

A46 Member Partnership, 16/06/2021

Virtual Meeting on Microsoft Teams

Draft Minutes

1. Introductions and Apologies (Chair)

Attendees:

Cllr Mark Cargill (Chair) – Stratford-on-Avon District Council
Cllr Philip King (Vice Chair) – Harborough District Council
Cllr Alan Amos – Worcestershire County Council
Cllr David Bill MBE – Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council
Cllr Adrian Hardman – Wychavon District Council
Cllr Jill Simpson-Vince – Rugby Borough Council
Cllr Ben Taylor – Blaby District Council
Cllr Vernon Smith – Tewkesbury Borough Council
Cllr Maggie Wright – Leicestershire County Council

Adrian Hart (AH) - Warwickshire County Council
Amanda Lawson-Smith (ALS) - Gloucestershire County Council
Nicholas Dauncey (ND) - Warwickshire County Council
Neil Benison (NB) - Coventry City Council
John Richardson (JR) - Blaby District Council
Cat Hartley (CH) - Blaby District Council
David Atkinson (DA) - Harborough District Council
Karen Hanchett (KH) - Worcestershire County Council
David Hudson (DH) - Environment Agency
Kirstie Rea (KR) - Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council
Victoria Lazenby (VL) - Highways England
Mark Palfreyman (MP) - Leicestershire County Council
Paul Harris (PH) - Stratford-on-Avon District Council
Jonathan Dibble (JD) - Tewkesbury Borough Council
Mike Warner (MW) - GFirst LEP
Peter Heath (PH) - Rugby Borough Council
Adrian Thorpe (AT) - Oadby and Wigston Borough Council
Philip Clarke (PC) - Warwick District Council
Sarah Spink (SS) - Midlands Connect
Tracey Crews (TC) - Cheltenham Borough Council

Apologies:

Cllr Heather Timms – Warwickshire County Council
Cllr Wallace Redford – Warwickshire County Council
Cllr David Gray – Gloucestershire County Council
Cllr Jim O’Boyle – Coventry City Council
Cllr John Boyce – Oadby & Wigston Borough Council
Neil Hopwood – GFirst LEP
Colin Knight – Coventry City Council
John Seddon – Coventry City Council
Shawn Riley – Wychavon District Council
Luke Willetts – Worcestershire LEP

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2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting and Matters Arising (Chair)

Cllr Cargill had written to Rishi Sunak via Jeremy Wright MP regarding the TMTC proposition, but unfortunately it had not featured in the subsequent Budget Statement.

AH is not convinced the VLR conference on 27th May 2021 had gone ahead as planned.

SS reported that making sure Midlands Connect was available to liaise with District/Borough Councils had been actioned.

Cllr Bill noted several references to concerns expressed by Cllr King about the A46 and commented that the minutes were accurate but that there are still references in the updated Action Plan which would arguably support a south and east Leicester bypass – not everybody agrees and there are still serious local objections.

AH – commented that the Action Plan is a record of proposals that are being considered and will try to find a way of capturing that point on local objections **[Action: AH]**. AH to send the final version of the Minutes to ALS for uploading on the A46 Partnership website **[Action: AH/ALS]**.

3. A46 Walsgrave Options Consultation (deferred to a future meeting)

AH reported that the planned consultation by Highways England has been put back to later in the year in order to allow for further technical assessment work to be undertaken.

4. Highways England Update (Victoria Lazenby, Highways England)

Cllr Cargill welcomed Victoria Lazenby, Head of Planning and Development West Midlands at Highways England to the meeting.

VL gave a presentation on Route Strategies – please refer to the PowerPoint slides circulated after the meeting.

Cllr Cargill asked for clarification on the timescales for physical works to commence.

VL replied that Highways England's current RIS2 investment strategy is in place up to 2025. This is about new schemes from 2025 onwards for RIS3. It can take a long time for schemes to be developed and implemented.

Cllr Cargill asked how this group can improve lobbying. VL noted that the key thing is to provide feedback on future investment priorities for the A46 using the online tool. Decision on investment ultimately rests with Government (DfT/Treasury).

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Cllr King commented that consultation and engagement over the summer through workshops will be challenging given that no dates are currently available. The Covid situation complicates this as people will be looking to be away over the summer holiday period. It is a very short timeframe to slot in an engagement session.

Cllr King also noted that Highways England's remit is looking not just at road function but a much wider brief and asked for clarification on this.

VL replied that the 'wider remit' relates to the role of route strategies - the intention is to make them more dynamic documents which can be updated as local priorities change.

