


Agenda Item No:	8	
Committee:	Cabinet	
Date:	19 May 2025	
Report Title:	Whittlesey Relief Road SOC	

Cover sheet:

1 Purpose / Summary

1.1 This report relates to the Whittlesey Relief Road Strategic Outline Business Case (SOC). Members are requested to:

- Acknowledge the completed Whittlesey Relief Road Strategic Outline Business Case (SOC) and its recommendations
- Agree next steps to source funding for the completion of further, more detailed work to continue the development of this project. The amount required is £220,000.

2 Key Issues

2.1 The SOC has set out a strong case for studying ways to address the current transport problems in Whittlesey and developed four shortlisted options to address these. The recommended scheme from the four shortlisted is the delivery of a relief road to the south of Whittlesey, Eastrea and Coates, with HGV rerouting and improvements to the active travel network within the town.

2.2 The SOC highlights current capacity issues at key junctions, high levels of traffic and lack of resilience on the network which is expected to worsen as more housing is created. Development in and around Whittlesey is strong and planning applications continue to come forward. Without intervention on the highway network this level of growth is unsustainable. Continued and increasing issues caused by congestion and HGV traffic in Whittlesey is expected to impact the potential for future growth. However, at present, there are no developments directly reliant on the delivery of this scheme.

2.3 The DfT's value for money framework is not just about the benefit-cost ratio, but the full range of impacts a scheme can have. Despite this, for a scheme to be considered for funding by the DfT, a positive BCR must be achieved. The current BCR for the Whittlesey Relief Road scheme in its current form shows poor value for money. This is due to the high cost to deliver this scale of intervention.

2.4 A wide range of positive impacts the Whittlesey Relief Road scheme will have for Whittlesey has been set out in the SOC. Key to this is the creation of a sense of place and community, protecting the historic market town and improving the health and wellbeing of its residents. To fully realise these in the benefit-cost ratio (BCR) and strengthen the value for money of the scheme additional work is needed to quantify and monetise these positive impacts.

- 2.5 The SOC recommends that further work should be undertaken to examine the following:
- Assess whether the scale and scope of the scheme can be reduced to lower costs.
 - Further appraise non-monetised benefits to seek means to include these in the BCR assessment.
 - Use the newly available traffic model to capture broader networkwide benefits.
 - Consider the schemes role in support of long-term strategic land use (linked to the emerging local plan).
- 2.6 This work is expected to cost £220,000 which is currently unfunded and is not part of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).
- 2.7 FDC is not expected to fund this additional work and therefore it is not included in the budget. The General Fund Budget Estimates and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) Report, agreed by Cabinet and Council in February, projects a financial shortfall for 2025/26 of £1.432m increasing year on year amounting to around £3.4m by 2027/28.
- 2.8 A way forward to source funding for the assessment work recommended the SOC is needed. Options for this include:
- Explore potential options for CPCA funding.
 - Third party funding – source undetermined.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 Members are requested to:
- Note the report and its recommendations.
 - Support in principle the proposal for further work to refine the scheme and assess further benefits.
 - Ask Officers to explore alternative potential approaches to source the £220,000 required to complete the work recommended in the Whittlesey Relief Road Strategic Outline Business Case (SOC).
 - Bring to the attention of the Planning Team the wording of paragraph 2.2 of this Agenda Report, requesting that Officers take this conclusion of the SOC into account as a material factor when determining future larger planning applications in Whittlesey, Eastea and Coates.

Wards Affected	All Whittlesey wards
Forward Plan Reference	KEY/09APR25/01

Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Seaton - Portfolio Holder for Social Mobility and Heritage
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Background Papers	<p>Whittlesey Relief Road SOC Final Report</p> <p>Whittlesey Relief Road SOC Final Report Appendix A to O</p> <p>Whittlesey Relief Road SOC Options Appraisal Report and Appendix A to E</p> <p>FDC Cabinet – 16 March 2023 https://moderngov.fenland.gov.uk/documents/s11850/Cabinet%20Paper%20March%202023%20-%20Whittlesey%20Relief%20Rd%20V2%206.2.2023%20updated%2002.03.23.pdf</p> <p>FDC Cabinet – 9 January 2022 Report and appendices.pdf (fenland.gov.uk)</p> <p>CPCA Board Meeting – 30 November 2022 353.pdf</p> <p>Whittlesey Town Council 2021 – Whittlesey Relief Road Inception Study Whittlesey Relief Road - Whittlesey Town Council</p>

