

Norwich Western Link

Communications and Engagement Strategy April 2021

1. Project Overview and Context

- 1.1 The development of a Norwich Western Link, to connect Broadland Northway, formerly known as the Northern Distributor Road (NDR), from the A1067 to the A47 west of Norwich, is one of our top infrastructure priorities. Since construction began on Broadland Northway there have been sustained calls to fill in the 'missing link'.
- 1.2 Broadland Northway was fully opened to traffic in April 2018 and, since then, has brought significant travel and wider benefits to Norfolk. With Highways England's plan to dual the A47 trunk road between North Tuddenham and Easton, to the immediate south of the Norwich Western Link, and ongoing work to improve journeys in and around Norwich as part of the Transport for Norwich project, further considerable changes to the way people travel in the Greater Norwich area will occur over the next few years.
- 1.3 This combined with planned growth in the area, including the Food Enterprise Park at Easton, is predicted to lead to increased pressure on minor roads to the west of Norwich unless action is taken.
- 1.4 The Norwich Western Link would provide a higher standard route between the western end of Broadland Northway and the A47 and significantly improve travel between these two major roads. Traffic congestion, rat-running and delays to journeys are all significant issues on minor roads to the west of Norwich and there is strong support from the public, the business community, emergency services, local councils and MPs for a link road to be created.
- 1.5 The Norwich Western Link has the following project objectives, which were reviewed and updated in 2020 to align with emerging details being developed to support the Outline Business Case:

High-level objectives

- Support sustainable economic growth
- Improve the quality of life for local communities
- Promote an improved environment
- Improve strategic connectivity with the national road network

Specific objectives

- Improve connectivity and journey times on key routes in Greater Norwich
- Reduce the impacts of traffic on people and places within the western area of Greater Norwich
- Encourage and support walking, cycling and public transport use
- Improve safety on and near the road network, especially for pedestrians and cyclists
- Protect the natural and built environment, including the integrity of the River Wensum Special Area of Conservation
- Improve accessibility to key sites in Greater Norwich

- 1.6 In July 2019, we confirmed a preferred route for the Norwich Western Link - a new 3.8 mile dual carriageway road. Together with the dualling of the A47 between North

Tuddenham and Easton, due to get underway in early 2022, delivering Option C as the preferred route would create a fully dual carriageway orbital route around the city.

1.7 In May 2020, the Department for Transport (DfT) approved our Strategic Outline Business Case, meaning the project has conditional entry into DfT's 'Large Local Majors' funding programme and awarding us more than £1 million of development funding for the project in the 2020/21 financial year.

1.8 We aim to start construction of the Norwich Western Link in late 2023 and to open the road to traffic in late 2025.

2. Communications objectives and considerations

2.1 The communications objectives must support the project objectives and the effective delivery of the Norwich Western Link. Therefore, the communications objectives are to:

- Clearly and effectively communicate the benefits of and need for the Norwich Western Link, using evidence and independent advocacy to make the case.
- Provide reassurance and counter misinformation regarding the ecological and environmental impacts of the road.
- Ensure local residents, elected representatives, businesses and affected landowners are kept informed and given opportunities to ask questions and comment on the proposals (including but not limited to public consultations).
- Help raise the profile of, and obtain funding for, the project by securing and evidencing support from key stakeholders and providing compelling information to decisionmakers.
- Reduce or remove negative reputational impacts by anticipating likely criticisms, concerns and controversies and take mitigating action.
- Advise the project team around public perception and engagement approaches relating to the technical development of the project.
- Ensure there is clear connectivity with appropriate messaging and engagement relating to Transport for Norwich and Transforming Cities.

2.2 The COVID-19 pandemic will continue to impact on how communications and engagement work is carried out in 2021 and possibly beyond. Face-to-face briefings and events may not be permitted or advisable. Creative solutions to this challenge will continue to be sought wherever possible, for example through the use of technology and easy-to-digest materials, printed and electronic. Proposed activities will be kept under review and adjusted in line with current guidance and to minimise risks to the public and those representing the project.

2.3 The pandemic and its impacts may have other effects on the project which will require careful communications handling. The importance of transport infrastructure to the recovery of the economy, as stated by government ministers, has been accounted for in the key messages for the project and the communications strategy and approaches will be updated to reflect emerging information and national and local priorities.

