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**From:** John Burr, Director of- Highways & Transportation

**To:** Thanet Joint Transportation Board

**Date:** 27 March 2014

**Subject:** **Poorhole Lane & Westwood Relief Strategy**

**Classification:** Unrestricted

**Summary:** Progress report on Poorhole Lane Improvement and the wider Westwood Strategy

**For Information**

## **Poorhole Lane Improvement**

### **Introduction**

At the 3 September 2013 meeting of this Board a report was given on the award of Department of Transport Pinch Point funding that would allow the Poorhole Lane component of the wider Westwood Strategy to proceed. This Report gives an update on scheme progress together with a broader overview on the development of the wider strategy. See Scheme Plan - Drawing No. 4300108/000/04 Rev 1 attached

The voluntary land negotiations have been successfully completed. The co-operation of the three landowners is gratefully acknowledged as without their support the Pinch Point funding may have been lost and the scheme unable to proceed in the short term. One land transfer has been formally completed and the remaining two are being actively progressed by solicitors.

Following submission of an environmental screening assessment, Kent County Council's Head of Planning Applications has given a Screening Opinion that a formal Environmental Impact Assessment is not required and that the scheme can proceed as Permitted Development. Thanet District Council has given consent for the removal of trees covered by Tree Preservation Orders.

Engineering surveys and the detailed design of the scheme has been completed.

Detailed discussion has been had with all utility companies and as anticipated in the earlier report, the diversion of their plant is going to be extensive although considerable effort is being made to minimise the work required.

## **Procurement**

A list of five contractors to tender for the scheme has been selected following an assessment of their suitability and experience and in accordance with European procurement legislation.

Construction tenders were invited in early March and are due to be returned in April.

## **Programme**

Site clearance of trees and scrub is currently underway. An advance contract was necessary in order to complete the bulk of the clearance before the start of the bird nesting season.

The construction tenders will be assessed in detail following their return. The aim will be to select a preferred contractor and award a construction contract in May. Following a period for the contractor to mobilise, a start of works in June is anticipated with completion in spring 2015. A firm completion date cannot be given at this time as much will depend on the contractor's view of the works and in particular the programming of utility diversions and the effects of any adverse winter weather.

## **Finance**

The estimated cost of the scheme is £3.86m. This is significantly above the initial estimate of £2.24m that was given in the Pinch Point bid. The primary reason for the increase is the estimated cost of utility diversions that has now been established following the detailed scheme design and utility companies consequently being able to give a detailed view of the required diversions.

The County Council has agreed to provide the financial support required to allow the scheme to proceed. This was a difficult decision but was judged against the risk of losing the Pinch Point funding that requires expenditure to be completed by March 2015, the potential risk to the continued availability of the S106 contributions and the considerable uncertainty on when a further opportunity would be available for delivering this fundamental component of the wider Strategy for creating a circular route around Westwood.

	£
Pinch Point funding	1.562m
Developer S106	0.680m
KCC	1.618m
	<hr/>
	3.860m

## **Public Information**

A Work Information notification was widely distributed prior to the start of the site clearance. Scheme Notice boards will be erected and a further notification will be given prior to the start of the construction works and measures will be put in place to ensure there is effective communication and liaison with local people, businesses and all road users throughout the roadworks construction period.

## **Westwood Strategy**

### **Introduction**

Kent County Council (KCC) and Thanet District Council (TDC) have been working together to improve the local economic condition by developing employment opportunities for Thanet's residents. The growth of Westwood Town Centre with the Westwood Cross Retail Development and Canterbury Christ Church University Campus, has helped the local economy and created a significant number of jobs for local people.

The success of these developments, however, has led to severe congestion at peak times during weekdays and Saturdays at the Westwood Roundabout as the intersection point of roads between Ramsgate, Broadstairs and Margate and at the heart of Westwood Town Centre. Thanet's two principle routes, the A254 and A256 converge at Westwood roundabout, creating a barrier to walking and cycling between different land parcels offering different retail outlets.

The Local Transport Plan for Kent 2011-2016 reports that Westwood Cross Roundabout has the highest number of crashes reported in Kent between 2007 and 2010 based on annual cluster reviews, with a "cluster" defined as six or more crashes within a 50m radius on roads with a 40mph or lower speed limit.