VL added that she is not aware of exact dates for consultation. There is an online tool so there will be other ways to engage if people aren't able to attend specific stakeholder sessions. VL will check this further with the team **[Action: VL]**.

AH commented that there is a huge amount of evidence developed primarily by Midlands Connect on the A46 and how this has been taken forward to developing the TMTC. There is no shortage of information to feed into Highways England via Sun-National Transport Bodies (e.g. Midlands Connect, Western Gateway) and individual authorities can also do so. The A46 corridor as a whole is in a very strong position.

5. A46 Partnership – North (Andrew Pritchard, East Midlands Councils)

Cllr Cargill welcomed Andrew Pritchard to the meeting.

AP noted that the A46 is hugely important to the East Midlands and this is now embedded in the TMTC concept as a route linking the River Severn with the Humber in the north, requiring further investment to support economic activity.

A major upgrade of the route to dual carriageway standard was delivered in Nottinghamshire through the Fiscal Stimulus Programme 10-15 years ago, with the Lincoln-Newark upgrade funded during the late 1990's/early 2000's.

There is close working with Highways England on the 'missing link' around Newark to deliver a northern bypass which crosses a river, railway line and other features – this will enable dual carriageway status to be achieved along the majority of the route around Lincoln, Leicester and Nottingham.

There is a Freeport at the Humber Ports and an emerging Freeport at East Midlands Airport – these will have significant freight implications.

Following this group as an example, the A46 Northern Partnership is currently developing a collective approach to understand development and traffic pressures on the northern section, in order to develop a collaborative case for investment.

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This is currently being progressed by officers and has not yet been elevated to elected member level. The group is at a relatively early stage but the ambition is to improve the level of understanding, information and alignment between major road investment proposals, economic regeneration and local plan development pressures on the northern section of the A46 to inform the business case for further investment.

Cllr Cargill thanked AP and noted that a representative of this group could attend meetings of the northern group and vice versa in the future.

Cllr King expressed concern that there is a major difference of opinion between Leicestershire County Council and one of the LPA's regarding highway infrastructure investment and is keen to ensure the views of the District/Boroughs as planning authorities in south Leicestershire are taken on board.

AP replied that he is aware of the issue and will endeavour to make sure all parties are involved. He will engage in further discussions with AH to ensure a consistent and joined-up approach when taking forward proposals to Government for the northern section.

6. Midlands Connect Update (Sarah Spink, Midlands Connect)

Cllr Cargill welcomed Sarah Spink to the meeting.

SS noted that she welcomed the creation of an equivalent group for the northern section as Midlands Connect is looking at the A46 route as a whole.

SS gave a presentation to update the group on recent Midlands Connect activity.

A significant amount of evidence is now being fed into the Highways England Route Strategies consultation process for RIS3 and the Midlands Connect Strategy Refresh.

Alongside this is the Productivity Growth Plan (PGP) work being undertaken by Atkins and EY to identify plan contents in detail for the TMTC.

Midlands Connect is working with the Midlands Engine on the TMTC, as it covers economic development not just transport. There is now joint working in Whitehall across departments as a result of this engagement.

The emerging PGP is expected to demonstrate that transport is an enabler of infrastructure, housing and business. It will need to be flexible enough to align with wider Government priorities for investment and housing, to maximise potential funding opportunities. The MC Project Board is due to consider the emerging PGP which can be circulated at a later date once complete.

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Joint working – the A46 and A50/A500 are following a similar approach. The A46 is bigger than just the road – DfT and BEIS asked Midlands Connect and Midlands Engine to work together to develop a programme and set up a team that can deliver the PGP.

Coventry-Leicester-Nottingham rail connectivity improvements – following a very positive publicity event, Midlands Connect is waiting to hear from DfT about the next stage of funding (hopefully in the forthcoming CSR).

Midlands Connect Strategy Refresh – the March 2017 strategy is being updated to reflect changing circumstances and funding opportunities, e.g. climate emergencies, carbon reduction, the Covid-19 Pandemic and ‘Levelling-Up’ agenda. The refresh is due for completion by the end of 2021. Officers represented on this group are involved in the process.

Midlands Connect will be putting in a Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) ‘Ask’ for the corridor which will bring forward the various work streams (Strategy Refresh, Prioritisation for RIS 3/4, TMTC Productivity Growth Plan, joint working with Midlands Engine). This should be underway by September 2021.

Cllr Cargill asked whether this group could assist with further lobbying of MPs. AH commented that in doing so we would need to be careful not to dilute the message from Midlands Connect.

