

Environment, Development and Transport committee

Item No.

Report title:	Market Town Transport Network Improvement Strategies
Date of meeting:	6 July 2018
Responsible Chief Officer:	Tom McCabe - Executive Director, Community and Environmental Services
Strategic impact This proposal will support the county council's vision for Norfolk. We will aim to put in the necessary infrastructure first to ensure that we build new communities where growth is being planned. The work 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. This proposal will support the Good Infrastructure objective in that it 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

<p>In September 2017, Members agreed to a programme of studies looking at the transport impacts of growth in market towns. This report provides an update on the initial programme of strategies. This report also asks Members to agree a programme for 2018/19.</p> <p>The scope of the current strategies, as agreed by Members, broadly covers:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Understand current transport problems and issues2. Understand the future situation (growth proposals and their impacts on transport)3. Develop implementation plan. <p>We are currently at stage two or three with all of the current work. It is proposed to bring a final version of the reports for Members to agree in November.</p> <p>A review of the evidence suggests five priorities for market town strategies for the 2018/19 programme, of which Members are asked to agree (in alphabetical order):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Aylsham• Downham Market• Fakenham• Wroxham/ Hoveton• Wymondham. <p>Recommendations:</p> <p>Members are asked to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Note the progress that has been made for the current market town Network Improvement Strategies in Dereham, Swaffham, North Walsham, Thetford and Diss.2. Agree a programme of market town Network Improvement Strategies looking at the transport impacts of growth in market towns and large villages in
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1. Proposal

1.1. Members agreed to undertake a programme of market town transport strategies. This report updates Members on the current year's programme and proposes towns for the second year's programme 2018/19.

1.2. Suggested priorities for strategies

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. Looking at the issues across the market towns, with growth being the prime consideration, the following market towns are suggested for the 2018/19 programme (in alphabetical order):

- Aylsham
- Downham Market
- Fakenham
- Wroxham/ Hoveton
- Wymondham.

2. Market Town Network Improvement Strategies 2017/18 update

2.1. This section deals with progress on the agreed programme of market town Network Improvement Strategies agreed in 2017/18.

2.2. Work on the studies to date has suggested a number of common interests across the towns leading to the identification of technical work to investigate issues including congestion, through traffic, cycling, and the impact on the transport network of future growth.

2.3. The focus of the work has been informed by an examination of the issues through stakeholder engagement. Officers met with a number of external stakeholders in each town including district, town and parish councils, sustrans, police, bus operators, business forums and Highways England. The transport issues raised, along with findings from other completed studies and reports, were considered to see where there were gaps in information around certain known issues. The proposed scope of the studies and the technical work was circulated to stakeholders for comment before the work commenced. In most cases, we are continuing to work with the stakeholders as we address the issues. It is proposed that a final draft of the studies be circulated to stakeholders for further comments before being reported to members for adoption in the autumn.

2.4. It is proposed that final draft versions of all strategies be brought back to EDT for adoption, with the first tranche in September 2018 and the remainder in November.

2.5. A summary of the work is set out below for each town.

2.6. Dereham

The main topics arising to date, identified through workshops and reviews of ongoing studies or current live issues, include: the possibility of longer-term growth within the town and its implications on the transport network; congestion; and cycle networks. A Neighbourhood Plan is being prepared which is considering longer-term growth. The Town Council has also completed study work including traffic surveys, which is being used to inform our study. The main area of congestion is around the A47 junction with Yaxham Road and Tavern

Lane. Highways England has agreed to build a traffic model of this junction to assess the issues and potentially find solutions.

Officers have commissioned technical work with our term consultants WSP. Studies on cycle corridors and parking signage is complete with future scenario testing (of implications of longer-term growth on the transport network) due mid-June. The cycle corridor study has identified improvements along the various corridor options and parking signage has suggested new entry/exit signs to redirect traffic from congested routes. The final Network Improvement Strategy is currently being drafted and due to be shared with the external stakeholder group for comment in July.

2.7. **Swaffham**

Priorities have been identified after internal and external stakeholder engagements. The main issues found include town centre congestion, volume of HGV traffic, high concentration level of air pollutants, lack of cycling facilities and illegal parking. One main area of concern is about the amount of through traffic, including HGVs, within the town although we do not have evidence about the relative amount of through traffic compared with traffic going to destinations within the town. There is an air quality management area declared within the town.

We are currently in the process of commissioning work with WSP, and also internally. This is likely to include assessment of the aforementioned issues as well as future growth scenarios. We are currently identifying the best form of surveys that would provide evidence about the volume of through traffic. Once we understand this, we will be able to identify how much of the remaining assessment work we will be able to commission given the available budgets.

2.8. **North Walsham**

External engagement utilised a series of meetings organised by the Town Council. Through these and internal discussions the key issues that have been identified relate to low bridges and consequent HGV routing, bus interchange, the town centre (potential for a more pedestrian-friendly environment) and signage.

