

A46 Strategic Link Road Broadcast Consultation

Transcript

Nicola van der Hoven, A46 Programme Manager, Warwickshire County Council

Hello everyone and thank you for joining us this evening for this consultation event on the A46 Strategic Link Road.

My name is Nicola van der Hoven, I work for Warwickshire County Council and I look after the team who manage the major infrastructure projects across the County.

I welcome you to this live broadcast which we will record and make available on the Warwickshire County Council website after this event. Unfortunately, current restrictions prevent us from meeting with groups in person but I hope that you will have had the opportunity to look at the information that is available on line, and that you take the time to respond to the consultation and this can be found at ask.warwickshire.gov.uk, or a paper copy can be requested.

The aim of this consultation exercise is to gather your views on the principle of a new transport corridor to the south west of Coventry, that is the area from the A46 around the Stoneleigh Junction to the east and the University of Warwick and Westwood Heath in the west. Warwickshire County Council, Coventry City Council and Warwick District Council have been working together to consider the issues in terms of travel movements in this area, and possible solutions including new highway infrastructure, roads, cycleways and footways.

The event this evening will last for an hour and I will start by introducing you to the representatives of the scheme promoters: David Ayton-Hill from Warwickshire, John Seddon from Coventry and Andrew Cornfoot from Warwick District. They will each provide information setting out the context for a new transport corridor in this area. Then Paul Bentley, the project manager from Warwickshire, will take us through the scheme options and consultation information. I will then set out the next steps and the timeline.

We will use the remainder of the session to answer any questions you may have. As the presentations progress you can pose questions using the chat box to the right of your screen. We will aim to answer as many questions as possible, and we will post the responses to your questions on the project website after the event.

David Ayton-Hill, Assistant Director for Communities, Warwickshire County Council

My name is Dave Ayton-Hill and I am the Assistant Director for Communities at Warwickshire County Council, with responsibility for transport planning, strategic infrastructure, economic growth and regeneration.

Now, more than ever, the need to ensure that Coventry & Warwickshire is best placed to facilitate and support economic growth and prosperity is hugely important. Over the past decade, the area has been one of the strongest and fastest growing economic areas in the country. A key driver of this growth has been the connectivity of the area, driven by investment in strategic and local transport infrastructure. The opening of the M40 in 1990 was hugely influential in the growth of Warwickshire, and along with other key road corridors including the M6, A5, A45 and A46 and the rail corridors to Birmingham and London, has helped open up new employment sites and made the area extremely attractive to businesses to locate and grow.

Coventry & Warwickshire is now home to many high-profile companies, including National Grid, BMW, Aston Martin, Geeley, Meggitt, Codemasters, Ubisoft, and the headquarters of both the NFU and NFU Mutual. The area has the strongest concentration of automotive technology and R&D activity in the UK and is a global leader in the development of future mobility – including electric and autonomous vehicles. This is supported by our two world class universities and a cluster of research establishments including the Manufacturing Technology Centre at Ansty Park, Horiba MIRA Technology Park, Quinton Rail Technology Centre, and WMG located at the University of Warwick. We are also home to the UK Battery Industrialisation Centre at Whitley due to open shortly, and we are pushing for the creation of a new Gigafactory, both of which we will help generate and manufacture the batteries to drive these future technologies.

The A46 corridor is vitally important to the current and future growth of the Coventry & Warwickshire. It is a key corridor for growth, and has been subject to a range of improvements in recent years including M40 Junction 15, the Stanks Island near Warwick, the Tollbar End Junction near Coventry, and now the junction improvements on the A46 at Stoneleigh which have just begun. As we look towards economic recovery and future growth, this corridor and the growth opportunities it presents will be vital. Furthermore, it is vital that we provide a strategic transport network that can deal with this anticipated future growth – ensuring that we tackle congestion now and into the future, and also develop new sustainable transport options that can complement, support and enable modal shift where possible.

The proposed development of the A46 Strategic Link Road helps provide a vital part on this jigsaw, and in my mind, will help support the continued growth and prosperity of Coventry & Warwickshire.