Improvements to the traffic flow through Westwood has been high on the agenda for several years and works have been carried out including the widening of existing roads and new roads approved from developer contributions to help disperse traffic more efficiently and improve journey times.

The Westwood Roundabout is significantly over capacity and this is leading to extremely long delays and unreliable journey times. As a result, traffic is experiencing severe delays on the A256 Westwood Road and the local community and businesses have raised considerable concerns about the impact of this severe congestion on their quality of life and business. In addition, the Thanet Loop (a well used circular bus service, operating in two directions every 7/8 minutes and linking the main Thanet settlements) has been severely disrupted with unreliable journey times and indeed one operator has withdrawn a route service.

KCC and TDC would like to see Westwood and Thanet continue to grow to increase employment opportunities and reduce the levels of deprivation. Despite improvements made to date, transport modelling of the area has demonstrated that future congestion and delay will be a stranglehold on the success of planned and future retail development.

KCC and TDC have developed a congestion relief strategy for the Westwood and Thanet area. The securing of Pinch Point Funding will enable the delivery of the Poorhole Lane and associated junctions scheme to be implemented by March 2015. This is considered as Phase 1 of the strategy and as reported above is currently progressing well.

The concept for the Westwood Relief Strategy is to provide a ring road around and through the retail area of Westwood and to relieve the convergence of traffic at the Westwood Roundabout. Most of the ring road is already in place or approved

comprising: the New Haine Road, the new link road through the Gleeson's site (between Haine Road and Nash Road), Star Lane and Poorhole Lane (after improvement works) and the proposed new Sainsbury's Link Road. The missing link is the connection between Margate Road and Westwood Road. One consideration would be to upgrade the Tesco internal link road to an adoptable highway standard and continue to maintain it as public highway. Tesco has given their initial support to the proposal and are willing to help take a scheme forward. Other options are also under consideration.

Developing a ring road around the Westwood area and subject to testing and KCC approval will give the opportunity to experiment with a closure of the Westwood roundabout to all traffic other than buses/taxis/cycles and pedestrians outside of peak hours, say between 10.00am and 4.00pm. This would effectively optimise the use of pedestrian desire lines between the different retail quadrants and offset the desire to "car park hop", thus reducing unnecessary extra trips around the retail area. It would reduce journey times for buses and enable better reliability, improve congestion and carbon emissions, optimise the economic benefit to the area and create a town centre environment.

Transport modelling has been carried out using the Thanet VISUM Model. The modelled network includes the necessary additional links to provide a complete network of routes around the Westwood Cross area with the central junction closed for general traffic.

By 2028, demand is expected to increase by 20% but model outputs suggests the revised network will operate at a lower level of saturation demonstrating that the proposed strategy more than accommodates the increase in demand. Queues will spread out across the network rather than focussing on one or two critical areas. Modelling was carried out with the permanent closure of the Westwood roundabout but the desired proposal is to keep the roundabout open during peak periods to better allow ease of movement when demand is at its highest.

### **Key Aspects**

Tesco's internal access road may be required. Discussions with landowners have indicated an in principle willingness to give the land to KCC by voluntary negotiation. This very welcome support for the scheme needs to be confirmed by the completion of negotiations on land values (Tesco contribution) and the formal transfer of the land to KCC.

The road is currently open to all traffic but its construction is unknown and the degree of improvement necessary to be of an adoptable standard will need further investigation.

It is not yet known whether the scheme requires planning permission or can be delivered as Permitted Development.

A detailed topographical survey needs to be commissioned together with associated environmental, drainage and geotechnical surveys to allow the detailed design to be developed.

Westwood Road is likely to be a key utility corridor and identifying the impacts of the proposed roundabout junction and any required diversions or protection measures will be important aspects of scheme cost and programme, as will the KCC Lane Rental Scheme.

Scheme cost, construction procurement and construction period are key factors in affordability and target end date delivery and these aspects will be considered in detail in the coming months as the design is progressed by KCC's consultant's Amey.

### **Finance**

KCC are undertaking initial feasibility work to get the scheme to a position whereby future funding opportunities can be taken full advantage of by having the scheme ready for implementation. KCC has included this proposal in the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) Strategic Economic Plan.

### **Recommendations**

### **FOR INFORMATION**

### **Background Documents**

Thanet VISUM Model - Draft Model Summary Report, November 2012

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