

Meeting between Highways England and Compton PC Local Plan Sub-Committee to discuss the A3 widening scheme in relation to Guildford's Local Plan (November 19, 2020) - Summary Notes of statements made by Patrick Blake

Attending:

Patrick Blake – Highways England (HE) Spatial Planning Manager for Area 3

Greg Stone – HE Route Manager for Area 3

Karen Stevens, Chairman, Compton PC Sub-Committee

Fiona Curtis, Compton PC Local Plan Sub-Committee

Patrick Blake explained the following:

- Highways England (HE) was tasked with identifying an A3 scheme that had the potential to be delivered in RIS 2. It was not a committed scheme and this was made clear throughout all HE's consultation responses to Guildford's Local Plan and in all its meetings with Guildford Borough Council (GBC).
- HE demonstrated only at a very high level that the widening scheme was viable, based on journey-time savings. If the government had wished to develop the scheme further and included it in a later RIS scheme, HE would have considered scheme options in more detail to understand whether widening offers value for money.
- GBC's Planning Officer should not have said at the Examination that there was an A3 scheme developed which met the value-for-money test and was deliverable. HE had not looked at all the factors that go into a proper value-for-money test.
- HE will continue to work with stakeholders through its route strategy process, and the A3 widening scheme could be included in a later Road Investment Strategy if HE still considers there is a need for it.
- The A3 widening through Guildford is not an easy solution: it may take 3, 4 or 5 years to construct and deliver, and during that time, there is a need for access and egress and to keep businesses operating. None of these things is easy and Guildford A3 widening is one of the more complicated options. Adding capacity (and demand) on the A3 could also create unintended problems on the local road network. HE would need to work with SCC to mitigate this.
- £325m was the most recent estimated cost for the A3 widening. The figure was a very broad-brush calculation based on the cost of closing sections of the road, the dwellings which would have to be compulsory purchased and some engineering factors. But typically any cost which is put forward at an early stage could easily be doubled as there are so many unknown factors.
- Guildford developed its Local Plan on the basis that the A3 widening scheme would be delivered. The Inspector fully understood this, and his report included the caveat that if the RIS scheme was not to be taken forward, GBC would review its Local Plan

from bottom up, and Guildford would be then tasked with reviewing the evidence base and transport situation to see whether the allocations could be delivered and what infrastructure was needed. (These may include some form of widening on the A3 or they may not.)

- The evidence base that supported the Local Plan was not strong. GBC acknowledged that the 29 years of growth outlined in the Local Plan would create a problem if the A3 was not widened. HE asked which development sites could and could not come forward in that period of time without the widening because this could not be determined from the evidence base. A compromise was reached whereby GBC carried out a further round of modelling to determine the level of development that could be delivered up until 2024 (the date when it was anticipated that the A3 widening might be delivered). Post 2024, it was not known what level of housing the network could cope with.
- During the Local Plan hearings, GBC said that if the A3 scheme did not go forward, the Blackwell Farm, Slyfield and Gosden Hill strategic sites would not be able to be delivered. This assertion was not contained in the Local Plan or any part of the evidence base. It is something that GBC stated verbally at the EIP hearing.
- If A3 widening was to come forward, HE and Surrey County Highways would likely need to consider the potential for a range of local road network packages. Guildford would unlikely realise the benefits of an A3 widening scheme without these. This will likely form part of the next transport review considerations by GBC and Surrey (in partnership with HE).
- Surrey County Highways developed the strategic model that supported the initial LP using the Simtram model. This was quite an old model. Surrey now has a much newer model, which will give more robust results – the model looks beyond Surrey and takes into account growth factors in other areas along the A3 (for example in Hampshire) and trips coming into Guildford from these areas.
- HE has had no engagement with GBC whatsoever since the hearings of the Local Plan. Whilst HE is aware that GBC will be shortly be considering if some further transport work is required, the Council has not engaged with HE on the matter. HE has also had no dialogue with Surrey County Highways regarding Guildford.
- Each individual site will eventually come forward as a planning application, and any transport assessment to support these applications would have to consider the impact of the site on the strategic network, as well as the cumulative impact of other developments. As a minimum, planning applications would need to demonstrate that they are deliverable and must also consider the cumulative impact of other committed developments.
- Any modelling that supports the Local Plan, or any individual planning application, would need to be reviewed by HE to make sure that it is an appropriate tool to demonstrate impact on the A3. Currently there is uncertainty around how robust traffic counts would be during COVID lockdown, and any counts undertaken would need to be treated with extreme caution. HE recommends that the Council use traffic counts from two or three years ago, as these may be more appropriate.
- HE will review any evidence base GBC brings forward to ensure that it uses an appropriate form of modelling to fully understand and demonstrate what the impacts on the A3 will be. If there's a lack of local road capacity to accommodate development, this could result in queuing back onto the A3, which would be a significant safety problem.

- HE has not been informed of any mitigation measures to enable development of the strategic sites in advance of the A3 widening going ahead. Clearly, there would be an impact on the A3 at some point as a result of this development and HE is keen to work with developers, GBC and Surrey County Highways to produce transport assessments to understand what that impact would be and what mitigation measures could be put in place.
- To date, HE has seen no evidence to demonstrate that the new link road between the A31 and Gill Avenue (part of the Blackwell Farm development) would alleviate traffic on the A3. HE would not be able to give a formal response to a planning application from the developers of Blackwell Farm until the impact from the development on the A3 was fully understood. For infrastructure of this type, HE would expect transport assessments to be informed by an appropriate modelling tool.
- As a Local Plan is developed any essential infrastructure required to deliver proposed allocations within the plan should be identified. It would need to be demonstrated that there was a reasonable prospect of delivery of the infrastructure that is relied upon, otherwise there is a risk the Local Plan would not be sound.

Actions - Patrick Blake to send information to Compton Parish Council Sub-Committee that HE had sent to the DfT in relation to the A3 widening.