2.4 Opposition to the project from organised groups, such as the Stop the Wensum Link campaign group and Extinction Rebellion, have been active and vociferous in their opposition to the Norwich Western Link (and all road building), publicly criticising and seeking to disrupt the decision-making process. This increased through 2020 and is likely to be maintained at the very least or increase further as progress is made on the project. As far as possible, the communications approach should seek to take account of

and minimise any adverse impacts of these actions in both proactive and reactive communications – this is accounted for in the communications objectives.

- 2.5 The likelihood of disruption to work on site, in the run-up to and especially during construction, is included in the risk register and communications handling and reputational advice to the site management team will be required.
- 2.6 Similarly, care will need to be taken around events, meetings and key milestones to anticipate likely criticisms and disruptions. Where possible, events and meetings should be held in secure venues and consideration to their advanced publicity given in order to minimise the likelihood of disruption.
- 2.7 Communications around cabinet meetings at which key decisions on the Norwich Western Link project are due to be taken will need to be carefully planned and managed. The stakeholder and engagement manager will be involved in the cabinet process early, reviewing and providing feedback on the report, preparing both proactive and reactive communications and organising briefings of spokespeople and external stakeholders. The stakeholder and engagement manager will also provide responses to written cabinet questions on the project from councillors and members of the public.
- 2.8 Regular meetings are held to review and update the project's risk register which are attended by the stakeholder and engagement manager. This allows advice around potential reputational risks to be provided to other members of the team and mitigating actions and comms approaches to be agreed at an early stage.
- 2.9 The volume of enquiries from all sources, whether the media, key stakeholders or members of the public, will be kept under review and raised in resourcing discussions as appropriate to try to avoid members of the project team being diverted from other key activities. More information on enquiries and the approach being taken by the NWL project team to handling them is given later in the communications strategy.
- 2.10 The Norwich Western Link is part of the council's wider approach to ensure suitable infrastructure and transport improvements are provided ahead of planned growth. The project will be included in the updated Transport for Norwich Strategy, which is due to be consulted on in 2021. Regular meetings are held with the comms and engagement leads with responsibility for specific transport infrastructure projects and highways and transport in general to share information and collaborate where appropriate. Opportunities for joint messaging and engagement are sought, in particular with the Transport for Norwich project as the two major projects designed to improve and transform travel in and around the city. Norwich Western Link activity is also updated on the central communications team's media grid and project planner.
- 2.11 With Highways England planning to begin its upgrade of the A47 between North Tuddenham and Easton in early 2023, planned communications about the projects will need to be shared and aligned to ensure consistency of messaging, reduce the potential for confusion and provide reassurance.

3. Key messages

- The Norwich Western Link would significantly improve travel between Broadland Northway and the A47 and is needed to tackle traffic problems on roads to the west of the city.
- There is strong support from the public, the business community, emergency services, local councils and MPs for a link road to be created.
- With significant jobs and population growth anticipated in the Greater Norwich area, the Norwich Western Link is part of a wider approach to ensure we have the transport infrastructure in place first so communities can grow successfully.
- Investing in infrastructure improvements will be a vital part of supporting Norfolk's economy to recover from the effects of the coronavirus pandemic, with the provision of good transport links critical to many of the county's major industries.
- As well as reducing journey times and congestion, the Norwich Western Link will enable economic growth, give local residents a better quality of life, support walking and cycling, and improve air quality in residential areas.
- We are absolutely committed to creating this road in an environmentally responsible way and seek opportunities to enhance the environment in the area by, for example, creating new habitats for wildlife and improving existing ones.

