

A46 Member Partnership, 26/01/22 Virtual Meeting on Microsoft Teams Minutes

1. Introductions and Apologies (Chair)

Attendees:

Cllr Mark Cargill (Chair), Stratford-on-Avon District Council
Cllr Adrian Hardman, Wychavon District Council
Cllr David Bill MBE, Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council
Cllr Jill Simpson-Vince, Rugby Borough Council
Cllr Alan Amos – Worcestershire County Council
Cllr Ozzy O’Shea – Leicestershire County Council
Adrian Hart, Warwickshire County Council
Nicholas Dauncey, Warwickshire County Council
Paul Harris, Stratford-on-Avon District Council
Karen Hanchett, Worcestershire County Council
Lisa Armstrong, Leicestershire County Council
Mark Palfreyman, Leicestershire County Council
David Atkinson, Harborough District Council
Jonathan Dibble, Tewkesbury Borough Council
Shawn Riley, Wychavon District Council
Peter Heath, Rugby Borough Council
Neil Hopwood, GFirst LEP
Luke Willetts – Worcestershire LEP
Victoria Lazenby, National Highways
Bryan Bradley, National Highways
Joseph Mulqueen, National Highways
Martin Potts, National Highways
Sarah Spink, Midlands Connect

Apologies:

Cllr Jim O’Boyle – Coventry City Council
Cllr Maggie Wright – Leicestershire County Council
Cllr Andrew McKinlay – Cheltenham Borough Council
Cllr John Boyce – Oadby & Wigston Borough Council
Cllr Ben Taylor – Blaby District Council
Karen Moore – National Highways
Tracey Birkinshaw – Cheltenham Borough Council
Bill Cullen – Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council
Kirstie Rea – Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council
Colin Knight – Coventry City Council
Cat Hartley – Blaby District Council
Amanda Lawson-Smith – Gloucestershire County Council

Cllr Cargill welcomed attendees to the meeting and noted the apologies.

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

AH noted that a submission has been submitted on behalf of the A46 member Partnership into the Road Investment Strategy (RIS3) consultation and opportunities for enhanced cycling to the National Highways Designated Funding for Active Travel.

A46 Strategic Link Road – AH is looking to discuss the business case with DfT in next few weeks and can then provide a more substantive update following this.

JLR is deferred to a future meeting.

3. A46 Coventry Eastern Junctions (Binley and Walsgrave) (Presentation from Joseph Mulqueen, National Highways)

Joseph Mulqueen (JM) representing National Highways gave a presentation on proposals for improving the A46 Walsgrave junction which is the last at-grade junction on the A46 between the M40 and M69 motorways.

Following the presentation, JM commented that the preferred Option 11 scheme allows for a potential link road into the hospital to be designed and constructed.

Cllr Cargill asked whether Hungerley Hall is a working farm and whether any farmland was required to deliver the scheme.

JM confirmed that it is a working farm and National Highways is in discussions with the owner and tenant farmer. They are aware of the proposed scheme and approved development proposals on the west side of the junction.

Cllr Simpson-Vince asked whether the scheme modelling had showed the extent to which northbound traffic would choose to divert off the A46 at the Binley junction to access Clifford Bridge Road via the most direct route, rather than heading further north on the A46 via the Walsgrave junction where traffic would effectively be coming back on itself.

JM replied that Option 11 would move the junction 800m further to the north. However, the modelling showed that the average time it takes to run through the two improved junctions in 2040 would reduce by approximately 10 minutes.

JM added that the modelling showed it would be quicker to access Clifford Bridge roundabout from Binley via A46 Walsgrave and the realigned B4082 link road even with the additional 1.6 km travel distance.

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JM commented that the current traffic modelling had not shown adverse impacts at Binley. National Highways is in discussions with Coventry City Council about speed limits on the B4082 link road with a view to making the A46/B4082 via Walsgrave a viable and attractive route for these movements.