Work has been commissioned to look at these issues, cycling and future scenarios for growth. One of the main issues is whether there is scope to lower the road under the rail bridge on the Cromer Road, thus increasing headroom for HGVs. We are undertaking a feasibility study to identify whether this might be practicable. If it is, further work will be required to fully establish its practicality, but lowering the road could make a dramatic improvement to the town by allowing HGVs to use the main road network instead of diversion routes through the town centre or residential areas.

2.9. **Thetford**

The areas identified within our review and workshops include congestion, connectivity to the main urban extensions in the north of the town, cycling (particularly to facilities on the edge of the town such as Thetford Forest), and a number of detailed traffic issues.

The further technical work is likely to look at congestion and connectivity to the 5,000 new dwellings planned for Thetford, cycling and walking and traffic issues in the south of the town including Nun's Bridges; a narrow route used by a number of large vehicles which sometimes get stuck causing congestion.

2.10. **Diss**

Originally EDT had identified Long Stratton in the current year's programme of studies. However, it was subsequently agreed that Diss would replace Long Stratton due to ongoing activity around transport in Long Stratton. Due to this, work has not progressed as far in Diss as in the other towns. Currently officers

are organising an external stakeholder engagement workshop. We have however commissioned surveys to assess the volumes of through traffic in order that these can be completed before the summer when traffic flows are unrepresentative. These have been commissioned jointly with work on the Greater Norwich Local Plan.

3. Proposed programme for 2018/19

3.1. This section deals with the proposed programme for 2018/19. It provides Members with the evidence and rationale for the programme for 2018/19 which is proposed to be (in alphabetical order):

- Aylsham
- Downham Market
- Fakenham
- Wroxham/ Hoveton
- Wymondham.

Members are being asked to agree these towns, which would be rolled out following completion of the current round of studies in the autumn.

3.2. 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. This is summarised below.

3.3. Size of settlement and growth plans

This evidence shows the largest market towns to be Thetford, Downham Market, 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 populations of the suggested priority market towns are:

- Aylsham: 6,388
- Downham Market: 10,726
- Fakenham: 7,725
- Wroxham/ Hoveton: 3,451
- Wymondham: 15,711.

3.4. 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. Chronic congestion is also experienced on a regular, routine basis in many towns. A number of the towns have major A or B class routes running through or near them. The main roads near the suggested priority market towns are:

- Aylsham: A140
- Downham Market: A10
- Fakenham: A148/A1065
- Wroxham/ Hoveton: A1151
- Wymondham: A11

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.

3.5. **Economy**

The towns have varied economies. The town centre vacancy rate of retail units varies from town to town. The market town studies will need to take this into account and consider how transport might support successful market town economies.

3.6. **Local engagement**

District Councils were consulted informally last year through the Norfolk Strategic 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.

3.7. **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 strategies underway in the shorter term would be of most benefit.

4. Financial implications

4.1. Members agreed at March 2017 EDT committee to put £20k to each of the strategies.

4.2. Officers have successfully sought additional match-funding for the current work including from other authorities and organisations and the Pooled Business Rates fund.

4.3. The current round of studies is being delivered within budget.

4.4. Looking to the proposed programme for 2018/19, it is suggested that Members agree to roll the existing programme forward; ie £100k for five studies commencing in the autumn (although see Section 5 for an alternative option that Members might like to consider). Funding for the studies will come from the funding invested in highways as agreed by Members in January 2018 when Members agreed the Highways Capital Programme and Transport Asset Management Plan. Officers would again explore the possibility to secure additional funding from external sources to support the work.

5. Issues, risks and innovation

5.1. The scope of work for each study was agreed by Members in 2017. At that time, it was made clear that each study would not address all points in the scope, but would look to address those of most relevance to each town.

5.2. Whilst in most cases this is working well, it is clear that a number of towns have issues and concerns around existing through traffic and congestion. Additionally, one of the main drivers for the studies is to consider the infrastructure requirements of longer term growth in and around the towns. These aspects require technical study work, usually in the form of traffic surveys and traffic modelling. For the current studies it is apparent that these elements of the work can each consume all of the budget. Given this, and that some other parts of the studies are also concluding that further work is required, the current round of studies will not provide resolution of all issues. On some topics the final studies will provide a narrative of the issues and the way forward, but this will flag up the need for further technical or study work to completely resolve.

Therefore, members are asked to consider whether they wish to consider alternate options (to rolling forward the programme and undertaking a further five studies in 2018/19) of:

- Using some or all of the budget proposed for 2018/19 to take forward some of the issues arising from the current round of studies
- Agreeing to a programme of fewer studies for 2018/19, which would allow

a more comprehensive approach.

If Members are minded to agree to one of these alternate approaches, a further report would be taken to EDT with a proposal for Members to agree.

6. Background

- 6.1. This matter was first discussed at March 2017 EDT Committee where Members agreed to a programme of studies and requested that a report be brought back to note progress and agree priorities. The report can be found on page 96 of the agenda for [March 2017 EDT Committee](#).

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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