4. Key stakeholders

4.1 The Norwich Western Link project team maintains a database of stakeholders and shares information and updates with them as appropriate in order to keep people with an interest in the project informed. This database comprises:

- Norfolk county councillors, particularly the Leader and Deputy Leader, cabinet members, the Norwich Western Link member group and local members
- The Norwich Western Link Project Board
- The Norwich Western Link Local Liaison Group (made up of local parish council representatives)
- Parish council clerks
- Local MPs
- Relevant district councils, particularly chief executives and councillors
- Natural England and the Environment Agency
- The Norwich Western Link Ecology Liaison Group (made up of groups with an interest and expertise in wildlife and habitats and their preservation and management)
- Norfolk Chamber of Commerce
- New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership
- Highways England
- Department for Transport
- Transport East
- Businesses in the area to the west of Norwich
- Norwich Airport
- Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital
- Norfolk Police
- Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service
- East of England Ambulance Service
- Norwich Research Park
- Easton and Otley College
- Road Haulage Association

- Regional haulage companies
- Public transport providers
- The Food Enterprise Park at Easton
- Walking and cycling groups
- Local Access Forum
- Campaign groups

4.2 Media

Members of the local and regional media are also key stakeholders and they are communicated with via press releases, briefings and reactive enquiries and in accordance with the council's media protocols.

4.3 Landowners

Norfolk County Council has engaged NPS property consultants to be the primary liaison with affected landowners. For those affected by the preferred route, communication with these stakeholders will need to be clear about the announcement's implications for them, their rights and the next steps. NPS are experts in this field and will be able to advise on the County Council's legal obligations, for example regarding blight.

As the project progresses, more engagement will be needed with a greater number of landowners, including about environmental mitigation and biodiversity net gain proposals, gaining access for surveys via noticing and design details.

Communications advice and strategic oversight will be provided to other members of the team who are leading on these discussions. The communications lead will need to remain informed about liaison with landowners and any emerging issues as wider communications on this subject will be required, for example when land purchasing decisions are taken to the council's Cabinet.

4.4 Department for Transport

The Department for Transport (DfT) are expected to be the main funding contributor to the project through their Large Local Majors programme. The Norwich Western Link Project Manager and NCC Infrastructure Delivery Team Manager have a relationship with the Department for Transport (DfT) and meetings have already taken place about the council's plans for the scheme. Officers will continue to keep key contacts at DfT informed of significant developments with the project.

5. Communications methods

5.1 Clear, timely and easily accessible communications across a variety of channels and methods will be produced to ensure stakeholders are well-informed throughout the project. Low and no-cost channels will be utilised as a priority in order to minimise spending.

5.2 As well as 'broadcast' communication, it will be important to facilitate conversation about the project so that stakeholders have the opportunity to comment, query and air concerns, and provide feedback to Norfolk County Council and its contractor that may inform the management of the project. This includes, but is not limited to, public consultations.

5.3 Communication activity will be planned in advance to reflect the project timeline but equally there will be a need to react to any emerging queries, concerns or opportunities and provide updates and reassurance as necessary.

5.4 The main communications methods that will be used are:

- **Website** – the Norwich Western Link webpages on the Norfolk County Council website (www.norfolk.gov.uk/nwl) will remain the core information resource, serving both as a comprehensive reference library for background information and a source of the latest updates, utilising maps, visualisations, photos and videos. A frequently asked questions section will be maintained. All other communications will direct people to the friendly url for these webpages to find out more about the project. The webpages will be reviewed monthly and updated regularly to ensure up-to-date information is provided, with substantial updates planned to coincide with significant project milestones.
- **Email** – Updates about the project will be sent to a database of stakeholders. A project email address has been set-up and this will be promoted as the primary means to get in touch with the project team.
- **Social media** – updates will be posted on Norfolk County Council's Facebook and Twitter accounts, which are well-established and have strong followings.
- **Briefings** – meetings will be offered and arranged with key stakeholders as appropriate ahead of announcements and project milestones, and in response to any concerns being raised. In many instances, these briefings will also serve the purpose of encouraging the stakeholders to share the information via their own channels and advocate for the project. As the coronavirus pandemic and associated restrictions continue, it is likely that these will need to be carried out remotely, via phone or internet calls.
- **Local media** – good relationships have been built and will be maintained with local editors and reporters. Regular information and multimedia content will be provided to them via press releases, interview and photo opportunities, media briefings and site visits.
- **Events and meetings** – opportunities to attend relevant groups, events and council committees that grant access to multiple key stakeholders will be sought out, with the intention of providing updates and answering questions. Opportunities to speak to members of the project team during public consultations will also be offered. As the coronavirus pandemic and associated restrictions continue, alternatives to face-to-face events and meetings will be sought where appropriate, for example making use of video calling and presenting and providing written updates where this isn't possible (for example, due to digital exclusion).
- **E-newsletter** – As the project progresses and more detail is confirmed, an e-newsletter will be established to provide a trusted and regular source of information and project updates. This will commence when the contractor has been appointed and people will be encouraged to sign up to receive the newsletter by signing up via the county council website. As the e-newsletter becomes established, it is likely that the stakeholder database will be refined and fewer updates may be sent to this list to avoid information overload and duplication of work.