Report:

1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 In January 2020, FDC Cabinet approved a series of economic masterplans under the title of Growing Fenland. This included a Growing Fenland Whittlesey masterplan setting out a series of projects aimed at improving this historic town. The need for a Whittlesey Southern Relief Road scheme is one element of this masterplan which featured highly in responses to the public consultation work that supported the strategy.
- 1.2 Later in 2020 Whittlesey Town Council commissioned the Whittlesey Relief Road Inception Study. The key findings of this study state that there is a sound strategic case with a few benefit areas and reasonable alignment with local plans and strategies. There is a reasonable prospect of value for money although this may be dependent on development. The report also noted some engineering challenges around flood risk and the railway level crossing. The consultants' overall conclusion is as follows:

“it is therefore concluded there is sufficient evidence to justify scheme progression, and it is recommended that the scheme proceeds to the next stage evaluation, namely, Strategic Outline Business Case.”

- 1.3 Further information about this study including a copy of the report can be found on the Town Council website as follows: [Whittlesey Relief Road - Whittlesey Town Council](#).
- 1.4 Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) are supporting the Growing Fenland masterplans financially through their Market Towns Programme. In November 2022, a market towns finance update paper was taken to CPCA Board. This included a proposal for reallocating £255,750 of funding towards a Whittlesey Southern Relief Road SOC. This was approved subject to a funding application from Fenland District Council in January 2023. The main factors for this CPCA decision being the inclusion of the Whittlesey Relief Road project in the Growing Fenland Masterplan for Whittlesey, the Whittlesey Town Council Relief Road Inception Study and its positive outcome, along with 80% of respondents calling for this study to be progressed as part of CPCA 2022-2023 budget review.

2 Whittlesey Relief Road SOC

- 2.1 In March 2023, FDC Cabinet confirmed the Member-led Project Board and terms of reference to deliver the governance for the Whittlesey Relief Road SOC project. The Project Board consisted of elected Members from Fenland District Council, Whittlesey Town Council and Cambridgeshire County Council, chaired by the FDC Portfolio Holder for Transport and Social Mobility.
- 2.2 FDC appointed Mott MacDonald, a specialist contractor, to complete the technical work for the project, including a Department for Transport compliant

Strategic Outline Case (SOC). The development of the SOC was managed by the FDC Senior Transport Officer and key decisions and project monitoring undertaken through regular Project Board meetings.

- 2.3 Work was undertaken from September 2023 to March 2025 to develop the SOC for a relief road for Whittlesey. This included a comprehensive review of the context, opportunities, issues and risks relating to a relief road and its role in relation to Whittlesey. This encompassed current and future scenarios and was set against the full range of transport issues within and around the town. An existing conditions report, baseline data review, case for change, traffic and transport surveys and a number of stakeholder workshops were delivered as part of this work.
- 2.4 Scheme objectives were identified for the project relating to four key themes. These are Sustainable Growth; Connectivity and Access to Opportunity; Health, Wellbeing and Sense of Community; and Environment. Each of which were given equal priority and weighting.
- 2.5 A long list of 35 options were identified through a Stakeholder Workshop held in May 2024. Attendees of the workshop included officers from FDC, CCC, CPCA and PCC along with representatives from Sustrans, Environment Agency, Stagecoach, Network Rail and Greater Anglia.
- 2.6 Other workshops were also held to engage with local businesses and social groups and to capture insights and feedback about the transport issues in Whittlesey and views on the longlist and shortlist of the options identified to address these issues.
- 2.7 Four shortlisted options were identified through a sifting process that identified which proposals performed best against scheme objectives. These were worked up into more detail and put to Public Consultation from 23 October to 22 November 2024. During this time, 2 face to face drop in events were held in Whittlesey and 1 online session to enable members of the public and stakeholders to engage with the project team and ask questions. Telephone and email contact details were also provided to enable people to get in touch directly and an online survey was available throughout the consultation period to capture responses. The online survey questions were provided in hard copy for those that needed them. These were sent by post or available to collect from Whittlesey Town Council offices where the consultation materials were on display.
- 2.8 In total, 310 responses were received through the online form, mostly from people who live or work in or around Whittlesey. The main age group of respondents was between 26 and 55 years, with only one respondent aged under 25. 75% were in paid employment or did voluntary work and 88% of those in work travelled to their place of work in a private car or van.
- 2.9 72% of respondents agreed with the scheme objectives and 23% neither agreed nor disagreed. Option 1 – a relief road with HGV routing was ranked the most popular of the 4 options with strong support also shown for Option 2 which included active travel improvements for Whittlesey. Some respondents explained that their reason for choosing Option 1 over Option 2 was that the scheme was likely to be expensive and therefore they were concerned that there would not be enough money to do a relief road and active travel

