


<b>Agenda Item No:</b>	11	
<b>Committee:</b>	Cabinet	
<b>Date:</b>	15 December 2025	
<b>Report Title:</b>	Whittlesey Relief Road update and potential funding opportunities for the Strategic Outline Case recommendations	

### Cover sheet:

#### **Purpose / Summary**

1. This report relates to the Whittlesey Relief Road Strategic Outline Business Case (SOC) and possible opportunities to fund the recommendations from this 2025 study. Members are requested to:
  - Write to the CPCA under their budget consultation to request inclusion of the cost of the Whittlesey Relief Road SOC recommendations report in the CPCA 2026/2027 budget or, failing that, in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for the 2027/2028 budget.
  - Contact Whittlesey Town Council requesting that they consider offering financial support towards the cost of the report.
  - Consider inclusion within FDC's next budget or Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). For the provision of funds to cover or contribute towards the cost of the next Whittlesey Relief Road report, as a backstop position.

#### **Key Issues**

- 2.1 The 2025 SOC 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 was 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 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 recommended that further work should be undertaken at a cost of £220,000 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 Cambridgeshire and Peterborough 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 Since the SOC report was produced, further planning permissions have been sought for residential and commercial developments in and around Whittlesey off the A605, strengthening the case for the Whittlesey Relief Road.
- 2.7 At the November 2025 CPCA Board Meeting the Mayor expressed support for progressing Whittlesey Capital Transport schemes. At the same meeting the CPCA initiated a public consultation on their 2026/2027 budget, the consultation to close on January 12th, 2026.
- 2.8 Contact should be made with Whittlesey Town Council about possible funding for the report. Consideration should also be given at this FDC Cabinet meeting about the potential to cover or make a contribution towards the £220,000 funding to complete the recommendations.

### **3 Recommendations**

- 3.1 Members are requested to:
- Write to the CPCA under the budget consultation to request inclusion of the cost of the next Whittlesey Relief Road report in the CPCA 2026/2027 budget or, failing that, in the MTFS for 2027/2028.
  - Contact Whittlesey Town Council requesting that they consider offering financial support towards the cost of the report.
  - Consider inclusion within FDC's next budget or MTFS for the provision of funds to cover or contribute towards the cost of the next Whittlesey Relief Road report, as a backstop position.