John Seddon, Head of Transport and Innovation, Coventry City Council

My name is John Seddon and I am the Head of Transport and Innovation at the Coventry City Council. The bulk of this scheme lies within the Warwickshire area and the Warwick District area but the nature of the geography around the boundary between city council and the county and district is such that the scheme is very influential in managing travel demand around the city itself and that includes up as far north as the A45. Now this was recognised by the City council back in 2017 when it adopted the connecting Coventry transport strategy and that was setting out the council's strategic transport and infrastructure programme for the next 10 to 15 years from 2017 onwards. A lot of that programme is now actually being delivered. Those of you that have been in the City Centre will see the public works taken within the pedestrian part of the city and the work at the railway station of the new £80 million investment in the new station building. And those are very much part of the city centre package which is agreed at that time in 2017 to kick start the regeneration of the city centre itself.

Another package is around Very Light Rail (VLR), a new mass transit system for the city and connecting outline areas to the city centre and that would include a route coming down to the south towards the University. Coventry North Package to facilitate in affect housing developments to the north-west of the city and to also take traffic off existing residential streets in that area of the city. And then crucially for this package, the Coventry South Package, and that includes schemes such as the Phase 1 of the A46 Link, the Stoneleigh Junction, which is under construction at the moment where colleagues at Warwickshire are leading that forward and improvements of the A46 Binley junction which Highways England are currently progressing and working on that. So again, from that report in 2017, that council decision to peruse an integrated transport package for the city, we have seen a lot on investment taking place in the city for a lot of schemes. The link road forms part of that and is very much something that the city council recognises the need to do something in this part of the city. We also recognise the need to do so in a way which supports the local communities in this part of Coventry and helps manage traffic. In all those congestions issues that occur on Gibbet Hill Road, Stoneleigh Road and so on we want to make sure that we don't just replicate that elsewhere through this scheme. We are very much looking to enhance the overall transport infrastructure in this area. Coventry South Package also includes rail investment, Coventry South Interchange station, improvement at Tile Hill and so on. So, it not just about the traffic, it is about moving people around this part of the city and in surrounding parts of Warwickshire. This is a key scheme for the city, which we are very much supportive of and working with colleagues in the county and district on delivery.

Andrew Cornfoot, Business Manager – Policy & Site Delivery, Warwick District Council

I'm Andrew Cornfoot and I manage the planning policy and site delivery team at Warwick District Council.

Whilst this project and current consultation is being led by Warwickshire County Council, officers of the District Council have been supporting it as it is considered to be an important piece of supporting infrastructure to enable the delivery of major development in the area. Through this consultation, we are keen to understand the views from residents and businesses in the local area.

As the proposed link road will be within Warwick District's administrative area, I will say a few words about the link road in the context of the current Local Plan, which sets out the Council's policies and proposals to support the development of the district through to 2029.

The Council's Spatial Strategy focuses growth within and adjacent to built-up areas – including to the southern edge of Coventry in the area, where growth is focussed on strategic housing allocations.

Land allocated in the area includes the largest allocation in our current Local Plan at Kings Hill, with a total capacity of up to 4,000 homes, with many of these likely to come forward after the current Plan period. It also includes an allocation of 425 dwellings at Westwood Heath. Collectively, these developments are expected to include associated supporting infrastructure including schools, a local centre and community, health and retail facilities.

The area also includes 'safeguarded' land to the south of Westwood Heath Road. This means that it has been removed from the green belt but is not currently allocated for development. It is safeguard as it is considered one of a limited number of realistic opportunities for growth that can be considered through a review of the Local Plan without further alterations to the Green Belt.

Warwick University is also located in this area. The university continues to be a success story for the region and plays an important role in the local economy. The University has growth aspirations a without investment in transport infrastructure, further development at the University will be restricted.

In addition to residential allocations referred to and the University, further growth and alterations to the wider area are planned. The Local Plan allocates land in the local area for housing and employment including strategic allocations in Kenilworth and a sub-regional employment site in the vicinity of Coventry Airport. HS2 will also impact on Stoneleigh Park, a major employment site in the Green Belt, and that site will need to adapt accordingly and consider its future development.

Additional highway capacity inclusive of sustainable travel options will enable the Council to bring sites forward with the necessary infrastructure to support the development. Without highway capacity improvements and planning for

infrastructure to support development, the District may struggle to deliver Local Plan allocations and cater for future growth to meet our housing needs and provide employment for residents.

Paul Bentley, A46 Project Manager, Warwickshire County Council

I'm Paul Bentley, the project manager for the scheme. I'm going to talk through our objectives of the scheme, what options we are consulting on and explaining the effects these could have.

