation

- 7.1 That the scheme detailed in Appendix 2 proceeds to detail design and construction subject to further consultation and public meeting with residents to review the scheme detail.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Existing layout
- Appendix 2 – Proposed Layout
- Appendix 3 – Summary of consultation responses
- Appendix 4 – Frequently Asked Questions