

Environment, Development and Transport

Item No.

Report title:	Market Town Network Improvement Strategy
Date of meeting:	15 September 2017
Responsible Chief Officer:	Tom McCabe – Executive Director, Community and Environmental Services
Strategic impact	
This proposal will facilitate Norfolk's market towns' and larger villages' sustainable development through addressing the transport pressures of planned housing and employment growth by improving access to public transport and reducing congestion.	

Executive summary

Many of Norfolk's market towns have a considerable amount of planned housing and employment growth identified through Local Plans. In March, Members agreed to a programme of studies looking at the transport impacts of growth in market towns. This would allow the county council to identify and plan interventions ahead of the growth. Members agreed that a further report should be brought back to Committee to recommend the scope of the studies and a programme. Since March, officers have considered readily available evidence around transport and growth issues, had initial discussions with district councils and reviewed any ongoing work. This report proposes a scope of the studies for Members to agree together with a programme setting out which towns it is proposed to study over the next three years, including the current financial year 2017/18. Further reports can be brought back to committee as appropriate to report on progress and outcomes, and to roll forward the programme into future years.

The scope of the studies is set out in detail in Section 1.1. It is broadly proposed to cover:

1. Understand current transport problems and issues
2. Understand the future situation (growth proposals and their impacts on transport)
3. Develop implementation plan.

The evidence suggests eight priorities for market town studies as below. It is proposed that these form an initial programme.

- Dereham
- Long Stratton
- Thetford
- North Walsham
- Fakenham
- Diss
- Swaffham
- Downham Market.

Recommendations:

Members agree:

1. The scope of the market town studies as set out in Section 1.2
2. The top four and second four towns from the list at Section 1.3 to form the first two years of the programme.

1. Proposal

1.1. It is proposed to undertake the agreed programme of market town studies in accordance with the following scope; and that the towns listed in 1.3 form an initial programme.

1.2. Proposed scope of the studies

The proposed scope of the studies is:

1. Understand current transport problems and issues.

Through discussion with stakeholders – principally the town and district councils, local business organisations, any groups representing particular sectors (eg people with disabilities), local highways area office and transport providers (principally bus companies) – understand current issues of concern:

- Analyse road traffic casualties
- Consider parking: provision for town centre parking for business / retail needs (on and off-street); provision for residents
- Identify traffic issues: local congestion hotspots; inappropriate speeds; traffic on inappropriate streets
- Analyse public transport provision: access to the town from the surrounding area by public transport (bus and rail), quality of public transport infrastructure (stops, stations); need for bus priority
- Assess access to services and facilities including jobs, health, school or other training opportunities
- Map cycle networks and key pedestrian routes between major origins and destinations. Identify any major issues, eg lack of crossing points or direct routes
- Assess the use of intelligent transport systems and driver information systems to help manage the network and off-street parking, optimise public transport services, and provide data for inclusion in information systems
- Placemaking assessment to map planning, design and management of public spaces.

2. Understand the future situation:

- Understand growth proposals identified in the local plans, or other aspirations, eg in neighbourhood plans. Consider what these might produce in the 30-50 year ahead scenario
- Understand the impacts of these growth proposals on the local transport network, including to identify transport infrastructure requirements arising from the growth proposals (ie what is required to mitigate the impacts of the growth), as well as understand what transport infrastructure is required to help bring forward the growth or otherwise overcome either existing or likely future problems (ie what is not required to mitigate the impacts of the development). The first of these will typically be provided and funded by the developers. The second category would fall to local partners to deliver.
- Understand implications of future changes to the economy or transport provision, and the likely future role of the town, from evidence in, amongst other things, the New Anglia Integrated Transport Strategy and New Anglia Economic Strategy
- The work described above is likely to vary for each town. For some, traffic modelling will be required.

3. Develop implementation plan:
 - Identify appropriate interventions to address issues identified in 1 and 2 above
 - Estimate cost of interventions
 - Determine priorities and timescales for delivery
 - Identify potential funding sources and partners for delivery.

1.3. Suggested priorities for studies

The priorities outlined below are suggested on an analysis of the growth and transport issues; together with some understanding about what – if any – locally-led work is ongoing or being planned. An informal discussion has taken place with district councils, which has helped inform the initial programme. Looking at the issues across the market towns, with growth being the prime consideration, eight towns have been identified as priorities:

1. Dereham (large amount of growth, current traffic issues, locally-led work has already commenced)
2. Long Stratton (large amount of growth, ongoing discussions about a bypass, Area Action Plan identifies need for town centre measures; study would provide means to tackle the town centre issues)
3. Thetford (large amount of growth, growth deal funding being spent on opening up growth site (Thetford Enterprise Park); all ongoing but needing a study to bring together the wider town context)
4. North Walsham (growth and current traffic issues)
5. Fakenham (large amount of growth; issues about how this links to the town centre)
6. Diss (growth and current traffic issues, neighbourhood plan – across a large area – about to start)
7. Swaffham (ad-hoc growth coming forward, current issues especially around north-south traffic and air quality)
8. Downham Market (growth issues).

1.4. Programme

Given resources available (EDT in March agreed to £20k per study), it is suggested that these form an initial programme. Because of the extent and progress of work ongoing in Dereham a market town study there has in effect already started. It is suggested that this be one of the studies in the first year's (2017/18) programme.

Officers have written to the other seven towns to get a better understanding of any work underway locally, or if towns have an appetite to become involved in the studies. A verbal update will be reported to Committee.