SS advised that unless there is something specific in your areas you wish to promote separately, Midlands Connect would be best placed to bring together all the workstreams into a compelling narrative for the CSR Ask, and to involve MPs at that stage.

VL noted that Highways England is very joined up with Midlands Connect and would support its role in developing the narrative for investment in the more strategic elements along the route.

7. Garden Town/Garden Village and Growth Update (LPA reps)

- a. Tewkesbury Borough Council (Jonathan Dibble/Amanda Lawson-Smith)

JD reported that the HIF-funded bridge over the railway line had now been granted planning consent which would allow the construction phase to be progressed. The timeframe for delivery is currently being firmed up.

The Tewkesbury, Cheltenham and Gloucester City Joint Plan for Development has been updated and is due to be taken to a Regulation 18 Draft Plan later in 2021. This will potentially include the Garden Town as a development proposition in the Joint Core Strategy, with a view to consultation in late 2021.

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The Garden Town programme is still in its infancy but a lot of work is going on in background. A progress update report is available on the website - link to be shared after the meeting **[Action: JD]**.

JD has met with Homes England to discuss the programme which is due to come back with a peer review of key recommendations.

ALS gave an update on the proposed M5 Junction 9 upgrade at the far south-western end of the A46. There is significant mainline queuing issue in the AM peak. In 2015, Highways England recognised the need for an upgrade but the scheme did not make it into the RIS1 programme.

Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) decided to take the scheme on itself to progress it through the Western Gateway's Regional Evidence Base. It has used DfT Large Local Major (LLM) Scheme Funding to progress scheme development and has an approved pre-Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC). It has also committed significant scheme development funding from its own resources towards developing the Outline Business Case (OBC).

Proposed consultation on the scheme was due to be undertaken in January 2021 but was postponed following a request from DfT and Highways England. However, Highways England does not appear to have the staff or financial resources necessary to help GCC move the scheme forward as it is outside the RIS2 programme.

ALS reported that GCC is in dialogue with Highways England Area 9 and has submitted a suite of documents, but there are limited resources at Highways England to review these.

ALS concluded that GCC is aiming to reach agreement with Highways England that the scheme can go out to public consultation in 2021, and for the full SOBC to be signed off by DfT to release scheme development funding to complete the OBC.

VL replied that she understood the issues and that her colleague Kam Khokar is working with GCC. Unfortunately, there are numerous competing demands for scheme funding on the SRN which cannot all be met. This is a complex and costly scheme with numerous deliverability issues. Highways England is keen to help GCC ensure that the scheme is deliverable.

KH queried whether the Garden Town project would be deliverable without the improvements at M5 Junction 9.

ALS replied that there is a small amount of development in the Garden Town area but the proposals for wider growth would stall without the junction upgrade.

JD replied that M5 Junction 9 and the A46 between Teddington Hands and the motorway is a problem today and has been for many years – it is a strategic issue.

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The Garden Town will meet housing need and is the reason why investment in upgrading M5 Junction 9 and the A46 is so critical.

Cllr Smith expressed support for the work being undertaken by ALS and noted that this section of the A46 affects the performance of the wider corridor. He is frustrated with the lack of progress and difficulties with Highways England which has long recognised the need to address the issues at this junction. The plans to deliver the Garden Town will not progress beyond concept stage without the road and junction improvements. He added that if the project drifts into RIS3 then the Garden Town will remain a concept and urged Highways England to be more flexible to keep the project alive.

b. Stratford-on-Avon District Council (Paul Harris)

PH explained that Long Marston Airfield (LMA) is one of two new settlements allocated in the adopted Core Strategy, the other being at Gaydon/Lighthorne Heath next to M40 Junction 12 adjacent to Jaguar Land Rover and Aston Martin Lagonda.

LMA is a proposed new settlement with 3,500 dwellings approximately 5 miles south-west of Stratford-upon-Avon on a disused airfield site with Garden Village status. The Core Strategy identifies that after 400 dwellings, the proposed South Western Relief Road (SWRR) is required to the south of Stratford linking with the A46 at Wildmoor.

Construction of the first 400 dwellings at LMA has started. SDC is producing a Site Allocations Plan and is hoping that it may be possible to deliver an additional 500 dwellings in advance of the SWRR being built. This will depend upon the highway network in Stratford having sufficient capacity to accommodate the additional traffic and further assessments are underway to demonstrate whether this is the case.