improvements. The least popular option was the (comparably) low-cost Option 4 – a mobility hub with active travel improvements. Option 3 – a relief road with HGV rerouting and bus priority measures received some support but concerns were raised that the bus improvements would have little effect and were therefore not worth including.

- 2.10 The overall results and feedback from the Public Consultation and stakeholder engagement were weighed against the outcome of the options appraisal for the four options to identify the preferred option to take forward. This concluded that the best performing option is Option 3 – a relief road with HGV rerouting and active travel improvements. This option reroutes traffic and HGVs away from the town centre and improves the centre itself, supporting non-motorised transport, encouraging physical activity and providing more overall benefit than the relief road on its own.
- 2.11 Additional technical work relating to network resilience was completed in early 2025 to support the SOC. This provided additional analysis around the impact of road closures such as the B1040 caused by flooding and issues relating to the lane reduction on The Causeway during 2024 and 2025.
- 2.12 The Whittlesey Relief Road SOC concluded the following:
- 2.13 That there is a need for investment in a Scheme that addresses the issues Whittlesey is experiencing in relation to traffic along the A605. That there is an opportunity to support the growth of the town and the development of the new Fenland Local Plan, in relation to housing and employment opportunities, by providing additional transport network capacity. That there is a need to build greater resilience to the road network to support the movement of people across the area, including during the high occurrence of road closures in the area due to flooding. That there is an opportunity to develop active travel improvements through the centre of Whittlesey to improve options for sustainable travel and aid in the sense of place for the town centre. That the best performing option to address the transport issues in Whittlesey is the delivery of a Relief Road with HGV re-routing and active travel improvements.
- 2.14 The SOC recommended that further work should be undertaken to examine the following:
- 2.15 Assess whether the scale of the scheme can be reduced to lower costs, such as by considering a shorter route for the relief road.
- 2.16 Use the newly available Cambridge and Peterborough Sub-regional Model to capture a broader network-wide assessment of the scheme's benefits and a more detailed assessment of its impact on network resilience.
- 2.17 Further appraise non-monetised benefits to identify opportunities to monetise them for inclusion in the Initial Benefit-Cost Ratio (BCR) assessment, thereby strengthening the final Value for Money position of the scheme.
- 2.18 Examine how the scheme could support long-term strategic land use and economic growth across the region. Consider the scheme's potential role in unlocking development opportunities along the wider A605 corridor, linking it to the emerging Fenland Local Plan. This could allow for any wider economic impacts of the scheme to be explicitly claimed and included in any Indicative BCR assessment, further strengthening the final Value for Money position.

- 2.19 The final SOC was completed in February 2025 and approved by the Project Board in March 2025. A peer review was undertaken by Steers as part of the CPCA assurance process. This supported the approach undertaken to complete the SOC and the overall level of benefit identified. It did raise concern over the poor BCR for the scheme and suggested the scale of the scheme as currently presented outweighs the issues it aims to address.
- 2.20 The next steps for the project requires funding for further assessment work. An approach to source the £220,000 is needed. Potential options for this are:
- Explore options for funding from CPCA. The Whittlesey Relief Road project was funded through the Growing Fenland/Market Towns fund and is not part of the CPCA MTFP. Therefore, no funding is currently allocated for future phases of work.
 - Seek options for third party funding. This could be in the form of developer contributions or other funding streams as they become available.