The proposals for a new transport corridor explore the opportunities to improve connectivity and deliver the growth set out earlier. The key driver is in delivering these future growth aspirations and improvements to the transport network, the objectives based on this are.

- Maintain journey times following wider A46 development growth
- Provide accessible economic development
- Improve network resilience
- Improve access to University of Warwick and surrounding employment
- Reduce severance
- Improve air quality
- Reduce rat-running
- Enhance active travel

We have carried out initial feasibility work to consider possible routes for a new link road, how and where it connects to the existing roads and the potential active travel improvements that can be made. Various options have been considered looking at constraints and opportunities. When developing these plans, the local topography and environmental considerations, such as woodlands and local landowners has been considered. Where possible major environmental impacts have been avoided, where this is not possible, they will be minimised. Additionally, where there are impacts these will be offset.

As part of our work a traffic model of the local area has been created with the proposals being assessed. This was to identify how the indicative proposals will likely be used and the potential impacts they have on the existing roads. A report of these results is available as part of the consultation documents.

These options will continue to be developed, using feedback from this consultation, as well as more detailed consideration of constraints and their effects. As part of this work more detailed environmental surveys which will identify environmental, ecological and other factors for consideration.

This work has led us to consult on three main options; these are:

Option 1

No new additional infrastructure or new modes of transport will be provided, with the existing transport network remaining as it is currently.

For this option there is no direct scheme costs, it does however restrict the amount of investment in employment and housing growth that could be delivered.

This option might not create any additional travel demand on the network, it would however restrict the ability to meet the demand for new housing.

Existing traffic congestion is unlikely to improve, with journey times predicted to increase without further investment in the transport network, particularly at peak times, with the traffic volumes set to increase over the next ten years by up to 25%. This is assuming pre-Covid levels, these numbers will have sensitivity tests as the scheme moves forwards.

Without further improvements, plans to increase the level of employment and residential development in this area will be limited by the capacity of the existing transport network. It is unlikely that additional journeys resulting from allocated Local Plan developments or future aspirational growth plans will be able to be accommodated.

Option 2

Moving on to option 2 a new link road to A429 Kenilworth Road

This option proposes to create a new link road between the A46 Stoneleigh Road junction, where construction on improvements has just got underway and Kenilworth Road.

The proposed link road would connect directly onto the improved junction between the A46 and Stoneleigh Road, with the addition of a left-in, left-out junction to the proposed King's Hill development. A new roundabout would be constructed to connect into Kenilworth Road, with a possible connection to a proposed new railway station and interchange. Plans of which are in the early stages of development.

The proposed road could be either single- or dual-carriageway road, depending on demand and constraints. Our aspiration is to have segregated cycle and pedestrian facilities on both sides of the carriageway. Additional space could be made available for other sustainable transport options, such as a possible dedicated bus lane and capacity for very light rail (VLR).

This option would provide a partial bypass for Stoneleigh Road and Gibbet Hill Road, but through-traffic would remain on Gibbet Hill Road as traffic from Westwood Heath area would not be able to directly access the proposed road. This option would also allow a future private connection providing direct access to the University of Warwick to be brought forward as a separate scheme.

Initial analysis shows that Option 2 improves congestion and average journey times in the morning peak. However, during the evening peak, it still does not deliver sufficient changes to congestion or journey times.

This could also impact the delivery of housing and employment growth set out in the Local Plans as well as the aspirational growth of University of Warwick, particularly without further infrastructure improvements.

Option 3

Moving on to option 3 a new link road to south of Coventry and University of Warwick

This option proposes new road constructed between the A46 Stoneleigh Road junction and Westwood Heath Road in Coventry, along with a direct connection into the University of Warwick. Improvements to a number of local junctions within

Coventry would also be made to help mitigate the predicted impacts of the scheme in that area of the city.

As with option 2, the proposed link road is proposed to connect directly onto the improved junction at the A46, with same connection into the Kingshill development and Kenilworth Road and new station site. From Kenilworth Road, the new link road could then connect to Westwood Heath Road, as well as providing an opportunity for direct access into the University of Warwick. I will pick up on the in the sub-options shortly.

The proposed road would likely be a dual carriageway with segregated cycle and pedestrian facilities on one or both sides of the carriageway, until the junction with University of Warwick. At this point the link road would reduce to single carriageway road with continued segregated cycle and pedestrian facilities provision. As with option 2, space could be made available for additional sustainable transport options such as a possible dedicated bus lane, capacity for very light rail (VLR) and other potential sustainable transport links to the University.