2. Evidence

2.1. The evidence used to arrive at the proposals set out above comprised: size of settlement; growth plans; known transport issues; and current or planned study work being undertaken within the towns.

2.2. Size of settlement and growth plans

The evidence included existing population, population growth through to 2040, planned housing growth in local plans and other plans eg neighbourhood plans, and the existing numbers of commercial units and residential units.

This evidence shows the largest market towns to be Thetford, Dereham, Wymondham and North Walsham. These towns also have the largest number of commercial and residential units. Population projections to 2040 would suggest that they will continue to be the largest market towns.

In terms of growth, Downham Market has had the largest number of housing completions since 2001 (1,817), followed by Dereham, Thetford, and

Wymondham with 1,428 completions. These towns have had significantly more completions than anywhere else; the next highest being at Attleborough with 830.

Significant planned growth is included in local plans at a number of the market towns, with the most at (in order) Thetford, Attleborough, Wymondham, Downham Market, Dereham and Long Stratton. The neighbourhood plan at Dereham is also suggesting a significant scale of growth over and above that included in the current local plan.

2.3. Transport issues

Most, if not all, of the market towns experience transport issues including localised congestion and parking, access to the town from surrounding areas and local safety issues. Of particular note would be traffic congestion at hotspots including at the coastal towns or on market days / summer weekends. Chronic congestion is also experienced on a regular, routine basis in many towns including Dereham.

A small number of the towns have major A class routes running through them including Swaffham (A1065), Diss (A1066), Cromer (A149/A148) and Wroxham/Hoveton (A1151). Others including Watton and Dereham have B class routes running through the town centres. North Walsham is particularly affected by heavy goods vehicles in residential areas due to restrictions caused by low bridges.

Most of the towns have issues affecting people on foot in their central retail and business areas. Most of these areas remain open to traffic, either for parking facilities and/or through traffic. Facilities for cyclists are often not available.

2.4. Economy

The towns have varied economies. Some, such as North Walsham and Fakenham have traditional manufacturing backgrounds whilst others, such as Holt, have developed niche retail offers. The town centre vacancy rate of retail units varies from close to 10% vacant units at Dereham and Loddon through to less than 1% at Wells. The market town studies will need to take this into account and consider how transport might support successful market town economies.

2.5. Local engagement

District Councils were consulted informally through the Norfolk Spatial Planning Group regarding priorities for the studies. The district councils' views largely corroborated the findings of the county council's desktop review about the top priorities for studies. District councils have more recently been contacted more formally – via a letter to the chief executive – to request that they support the priorities, to understand what existing study work is being undertaken, and about whether they would be prepared to contribute to the county council's work. Each town council for the top eight priorities listed in 1.3 have also been written to in a similar vein.

2.6. Summary

A table-top examination of the evidence has been completed. It shows that market towns largely face similar issues around traffic, growth and the economy. However, it also suggests – relatively clearly – a number of towns where getting studies underway in the shorter term would be of most benefit. These are shown as the eight towns in Section 1.3, which also summarises the main supporting evidence for the proposal to progress an initial programme of studies for these towns.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1. Members agreed at March EDT committee to put £20k to each study, and to undertake three to four per year. A programme of four each year is proposed.
- 3.2. Officers are actively seeking additional match-funding for this work. A bid for Pooled Business Rates has been submitted for three studies, in Dereham, where the town council is commissioning work the county council has allocated some National Productivity Investment Fund money.
- 3.3. The scope of work for each study has been set out above. In the absence of any further funding the study will be completed for £20k, and will cover as much of the scope as is possible, to be agreed between the county council and representatives from the localities. Where additional money is secured it will enhance the work that can be delivered. The work will be undertaken through a mix of officer resource and outsourced work through our existing contractual arrangement with WSP.

4. Issues, risks and innovation

- 4.1. The market town studies will assist the county council's planning of services. Whilst the studies will focus on transport it will assist in other areas of service planning, most notably access to education and future school transport provision.

5. Background

- 5.1. This matter was first discussed at March EDT Committee where Members agreed to a programme of studies and requested that a report be brought back to agree study scope and priorities.

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper or want to see copies of any assessments, eg equality impact assessment, please get in touch with:

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If you need this report in large print, audio, braille, alternative format or in a different language please contact 0344 800 8020 or 0344 800 8011 (textphone) and we will do our best to help.

Appendix A: Market Towns in Norfolk

The following is a list of Norfolk market towns, as included in Norfolk County Council's Market Towns Report 2015, see:

<https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwiljer82-VAhVQOMAKHWx8C14QFggmMAA&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.norfolk.gov.uk%2F-%2Fmedia%2Fnorfolk%2Fdownloads%2Fwhat-we-do-and-how-we-work%2Fpolicy-performance-and-partnerships%2Fpolicies-and-strategies%2Fmonitoring-land-use%2Fmarket-towns-report-2015.pdf&usq=AFQjCNGWs9Sk8HZNt7pAeo-FXe73cehDfQ>

- Attleborough
- Aylsham
- Cromer
- Dereham
- Diss
- Downham Market
- Fakenham
- Harleston
- Holt
- Hunstanton
- Loddon
- Long Stratton
- North Walsham
- Sheringham
- Stalham
- Swaffham
- Thetford
- Watton
- Wells-Next-The-Sea
- Wroxham/Hoveton
- Wymondham