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The total cost for the Whittlesey Relief Road SOC was £277,783. This was funded by the original £260,000 Market Towns Fund plus some additional underspend from other Growing Fenland projects. This investment has delivered a SOC which makes a clear case for the need for traffic interventions in Whittlesey.
- 3.2 The best performing scheme to address the issues in Whittlesey has been identified as a southern relief road, HGV rerouting and active travel improvements. The cost of a scheme of this scale is significant and requires further work to understand the monetised value the wider benefits it may bring. The Benefit to Cost Ratio for the project is currently too low for the project to progress to Outline Business Case. The recommended assessment work would focus on addressing the gap between the benefits costed so far and the scale and cost of the proposed scheme with the aim of creating a stronger BCR.
- 3.3 To undertake the additional assessment, the scheme requires development funding of £220,000. Upon completion of this assessment, the scheme should be reviewed for further consideration, with the intention of seeking funding for the Outline Business Case.

4 CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Please refer to paragraphs 2.8, 2.9, 2.10 above which confirm public consultation in support of the scheme.

5 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1 A non-relief road option was included in the shortlisted options and the public consultation. This performed poorly against the scheme objectives,

particularly due to it not affecting the current routing of HGVs. This option was garnered the least support of all of the options.

- 5.2 The conclusion of the project highlights that transport interventions are needed for Whittlesey and that one single solution is unlikely to resolve all of the towns transport issues. This suggests a multi-mode, multi-faceted approach is needed. Part of the solution is therefore likely to include the Cambridgeshire County Council as the Local Highway Authority and CPCA as the Local Transport Authority programmes to develop transport proposals across all modes of transport; a new Transport Strategy for Fenland District covering all modes of transport; and walking and cycling proposals for Whittlesey included within the new district transport strategy, the Fenland Walking, Cycling and Mobility Aid Strategy and the County Council emerging Active Travel Strategy. Fenland District Council's work with CPCA and others to develop plans to significantly improve Whittlesey railway station will also be a significant factor.
- 5.3 A key component for any solution for transport issues in Whittlesey will need to continue to consider alternatives ways to address the key issues that need resolving. Alternative options must be considered to satisfy funding requirements and therefore they will continue to form part of this work.

6 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Legal Implications

- 6.2 There are no legal implications in relation to the recommendations set out in this report however, if funding is successfully secured, the appointment of a consultant to undertake the additional works will be made in compliance with the Council's Code of Procurement.

6.3 Financial Implications

- 6.4 As stated above, £220,000 is needed to continue the development of the case for a relief road for Whittlesey. This is currently unfunded and not part of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).
- 6.5 FDC is not expected to fund this additional work and it is not included within the budget. The General Fund Budget Estimates and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) Report, agreed by Cabinet and Council in February, projects a financial shortfall for 2025/26 of £1.432m increasing year on year amounting to around £3.4m by 2027/28.
- 6.6 Although there are currently many uncertainties regarding the budget for 2025/26 and the MTFS, there remains a significant structural deficit which the Council will need to address.
- 6.7 Any additional costs for items not already included in the budget will incur additional revenue costs of circa. £81k p.a. for every additional £1m required based on an assumed 30 year borrowing profile.

6.8 Equality Implications

- 6.9 Building a case for traffic interventions for Whittlesey is concerned with improving the economic and social performance of the town. Existing transport challenges in and around Whittlesey cause disruption and congestion. This project is one component of the transport strategy set out in the Growing Fenland report for Whittlesey which has a multi modal approach. Proposals for transport projects to assist all members of the community are being taken forward and considered as part of a wide range of policies and strategies.

APPENDIX 1 – Whittlesey Relief Road Study Project Board draft terms of reference

1. Background – What is the Whittlesey Relief Road Project SOC?

Introduction

FDC and our partners have been working on a project to consider a relief road for the Market Town of Whittlesey. Whittlesey is an historic market town with some narrow streets and important old buildings. There is also a major road (A605) through its centre and an industrial estate to the south. The town economy relies on significantly on road traffic with large vehicles needing to access all parts of the town. The railway level crossings around the town are in prominent locations and with increasing amounts of barrier downtime congestion on the local road network increases. The transport challenges in Whittlesey need to be addressed.

In 2020 Whittlesey Town Council commissioned the Whittlesey Relief Road Inception Study. The key findings of this study state that there is a sound strategic case with benefit areas and reasonable alignment with local plans and strategies. There is a reasonable prospect of value for money although this may be dependent on development. The report also noted some engineering challenges around flood risk and the railway level crossing.