The initial analysis shows that this option would likely result in a substantial reduction in journey times across the local network, during both morning and evening rush periods. Being likely to reduce congestion and deliver network-wide benefits. Along with localised benefits along critical parts of the network, such as the A45 and A46. These improvements in local network performance and connectivity could support the delivery of housing and employment growth allocated within Local Plans as well as the aspirational growth of University of Warwick.

Option 3 also enables additional changes to be made that we are consulting on these are:

The down grading of Gibbet Hill Road:

A section of Gibbet Hill Road on the university campus would to be closed to general through-traffic. This could facilitate the repurposing of this section of road for use by public transport, pedestrians and cyclists only.

General through-traffic would be able to use the higher-standard link road, which provides a more attractive route from Westwood Heath to the A429 and A46. University traffic would be able to access the campus using the new connection from the proposed link road, rather than from Gibbet Hill Road.

Creating an additional access to Westwood Business Park:

This provides an opportunity for a direct link into Westwood Heath Business Park. However, HGVs would not be able to use this new access and would need to continue to use the existing access.

Whilst a link into the Business Park would provide relief to the local road network from general traffic, especially Kirby Corner Road, it also has the potential to have an impact on existing properties and communities.

The connection to Westwood Heath Road:

Analysis indicates that connecting the proposed link road into Westwood Heath Road results in wider benefits to the transport network. However, it is recognised that there are likely to be community concerns over the impact of such a connection. If

such a proposed link is delivered, there are a number of locations where the connection could be made on Westwood Heath Road along with different junction types. Likely to be either a roundabout or signalised junction.

Local junction improvements:

The proposed road particularly in option 3 will inevitably alter traffic flow and patterns on the surrounding local network. From our analysis, it is expected that overall congestion will decrease in the local area. However, mitigation may be required at specific locations where congestion has the potential to increase as a result of the link road. If any additional locations requiring improvement are identified during further scheme development, these will be considered as part of the ongoing assessment work.

1. Cromwell Lane/Westwood Heath Road Junction
This scheme proposes the adjustment of the junction to form a mini roundabout. The scheme maintains the two-lane entry on the Westwood Heath Road approach, which is to be delivered as part of an existing scheme with planning permission identified at this junction.
2. Cromwell Lane/Charter Avenue
This scheme proposes the implementation of a 30-metre right-turn lane on the Cromwell Lane northbound approach to the junction.
3. Cromwell Lane/Torrington Avenue
This scheme proposes the installation of a 50-metre right-turn lane on the Cromwell Lane northbound approach to the junction.
4. Westwood Heath Road/Westwood Way
This scheme involves the provision of two-lane entry and exits on the Westwood Heath Road arms to the roundabout, to enable the east-to-west and west-to-east movements to be made in two lanes.
5. Broad Lane/Job's Lane
This scheme proposes the implementation of a 30-metre two-lane section on the Job's Lane approach to the junction.
6. Kings Hill Access Restrictions
This scheme allows Kings Hill traffic to travel to/from the site via Stoneleigh Road, however through-trips on Stoneleigh Road will remain banned.

Please do ask any questions regarding these proposals and strongly encourage you to fill in the survey.

Nicola van der Hoven, A46 Programme Manager, Warwickshire County Council

Any proposal for new infrastructure on this scale will take a number of years to develop, the consultation that we are presenting this evening aims to gather views on the need for new infrastructure in this area.

The results of the consultation survey which is available to complete on-line at ask.warwickshire.gov.uk or can be requested in paper format, will be analysed and reported with a proposed way forward to the decision-making committees at each authority.

A decision to move forward with one of the highways options, will lead to the development of applications for funding to funding bodies and development of feasibility design and survey work during the summer of next year.

Then if the funding applications are successful, we will develop the detailed design stage and this will include further consultation on the proposals, a planning application and negotiations for any land required. This process would be expected to take around three years to complete so finishing during 2024.

This would be followed by the procurement and construction with a new road expected to be open at the earliest during 2026 or 2027.

It is difficult to be too precise about timescales this early in the process, as there are a number of significant dependencies and approval processes to be completed. And so, I am setting out our current aim recognising that this will need to be reviewed over time.