

Submission to Cabinet Item 11

18th June 2020

Comments and Questions from Terri Eynon CC, Coalville North

COALVILLE TRANSPORT STRATEGY

Comments

As Local Member for Coalville North I welcome this intervention from the Local Highways Authority and am willing to overlook a tendency to rewrite the past as an understandable attempt to maintain a reasonable relationship with my local Planning Authority, NWLDC.

I am pleased to see that recent transport study work has evidenced the risk of 'severe residual cumulative highway impacts' in the Coalville area and has recognised that traffic congestion will remain likely even after the much-needed Major Road Network Scheme (MRN) gets its funding.

I especially welcome point 2(f) which makes it clear that this Authority may use this evidence to justify advising NWLDC to refuse development proposals on highways grounds.

The Strategy notes (para 46) that the 'Section 106 policy for the delivery of infrastructure in Coalville' (the Policy) was established by resolutions of NWLDC's Cabinet in 2013 and that (para 48) around £8m has been secured and a further £20m 'expected'. Clearly this has been nowhere near enough. I have supported this Authority's bid for £49M of Government funding from the MRN. I also welcome this Authority's admission that even if that funding arrives, it will not be enough to resolve all the problems caused by unsustainable development in and around my town.

A-level English students will note the strange syntax and agentless passive construction in paragraph 49. *'It was recognised that at the time of the Policy's adoption, it would unlikely be capable of funding the entirety of the transport infrastructure required to support growth in the area'*. An agentless passive is a neat way of hiding the identity of the persons doing the recognising. Labour's town centre District Councillors have long memories and remember that we were very exercised by this problem. We 'recognised' the time-bomb being created by a Planning Authority only too willing to follow the drive for growth of the then Government's new National Planning Policy Framework. We were concerned by the decision to deem the Bardon by-pass unnecessary, a decision rewritten in this document as being due to it being unlikely to be funded. When we raised

these points in both private and public settings, we were reassured by the then NWLDC Portfolio Holder for Planning and Infrastructure that it would be 'short term pain for long term gain'.

The reality has been short term 'gain' for NWLDC in the form of new homes, New Homes Bonus, planning fees and Council Tax receipts. We now see the future long term 'pain' of congested town centre streets and lorries grinding along the residential A511 Bardon Road.

The future of our town centre is currently being debated as part of a 'Future High Streets Fund' and it is disappointing to see the state of the A511 corridor setting limits to local ambition. More social homes in the town centre are needed. So is the long-promised redevelopment of the Belvoir Centre. More traffic along Belvoir Road and High Street most certainly isn't needed. I would personally like to see the pedestrianisation of a short section of High Street, from Holmes Butchers to the Library, allowing people, post-Covid19, to sit outside Coalville's delightful town centre restaurants, encouraging drivers to park in the town centre and diverting through traffic back onto the A511. I am being told that, even with the MRN, the A511 cannot support the extra traffic a minor town centre improvement would load onto this already congested route.

I appreciate that (para 28) the A511 Growth Corridor MRN was 'never meant to – or ever likely to – deliver all of the measures required along the A511 corridor to deal with growth in Coalville'. I am pleased to see, at last, a strategy that is driven not just by the political imperative of 'growth' but one that will provide a 'coherent, justified and evidenced transport strategy'.

As Local Member, I hope this strategy will make it clear to the Government that, however cash-strapped they may feel after Covid19, short-changing this Authority on MRN funding would be a false economy and that further investment in transport infrastructure in North West Leicestershire, including the reopening of the National Forest/Ivanhoe Line, will be of economic benefit not just to residents in my division but to the East Midlands as a whole.

From a more parochial perspective, I am pleased to see the Highways Authority showing it has teeth and look forward to NWLDC, as Planning Authority, using this strategy as evidence to resist unsustainable development. I also look forward to seeing detailed proposals come forward, from both authorities, to address the congestion in Coalville's town-centre streets and evidence further bids for national funding.

With these comments in mind I would like to suggest that Cabinet members consider the following questions:

Questions

Responses of the Director of Environment and Transport have been provided (in italics) below.

1. How high is the risk that the Government will cut the expected funding from the Major Road Network Scheme?

A: We continue to proceed with work to develop the scheme and the Final Business Case, albeit with some impacts resulting from Covid19. The scheme offers strong benefits and was the only East Midlands MRN scheme to be taken forward initially by Midlands Connect/Department for Transport. We have received no indication from either body that funding for the project will be 'cut', but as the Cabinet report highlights there is a potential risk that the total value of MRN projects across the country could ultimately exceed the level of funding available. Whilst it is not possible to quantify the level of risk, it should also be considered that other MRN schemes' timetables might slip or that projects originally put forward might be 'dropped', as could be the case for the Hereford Bypass. Additionally, Government is indicating that infrastructure investment will play a major role in the UK's economic recovery.

Notwithstanding the above, in the event that no MRN funding were to be available in this first round, then other funding options include:

- *Continuing to secure develop contributions, underpinned by the latest evidence work and policies of the adopted North West Leicestershire Local Plan;*
- *Pursing future Government bidding opportunities that might arise, including potentially MRN round 2.*

In practice, such an approach would likely result in the eventual delivery of the MRN project, albeit in a piecemeal fashion and over a longer timescale.

2. What is the risk to the Leicestershire economy if the MRN funding were to be cut?

A: As the Cabinet report sets out, without investment in the corridor the traffic impacts of growth are likely to be 'severe'. Notwithstanding the response to Q1, if no funding were to be available from any source (which is extremely unlikely), it is potentially possible that growth could be delivered elsewhere in the district instead, such as the potential for an earlier move to the delivery of growth in the Strategic Growth Plan Leicestershire International Gateway. However, such matters would be for North West Leicestershire District Council to consider as the Local Planning Authority and Development Plan making Authority.

3. What role will there be for the National Forest Line in resolving traffic problems along the A511 corridor?

A: Supported by a £10,000 contribution by the County Council and ongoing assistance from officers, the Campaign for the Reopening of The Ivanhoe Line (CRIL) will be undertaking work to revisit the Business Case for the line's reopening to passenger traffic. As set out in the Cabinet report, the Strategy will take into consideration the outcomes of CRIL's work when it is completed. However, short to medium term investment in highway measures to unlock growth has the potential to bolster the case by helping to generating potentially high levels of future passenger demand.

4. How will this Strategy meet our obligations to the Climate Change agenda?

A: By improving the flow of traffic along the corridor, this should help to reduce vehicular pollution impacts. The A511/A50 corridor is also an important passenger transport link between settlements in the north west of Leicestershire and Leicester; reduced congestion will bring journey time reliability benefits, improving the attractiveness of services and encouraging new passengers who might otherwise have travelled by car. In addition, the scheme will look to build on the considerable investment already made in Coalville and the A511 to improve walking and cycling routes in the past 10 years.

5. How might Highways propose to address the congestion through Coalville town centre?

A: The County Council is working with NWLDC on its Future High Street Fund bid which aims to reduce traffic levels in the town centre by enhancing the public realm to promote walking and cycling supported by a parking strategy.

6. What role will there be for District Councillors and members of community groups interested in the regeneration of Coalville in shaping these plans?

A: In working jointly with NWLDC to prepare a Coalville Transport Strategy document, consideration will be given as to how other parties might be involved. Where specific projects are being taken forward, the County Council will follow its normal processes for undertaking 'public' consultations, as has been the case with the MRN scheme.

Dr Terri Eynon