The findings of the study are fully supported and FDC considered opportunities to secure funding for the next stage of work for a Whittlesey Relief Road.

Growing Fenland Whittlesey Masterplan

Following a successful pilot scheme undertaken in St Neots, the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) Board committed to provide funding to create a masterplan for growth for each market town within the CPCA area (as recorded in the actions from the CPCA Board meeting held on 28.03.18).

With the aim of bringing jobs, infrastructure and growth to the Fenland area, the masterplans also enable each town to become and remain "vibrant and thriving places" whilst helping to boost the local and regional economy.

A commitment of £50k was made by the CPCA to produce a masterplan for each town in Fenland. The master planning project was given a working title of 'Growing Fenland' which linked the proposed growth of the local economy to our important agricultural heritage. The Whittlesey Growing Fenland Masterplan, which includes a Whittlesey Relief Road was approved in early 2020 and can be found from the following weblink:

[Whittlesey Relief Road - Whittlesey Town Council](#)

Upon completion of the Masterplans, CPCA approved further funding to kick start the delivery and implementation of these Masterplans. In late 2022 as part of a CPCA Market Towns Programme review, an opportunity arose to review the proposals for Whittlesey projects. FDC submitted a successful application to CPCA for the Whittlesey Relief Road SOC project. This was approved at the CPCA Board meeting in November 2022 and is available to read as follows [CMIS > Meetings](#)

2. Whittlesey Relief Road SOC Project Board

Objective:

The Project Boards will provide oversight for the continued development and delivery of the Whittlesey Relief Road SOC and provide a forum for key issues to be considered and key decisions to be made. It is the vehicle by which the key strategic issues (including financial and legal) can be acknowledged, recorded, and monitored.

Responsibilities:

The remit of the Project Board relates to the design, delivery and implementation of the Whittlesey Relief Road SOC project. Responsibilities include but are not limited to the following:

- Approval of the Project Brief including its specific aims.
- The project programme from its inception to its conclusion
- Discuss and agree action regarding specific project constraints
- Review and approval of the procurement strategy
- To receive progress reports from the project team, review & confirm achievements at each major project milestone (or end of stage) and approve commencement of the next stage
- Provide direction and support to help resolve key project risks and issues
- To provide input and representation to the defined projects for their respective organisations
- To provide advice on local issues
- To provide their respective organisations' positions on all elements of the project
- To agree community engagement and public consultation strategy.
- Authorise project closure and send project closure notification

Membership:

The core membership of each of the project board will be as follows:

FDC Cabinet Member – Portfolio holder for Transport (Chairperson)

FDC Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance

FDC Cabinet Member – Portfolio holder for Planning

Whittlesey Town Council – two representatives

Cambridgeshire County Council as Local Highway Authority - 1 member

A vice-chairperson should be elected from the membership of the group at the first Project Board meeting. This vice-chairperson is expected to deputise for the Chairperson.

It should be noted that only members listed above, or their nominated substitutes will have voting powers.

It is envisaged that the project board may also make recommendations to Fenland District Council's Cabinet, which would in turn make recommendations to the CPCA Board, the ultimate decision-making body regarding funding.

Officer and Project Support Staff:

The Project Board will be supported by officers from Fenland District Council and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough (CPCA) Combined Authority. Additional officer support will be brought into meetings as required. E.g., communications officer or specialist consultant. The appointed consultants delivering the SOC will also attend all the Project Board meetings and help as required. It is also expected that other specialist staff may attend some meetings as necessary such as Network Rail and the lead local flood authority

team related to known challenges that will need to be overcome to deliver any project in the future.

Meetings

The Project Boards will meet or hold a meeting or conference call at least every 3 months and at other times as necessary and at key stages of the project.

Each party may substitute attendees on an occasional basis; however, substitutes should be briefed and empowered with the same authority as the usual attendee.

Communications

A Whittlesey Relief Road SOC Project Board Communications Strategy will also support the terms of reference document. This Strategy will set out protocols for communication in respect of the Whittlesey Relief Road SOC. Members have a role to adhere to the communications strategy to enable effective implementation of the programme. An initial draft of the strategy will be tabled at the first meeting of the Project Board for approval.