Wards Affected	All Whittlesey wards
Forward Plan Reference	
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Boden – Leader of the Council Cllr Christy – Cabinet Member for Transport
Report Originator(s)	Wendy Otter (Transport Development Manager)
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Background Papers	<p>FDC Cabinet – May 2025 <a href="https://moderngov.fenland.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=136&amp;MId=3070&amp;Ver=4">https://moderngov.fenland.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=136&amp;MId=3070&amp;Ver=4</a></p> <p>Whittlesey Relief Road SOC Final Report <a href="https://moderngov.fenland.gov.uk/documents/s17117/Whittlesey%20Relief%20Road%20SOC%20FINAL.pdf">https://moderngov.fenland.gov.uk/documents/s17117/Whittlesey%20Relief%20Road%20SOC%20FINAL.pdf</a></p> <p>Whittlesey Relief Road SOC Final Report Appendix A to O <a href="https://moderngov.fenland.gov.uk/documents/s17118/Combined%20Appendices%20A%20to%20O.pdf">https://moderngov.fenland.gov.uk/documents/s17118/Combined%20Appendices%20A%20to%20O.pdf</a></p> <p>Whittlesey Relief Road SOC Options Appraisal Report and Appendix A to E <a href="https://moderngov.fenland.gov.uk/documents/s17119/Combined%20OAR%20Appendices%20A%20to%20E.pdf">https://moderngov.fenland.gov.uk/documents/s17119/Combined%20OAR%20Appendices%20A%20to%20E.pdf</a></p> <p>FDC Cabinet – 16 March 2023 <a href="https://moderngov.fenland.gov.uk/documents/s11850/Cabinet%20Paper%20March%202023%20-%20Whittlesey%20Relief%20Road%20V2%206.2.2023%20updated%2002.03.23.pdf">https://moderngov.fenland.gov.uk/documents/s11850/Cabinet%20Paper%20March%202023%20-%20Whittlesey%20Relief%20Road%20V2%206.2.2023%20updated%2002.03.23.pdf</a></p> <p>FDC Cabinet – 9 January 2022 <a href="https://moderngov.fenland.gov.uk/documents/s11850/Cabinet%20Paper%20January%202022%20-%20Whittlesey%20Relief%20Road%20V2%206.2.2023%20updated%2002.03.23.pdf">Report and appendices.pdf (fenland.gov.uk)</a></p> <p>CPCA Board Meeting – 30 November 2022 <a href="https://moderngov.fenland.gov.uk/documents/s11850/Cabinet%20Paper%20November%202022%20-%20Whittlesey%20Relief%20Road%20V2%206.2.2023%20updated%2002.03.23.pdf">353.pdf</a></p> <p>Whittlesey Town Council 2021 – Whittlesey Relief Road Inception Study <a href="https://moderngov.fenland.gov.uk/documents/s11850/Cabinet%20Paper%20November%202022%20-%20Whittlesey%20Relief%20Road%20V2%206.2.2023%20updated%2002.03.23.pdf">Whittlesey Relief Road - Whittlesey Town Council</a></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) supported 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.
- 1.5 Between March 2023 and March 2025, the Whittlesey Relief Road Strategic Outline Case was delivered. The work was overseen by a Project Board consisting of elected Members from Fenland District Council, Whittlesey Town Council and Cambridgeshire County Council and chaired by the then FDC Portfolio Holder for Transport and Social Mobility.

## **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 several 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 was 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:
- Assess whether the scale of the scheme can be reduced to lower costs, such as by considering a shorter route for the relief road.
  - 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.

- 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.
  - 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.
- 2.15 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.
- 2.16 The next steps for the project require funding for further assessment work. At the May 2025 meeting, FDC Cabinet requested that Officers explore options to secure the £220,000 third party funding. In November 2025 at the CPCA Board meeting, the mayor expressed support for Whittlesey capital transport projects. At the same meeting a public consultation was initiated on the 2026/2027 CPCA budget. Representations can be made to this consultation about priority projects for funding. There is also potential to ask Whittlesey Town Council to help fund the work and for FDC to also consider covering the costs or contributing as a back stop.

### **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. At its meeting in May 2025, Cabinet approved a recommendation that officers explore potential opportunities to secure the £220,000 funding needed to complete the recommendations in the SOC. Following the November CPCA Board meeting, where the Mayor expressed support for progressing Whittlesey

capital transport schemes, there is an opportunity via public consultation to influence the public consultation for their 2026/2027 budget and to consider other possible funding sources.

#### **4. CONSULTATION**

- 4.1 Please refer to paragraphs 2.8, 2.9, 2.10 above which confirm the public consultation in support of the scheme, that was part of the Whittlesea Relief Road SOC project.

#### **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 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 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 alternative 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 neither funded or part of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), although it is noted that the recommendation is for Members to write to the CPCA under the budget consultation to request



inclusion of the cost of the next Whittlesey South Relief Road report in the CPCA's 26/7 budget or, failing that, in the MTFS for 27/8.

- 6.5 FDC was not previously expected to fund this additional work and as such it is not currently 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. Members may wish to agree to include this within the FDC 26/27 budget as a back stop should the request to CPCA for funding not be forthcoming, particularly given the potential significance of the Relief Road development for the area.
- 6.6 Although there are currently many uncertainties regarding the budget for 2026/27 and the MTFS, there remains a significant structural deficit which the Council will need to address and therefore any additional budget considerations should be considered within this context.
- 6.7 **Equality Implications**
- 6.8 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.