PH noted that the key issue is whether the SWRR can actually be delivered – it is a highly contentious proposal with major environmental impacts. The SWRR has been through Core Strategy examination but the planning application which has been live for 18 months has stalled.

Warwickshire County Council's bid to Homes England for HIF funding for the SWRR was unsuccessful and there is considerable uncertainty about further large-scale housing delivery at LMA without the SWRR. SDC is engaging with Homes England to explore potential alternative transport solutions.

Cllr Cargill is concerned that SDC will be 2,500 houses short in terms of 5-year housing land supply. He referred to Very Light Rail (VLR) and asked whether this could provide the solution if it ran along the Stratford Greenway.

PH considered that VLR on its own was unlikely to enable delivery of the site as envisaged in the Local Plan. There could be a combination of road and sustainable transport-based solutions. These would need to be considered as part of the South

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Warwickshire Local Plan which SDC is now developing jointly with Warwick District Council.

PH noted that Cala Homes who are promoting the new settlement at LMA do not have the funding to pay for a road in its entirety, nor pursue rail re-opening between Stratford and Honeybourne, so funding will be required from other sources, potentially in part from additional development south of Stratford.

c. Blaby District Council (Cllr Ben Taylor/Cat Hartley)

Cllr Ben Taylor noted that work on Whetstone Pastures Garden Village is still ongoing. Visioning took place in early 2021 to work through residents' ideas. A formal document is due shortly. Technical work continues on the M1 Junction 20a proposal. Local Plan – completed Regulation 18 with a target for completion in 2023.

CH noted that the developer consortium is exploring two options for the Garden Village, one with and one without the proposed M1 Junction 20a. She stressed that there is no agreed process at the moment for the junction to come forward. It is not in the RIS programme or formal transport strategy. Work on the business case is due to finish in early 2022 and the technical highway work to support that will move forward to look at appropriate funding streams and secure agreement with agencies including Highways England.

d. Other emerging strategic development opportunities (All LPA's)

David Atkinson, Director of Planning at Harborough District Council, is exploring cross-border opportunities around Whetstone Pastures and working together with Blaby DC.

Cllr Simpson-Vince provided an update on the SPD for the South West Rugby site (5,000 dwellings and 35 hectares of employment land). She commented that the SPD had been subject to two consultations and had re-awakened public opposition to the Local Plan.

The SPD went through Cabinet last week and is due to be considered by a full meeting of the Council tomorrow. Public opposition is now focussed on woodlands, open space and cycle routes rather than the proposed new link road through the site. The site is located close to the A45/M45 roundabout which links with M1 Junction 17 to the east and A46 Toll Bar End to the west. The M45 has spare capacity to accommodate the extra traffic generated by the new development.

8. A46 Action Plan/A46 Corridor Local Plan and SEP Update (Adrian Hart)

AH noted that the A46 Action Plan has been extensively updated to inform members of the various proposals for improving the A46 and their current status. Similarly, information on Local Plans and Strategic Economic Plans had been circulated with the meeting papers for information.

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Cllr Taylor requested that the timescale for adoption of the Blaby District Local Plan be updated from 2022 to 2023 **[Action: AH]**.

9. Lobbying, Communications and MP Engagement (Chair)

Cllr Cargill proposed to discuss this matter offline with officers and to report back to the group at the next meeting.

AH noted that in the immediate future we will have a very good opportunity to engage with Government in conjunction with Midlands Connect and colleagues from the Northern Partnership group to raise the profile of the TMTC narrative and associated PGP.

10. Future Items (Chair)

- a. A46 Walsgrave Options Consultation
- b. Midlands Connect Strategy Refresh
- c. Mapping of Housing and Employment Growth
- d. HS2 Update
- e. Gigafactory, Coventry Airport
- f. University of Warwick Masterplan

Cllr Cargill offered to speak with the University of Warwick which is located close to A46 near Coventry and at its Wellesbourne campus on the A429 south of Warwick.

11. AOB

Cllr Cargill referred to the e-mail he had received from a residents' group near Teddington and Alstone which he had asked AH to draft a response.

AH thanked Swati Mittal at Midlands Connect for providing information to include in the response. This covered how improvement options were considered as part of the A46 Strategic Corridor Study, i.e. why certain options were taken forward and others were not. The e-mail and draft response had been shared with colleagues at Worcestershire and Gloucestershire County Councils for review and comment.

Cllr Cargill thanked all for attending and closed the meeting.

Date of Next Meeting: 6th October 2021, 10.30-12.30 (Microsoft Teams)