Cllr Hardman expressed surprise that a noise increase of 3-4 dB was sufficient to trigger the need for mitigation.

JM replied that an adverse effect was considered to be in excess of 3 Db. The new B4028 link road would be closer to Hungerley Hall Farm. Mitigation being considered includes low noise surfacing and insulating the farmhouse. National Highways is in discussions with the farm to agree the mitigation strategy.

Cllr Cargill commented that road noise can often be quite intrusive in the open countryside on the A46 near Alcester and asked whether low noise surfacing is now standard policy.

Victoria Lazenby (VL) commented that when National Highways undertakes resurfacing or delivers new schemes near residential properties, low noise surfacing is normally used. However, in isolated rural areas with very few properties, longer lasting surfacing is normally used. Most of the A46 corridor would be treated by low noise surfacing.

Cllr Bill asked for copies of the presentation slides.

AH agreed to circulate the consultation brochure which goes into more detail and would be happy to submit any feedback on behalf of the Partnership in conjunction with John Seddon at Coventry City Council ahead of the February deadline.

Cllr Cargill thanked JM for the presentation.

JM agreed to update the Partnership next year on scheme progress.

4. Mapping of Housing and Employment Growth (Lisa Armstrong)

Lisa Armstrong (LA) representing Leicestershire County Council referred to the map she had produced several years ago which had been circulated to the Partnership to provide a visual representation of existing and potential housing and employment growth sites along the A46 corridor. The map is currently being refined and updated.

The map includes Garden Towns and Villages and other residential sites with over 50 dwellings. Included sites are normally within 5 miles proximity of the A46 corridor although any developments of a significant size outside this threshold which are likely to have a significant relationship with the A46 are also included.

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LA has also produced an Illustrative Growth Area map showing the number of planned houses along the corridor.

AH commented that the maps showed the very significant level of housing and employment growth affecting the A46 corridor and agreed to circulate them after the meeting.

Cllr Cargill and AH thanked LA for producing and updating the maps and all the officers who had fed into the process.

5. M1 Leicester Western Access RIS3 Pipeline Scheme (Presentation from Martin Potts of National Highways)

Martin Potts (MP) Project Director for National Highways' RIS3 pipeline projects in the Midlands gave a presentation on the Leicester Western Access Scheme.

MP noted that within RIS Period 2 between 2020-2025, £347 million had been earmarked for scheme development, a proportion of which is set aside to forward look into RIS3 and RIS4.

The M1 Leicester Western Access Pipeline Scheme is one of 32 potential schemes which is being considered for inclusion in RIS3 (2025-2030). It is not a committed scheme; ultimately ministers will decide which schemes are taken forward for delivery.

Initial options are being considered for improving the operation of M1 Junction 21, and the main section of the M1 motorway between Junctions 21 and 21a which is experiencing flow breakdown and shunt type accidents.

Cllr Bill asked for clarification on the types of improvement which are envisaged and whether barriers could be considered to prevent people climbing over the A47 bridge across the M1 at Leicester Forest East Motorway Service Area.

MP replied that the problems which the scheme would seek to address relate to the reliability of the network, particularly at Junction 21 where operational improvements were required to address significant traffic demands.

MP noted that this may require signalisation of the junction or more expensive options for improving the free flow links between the M69 and M1 to take traffic away from the roundabout.

Other options may include provision of additional lanes to address link capacity problems on the motorway itself. The safe operation of the Leicester Forest East Services will need considered when developing options.

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Victoria Lazenby (VL) offered to take the specific issue raised by Cllr Bill relating to the A47 Leicester Forest East bridge away for discussion with colleagues at National Highways.

Cllr O'Shea commented that there are a number of areas along the M1 where people had accessed bridges in an attempt to commit suicide and unfortunately it is not possible for the police to intervene without stopping the traffic.

Cllr O'Shea referred to the pinch point on both sides of the M1 between Junctions 20 and 21a with significant queuing and shunt type accidents being a regular occurrence. He thanked National Highways on behalf of Leicestershire County Council for looking into these issues.