5.5 Proactive and regular engagement with some key stakeholder groups has been established via four liaison groups:

- **Member group** – a cross-party group of county councillors chaired by Cllr Stuart Clancy that meets bi-monthly to receive updates on the project and provides advice and insight to the project team.
- **Local liaison group** – a group comprising parish council representatives from a wide area to the west of Norwich. The group is chaired by Cllr Martin Wilby, the County

Council’s Cabinet Member for Highways and Infrastructure and meets bi-monthly to receive updates on the project, provide advice and insight to the project team. The intention is that representatives can then share information with their fellow parish councillors and the wider community.

- **Ecology liaison group** – a group comprising representatives from wildlife groups and organisations with an interest in the Norwich Western Link area. The group is chaired by Ian Ellis, the lead ecologist on the project, and meets around three times a year currently to receive updates on the project (with an emphasis on the ecological elements) and provide advice and support to the project team, most specifically in relation to mitigation measures and biodiversity net gain approaches.
- **Sustainable transport stakeholder group** – a group comprising representatives from organisations and groups with an interest in measures to support more sustainable forms of transport, including walking, cycling and public transport. The group is chaired by Paula Cuthbertson, who leads on the project’s sustainable transport strategy. The group meets to provide input and receive updates on the project’s sustainable transport measures. These meetings coincide with relevant project timings rather than being held at regular intervals.

5.6 As well as providing a means to keep these key stakeholders updated, it is intended that these groups will limit time and resource demands on the project team by reducing reactive enquiries and one-on-one briefings. Meetings with individual stakeholders and organisations will still be arranged as appropriate however.

5.7 During the coronavirus pandemic, meetings with these groups have been carried out remotely via Microsoft Teams. While this presents some challenges, it has generally been an effective means of continuing engagement with groups which otherwise, according to current restrictions, we would not be able to meet all together. In some instances, meetings with individuals, both remotely and in person, have been arranged due to the limitations of the Teams platform e.g. due to technical issues or a hearing disability.

5.8 A project board has also been established to oversee the delivery of the project. The membership comprises senior NCC officers and representatives from district councils, the New Anglia LEP and Highways England. Project team members, including the communications lead, attend board meetings to provide regular updates and agree key decisions. These meetings have also been held remotely via Microsoft Teams since April 2020.

5.9 Other methods such as NCC’s residents’ magazine, partner websites and newsletters, mail-outs, advertising and leaflets and posters will be used as appropriate throughout the project.

5.10 A breakdown of main communications methods by key audience is provided below. It is assumed that all key stakeholders will be referred to the website for further information as necessary. Technical meetings and discussion with some statutory bodies, including Highways England, Natural England and the Environment Agency, will be carried out by the project team as appropriate, but they will still be informed about key decisions and significant updates along with other stakeholders.

Key audience	Communications methods
Local residents	Email, social media, local media
Local businesses, including key supporters and Chamber of Commerce	Email, social media, local media, briefings, events

Landowners	Email, letters, briefings and meetings (with support from NPS)
Councillors (including the member group and local liaison group)	Email, briefings, events and meetings
Local MPs	Email, letters, briefings and meetings
Ecology liaison group	Email, meetings
Emergency services	Email, briefings
Public and third sector partners, representative organisations and statutory consultees	Email, briefings
Walking and cycling groups	Email, briefings, meetings
New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership	Emails, letters, briefings, meetings
Campaign groups	Email, briefings
DfT Ministers	Letters, briefings, invitations for site visits at key milestones.

6. Enquiries

6.1 A high number of enquiries from members of the public and key stakeholders has been taken to date by the project team and this is likely to continue throughout the life of the project. With many of the queries falling under the [Environmental Information Regulations 2004](#), the project team is in close liaison with the council's Freedom of Information team over its obligations to share information with the aim of being open and transparent about the data used to inform its decision-making but to do so in a reasonable and planned way.

6.2 Due to the volume of enquiries being received, the need for these to be managed in a considered and consistent way, and the complex and technical nature of many of the questions being asked, the project team has appointed a member of the team with specific responsibility to oversee and coordinate responses to enquiries. All enquiries will be logged and a Q&A database maintained to make responding more efficient and reduce risk of duplicating work or providing inconsistent or contradictory responses.

6.3 All responses will be sent to the communications lead for approval prior to them being returned and sensitive or high-profile responses will be approved by the project manager. All media enquiries will be managed by the communications lead.

7. Communications strategy development, approval and delivery

7.1 The communications strategy will be updated regularly by the NCC stakeholder and engagement manager to reflect changes to the project programme and emerging details. Approval for significant updates to the strategy will be sought from the Norwich Western Link board.

7.2 The stakeholder and engagement manager at NCC will lead on the delivery of the plan, including seeking approval for communications as appropriate. Members of the Norwich Western Link project team, the NCC communications team and senior councillors and officers at the council will also contribute to the plan's delivery.

8. Roles and Responsibilities

Senior Oversight - NCC	Tom McCabe
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	<p>Executive Director of Community and Environmental Services Chair of the Norwich Western Link Project Board</p> <p>Grahame Bygrave Assistant Director, Highways and Waste</p> <p>Final approval of high-profile/milestone communications</p>
Senior Responsible Officer - NCC	<p>David Allfrey, Major Projects Manager</p> <p>Approval of lower level communications</p>
Project Management - NCC	<p>Chris Fernandez, Project Manager</p> <p>Approval of lower level communications and responsible for factual accuracy of construction-related communications.</p>
Communications and Stakeholder Engagement - NCC	<p>Susie Lockwood Stakeholder and Engagement Manager</p> <p>Leads on the delivery of the communications strategy, creates and reviews key communications, management of relationships with key stakeholders, media relations lead, provides regular updates to the project board, supports the project team in planning for events/consultations, provides direct support for Members (particularly the Cabinet Member) and senior officers, and is a key point of contact with the NCC comms team and communications leads at partner organisations.</p>

9. Communications activity to date

9.1 Significant publicity and engagement have been carried out at the following key milestones for the project:

- May to July 2018 – Initial consultation on traffic issues to the west of Norwich
- November 2018 to January 2019 – Consultation on shortlist of options
- July 2019 – Preferred route recommendation and decision; regional prioritisation by Transport East
- May 2020 – Strategic Outline Business Case approval and conditional entry into Large Local Majors funding programme
- July to September 2020 – Local Access Consultation

10. Outcome of consultations

10.1 *Public consultation on transport issues (May to July 2018)*

10.2 This consultation had two elements – a text-based ‘Initial Views’ questionnaire and a complementary map on which people could highlight transport issues in specific locations.

10.3 The Initial View consultation received more than 1,700 responses while more than 750 comments from just over 530 contributors were 'pinned' to the consultation map.

10.4 The results show that the majority of people who took part in the consultation believe a new road linking the A47 to Broadland Northway (previously the Northern Distributor Road) would help tackle transport issues in the area. This option was selected more than three times as much as the next most popular option, 'Improving existing roads'.

10.5 People who took part in the consultation were also asked to identify which transport problems were a particular issue in the area to the west of Norwich. The top three issues people selected were:

- Roads not suitable for level of traffic (selected by 1,395 people)
- Rat-running (selected by 1,103 people)
- Slow journey times (selected by 1,001 people)

10.6 People were also asked which issues the County Council should consider when planning any transport improvements in the area. The top three issues people selected were:

- Reducing congestion (selected by 1,135 people)
- Reducing rat-running (selected by 1,115 people)
- Shortening journey times (selected by 1,026 people)

10.7 *Public consultation on shortlisted options (November 2018 to January 2019)*

10.8 More than 1,900 people responded to the options consultation, with 1,825 responding via the consultation survey available on the consultation website and 104 sending their responses by letter or email. The consultation website was viewed by 3,475 people and a total of 1,245 people came to 17 consultation events staffed by members of the Norwich Western Link project team.

10.9 There was strong support for creating the link road and 77% of respondents either agreed or mostly agreed when asked to what extent they agreed there was a need for a Norwich Western Link.