VL noted that there were several challenges in the area including the presence of the Leicester Forest East Services, the fact that the junctions are very close to one another and there is a frequent lane switching between them which creates congestion problems.

6. Gigafactory Update (John Seddon)

John Seddon (JS) representing Coventry City Council referred to the proposed Gigafactory at Coventry Airport to the east of the A46 between Stivichall and Tollbar End. The vast majority of batteries for electric vehicles (EVs) including buses are currently manufactured in the far east or in the USA.

Nationally, there is a need for around six Gigafactories which are extremely large high volume automotive battery production facilities. The Gigafactory at Coventry Airport is expected to employ up to 4,000+ people and thousands more in the supply chain.

JS commented that it represents a significant investment in the economy of Coventry and Warwickshire and is supported by the West Midlands Mayor, CWLEP and the local authorities.

National Highways has already invested in improving Tollbar Island which had been grade-separated. A new junction had been created at Whitley in 2021 including a new bridge across the A45 Stonebridge Highway linking the JLR site with the airport area.

There are other key employment developments at Gateway South. The UK Battery Industrialisation Centre is nearing completion and will be adjacent to the Gigafactory to maximise potential synergies.

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Good working relationships between Coventry City Council, Warwickshire County Council, Transport for the West Midlands, National Highways and the site promoters have helped to ensure there is a suitable package in place to support sustainable access.

This includes provision of walking and cycling routes and public transport to the Gigafactory site to help manage travel demand and minimise highway impacts at Tollbar and Stivichall Islands.

Warwick District and Coventry City Councils' respective planning committees recently considered the Gigafactory application which had undergone significant scrutiny in view of key challenges associated with the potential impact on local communities, loss of the airport and environmental impact of lithium in the production process.

The site has now been granted outline planning approval by both committees. The application may be subject of a Call In by the Secretary of State as the site is located in the Green Belt and a decision on this is awaited.

The site promoters Coventry City Council as owner of the airport and its managing partners are in the process of agreeing who the commercial partner will be. The aim is to have a first phase of operation by 2024/25.

Cllr Cargill asked for details of the vehicular access strategy for the site. JS replied that access will come from Tollbar Island via Rowley Road and Whitley South as the primary access.

7. National Highways Update (Victoria Lazenby)

Cllr Cargill referred to two recent fatal accidents on the A46 including one at Billesley Crossroads at a known problem area in November 2021 and considered these were becoming more problematic

VL replied that there had been at least two reported fatalities on the A46 during the last few months. Every fatality is of significant concern to National Highways which is working with the Police to investigate the specific causes of these accidents and look more holistically at any trends which may be emerging.

VL will aim to provide an overview of National Highways' various approaches to improving road safety at the next meeting and refer to issues specifically relating to the A46.

VL gave a short presentation on the Route Strategies consultation, the M40/M42 Interchange proposals and M42 Junction 6 Improvements.

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Cllr Hardman highlighted the issue of road safety had become an increasingly significant concern on the A46 between Tewkesbury and Evesham. He added that there is an online petition with over 6,500 signatures and a group led by local Parish Councils looking for some sort of action. The local MP had recently walked the section of the A46 between Sedgeberrow and the Hinton Cross junction.

VL replied that she shares these concerns and is working with the Police to investigate the specific causes of the problems. The results of these investigations are awaited.

Cllr Bill asked whether National Highways had reached agreement with Tritax Symmetry regarding the predicted highway impacts of proposals for a National Rail Freight Interchange near Hinckley.

VL replied that she would check with colleagues in the appropriate team at National Highways regarding the status of these discussions and report back.

8. Midlands Connect Update (Sarah Spink)

Sarah Spink representing Midlands Connect reported that the current focus was on the Strategic Transport Plan which is due to be launched in April 2022 at the New Exchange Building in Birmingham. A conference is due to be held which A46 Partnership members are welcome to attend.