10.10 Of all the road options, Option D ranked as the most popular solution with Option C the second most popular. Option B was notably less popular and Option A the least popular of the road options. The 'do nothing' option received a similar amount of support as Option B and 'none of them, but something should be done' was the least popular choice overall.

10.11 *Local Access Consultation*

10.12 The Norwich Western Link Local Access Consultation ran for eight weeks between Monday 27 July and Sunday 20 September 2020. The consultation asked for people's views on how the council could best support people to walk, cycle and use public transport in the area to the west of Norwich, and for opinions on proposals for local roads that cross the planned Norwich Western Link, as well as for Public Rights of Way in the vicinity of the new road. The consultation brochure is provided in Appendix A to this report.

- 10.13 Nearly 440 responses were received with more people agreeing with the proposals for the local roads and Public Rights of Way than disagreeing. The exception to this was the responses to the two options presented for Ringland Lane, which were fairly evenly split between keeping the road open to all traffic and restricting it to non-motorised traffic only, with slightly more support for the option which severed the route for motorised traffic.
- 10.14 Of the eight potential sustainable transport measures across the wider area that were consulted on, seven received a similar level of support with only the measure to improve cycle parking at and access to the Airport Park and Ride site from Drayton receiving considerably less support.
- 10.15 Regarding the possible new Western Arc bus service the Norwich Western Link could help to enable, more than a third of respondents to the question selected Option A (a service to connect Thorpe Marriott to the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital and University of East Anglia via Taverham, Queen's Hills, Longwater and Bowthorpe) as the route they would be more likely to use, compared to Option B (a service to connect Thorpe Marriott to Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital and University of East Anglia via Drayton, Norwich Airport, Hellesdon and Earlham), which was selected by fewer than a fifth of respondents. Just under half of the respondents to the question said they would be likely to use neither service.

11. Key communications activity schedule

- 11.1 With construction due to start in late 2023, the communications activity schedule provides only high-level milestones for later stages of the project. As the project proceeds and more detail is known, the schedule will be updated.
- 11.2 This schedule is based on the project programme, which assumes statutory processes are completed as anticipated.

Dates	Project activity	Communications activity	Audience
May 2021	n/a	Contribute to wider briefing of new councillors on transport projects as appropriate	Councillors
June 2021	Cabinet report to seek permission to submit OBC and appoint contractor	Press release, briefings, email and news update, website and social media updates, reactive statements and Q&As prepared.	Everyone
June 2021	Contractor appointed	Press release, briefings, email and news update, website and social media updates,	Everyone
June 2021	Outline Business Case submission	Press release, briefings, email and news update,	Everyone

		website and social media update.	
Summer 2021	n/a	Provide advice and information as appropriate on Norwich Western Link-related aspects of Transport for Norwich Strategy public consultation and prepare relevant Q&As	Everyone
Summer/autumn 2021	Lobbying work to support Outline Business Case submission and maintain/gain support	Briefings, events and meetings, supported by targeted material (e.g. briefing notes, brochure and video/s)	Key stakeholders and decisionmakers
Summer/autumn 2021	n/a	Launch e-newsletter	Everyone
September 2021 (assumed)	DfT OBC approval / programme entry	Press release, briefings, email and news update, website and social media update.	Everyone
Autumn 2021	Pre-planning application public consultation	Pre-publicity, briefings, design work (brochure, leaflets, exhibition boards), press releases and media briefings, email and news updates, website and social media updates.	Everyone
Early 2022	Cabinet report seeking approval for planning application	Press release, email and news update, website and social media updates, briefings and meetings	Everyone
Early 2022	Planning application submission	Email to key stakeholders, website update (n.b. this is likely to be during the pre-election period for the NCC elections).	Everyone
Mid 2022	Determination of planning	Press release, briefings, email and news update,	Everyone

	decision (if not called in)	website and social media update.	
Late 2022	Public Inquiry	TBC	
Mid 2023	Full Business Case (FBC) submitted to DfT	TBC	
Late 2023	Start of works on site	Photo call with key stakeholders. Press release, email and news update. Update website and social media.	Everyone
Late 2025	Norwich Western Link open to the public	Official opening event and announcement. Press release, email and news update, update website and social media.	Everyone