The focus is on 'Levelling up' and strengthening the regional economy with proposals for decarbonising transport and adapting to climate change, rethinking rural mobility, improving access to rail stations and the role of technology including electric vehicles and ensuring charging infrastructure is located in the right places.

Recommendations for infrastructure investment priorities on the Major Road Network and Strategic Road Network for the RIS3 period across the Midlands have also been identified.

SS reported that Midlands Connect is preparing to host an event later in 2022 to showcase the importance of the A46 corridor – date to be confirmed. A similar event is planned for the A5 corridor.

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

(a) Tewkesbury Borough Council

Jonathan Dibble of Tewkesbury Borough Council gave an update on behalf of Amanda Lawson-Smith who was unable to attend today's meeting and reported that work continues in earnest on the business case for improving M5 Junction 9 and the nearby A46 corridor with public consultation scheduled in Autumn 2022.

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The sustainability strategy for the proposed Garden Town is work in progress and a verbal update is proposed for a future meeting.

The HIF funding for the new bridge across the Bristol-Birmingham railway line had been subject to judicial review which concluded that three challenges had failed, and the planning approval should stand.

A large land acquisition by Belway Homes in the vicinity of the railway bridge had been completed in late 2021.

(b) Stratford-on-Avon District Council

Paul Harris reported that various studies are being progressed to consider whether there is something other than the South Western Relief Road that would help to deliver the remaining 3,100 dwellings allocation at Long Marston Airfield (LMA). These studies may conclude that a road option is still necessary.

Stratford-on-Avon District Council (SDC) is about to commission a Sustainable Transport Options Study which has been arranged with funding from Homes England, SDC and Warwickshire County Council (WCC).

A government announcement from DfT is also awaited on the Restoring Your Railways Study which is looking at whether there is a strategic case for reopening the railway between Stratford and Honeybourne is justified. The line runs past LMA and could provide a rail connection from Stratford and LMA to the Cotswold Line to the south.

Other work is ongoing with WCC and its consultants to see if the highway network in south and through Stratford could accommodate a potential further 500-750 dwellings beyond the beyond the 400 dwellings already consented, but this is still to be confirmed.

(c) Blaby District Council

Cllr Cargill noted that an update on Whetstone Pastures Garden Village prepared by Cat Hartley of Blaby District Council had been circulated with the meeting papers.

(d) Other emerging strategic development opportunities (All LPAs)

Paul Harris reported that work on the joint South Warwickshire Local Plan (SWLP) was being progressed by SDC and Warwick District Council. This will replace their existing local plans.

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The Call for Sites consultation had identified several very large sites along the A46 corridor from the south of Coventry around Warwick/ Leamington Spa south to Stratford and just off the A46 at Wellesbourne. None of these sites is yet committed and all will require further assessment before a preferred option can be identified.

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

AH noted that he has updated the A46 Local Plan, SEP document and Action Plan covering the whole corridor.

He noted the SWLP update given by PH which had been reflected in the document, the updated Charnwood Local Plan and the update provided by Luke Willetts on the Worcestershire Growth Strategy 2050.

11. Lobbying, Communications and MP Engagement (Chair)

AH referred to our response which had been submitted to National Highways to the RIS3 consultation identifying our priorities for the A46 corridor. He added that it will be important to target lobbying to highlight some of the infrastructure priorities we have set out in our response over the next 2-3 years.

12. Future Items (Chair)

- a. A46 Walsgrave Options Consultation (likely early 2022)
- b. Mapping of A46 Corridor Housing and Employment Growth
- c. Gigafactory, Coventry Airport
- d. EV Charging and Power Generation Infrastructure
- e. Environment Agency and Climate Change Adaptation
- f. Jaguar Land Rover (JLR)

13. AOB

None.

Date of Next Meeting:

Cllr Cargill thanked attendees for attending the meeting.

8th June 2022, 10.30-12.30 (Microsoft Teams)