

## **REQUEST FOR FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR A CHRISTCHURCH RELIEF ROAD**

### **1. The Purpose of this Report**

- 1.1 This report has been prepared for Officers at Christchurch Borough Council as:
- a) A Policy lead for them to take forward to Dorset County Council as the local Highways Authority and/or any other appropriate Highways Authority/Agency, to request a Feasibility Study be carried out into the provision of a Christchurch Relief Road
  - b) A vehicle to enable them to apply to the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) for funding to carry out that Feasibility Study
- 1.2 It is requested that Officers carry out research and add/include any supporting information and data which they consider necessary, in order to produce a robust report for the above purposes noted at paragraph 1.1.

### **2. Background**

- 2.1 The need and vision for a Relief Road was recognised in 1993 when public consultation took place on 4 options – 2 inner, and 2 outer routes. Route details attached.
- 2.2 The Draft Christchurch Local Plan 1995 noted preferences for the “red” outer route and “blue” inner route. Draft Policy T6 was included to protect those route corridors with a proposal for preparation of an environmental statement.
- 2.3 Both the South East Dorset Structure Plan and Deposit Dorset County Structure Plan included a Christchurch Relief Road Policy, but at Modifications stage the Authorities decided to delete the scheme from the Structure Plan. This retrograde decision was reflected in the Christchurch Local Plan adopted March 2001.
- 2.4 The alternative strategy was a “package approach” of multi modal transport to include buses, cycling and walking. Now, in 2015, Christchurch Borough Council Members have serious concerns as to the effects of introducing such a policy, as traffic congestion has increased significantly, reflecting the failure of this strategy.
- 2.5 The 2010 Christchurch and East Dorset Core Strategy Options document included an aspiration for a Christchurch Relief Road but no actual route. Consultation responses from conservation bodies requested removal of that aspiration.
- 2.6 In October 2011 Dorset County Council considered the current status of a proposed Relief Road. It was said to be undeliverable within their Local Transport Plan period 2011 to 2026, due to many reasons including cost. Christchurch Borough Council considered that insufficient due diligence had been undertaken. Alternatives were again said to be “sustainable options” such as buses, cycling and walking. Such policies had already proved to be unsuccessful in reducing traffic congestion.
- 2.7 After insistence from Christchurch Borough Council a clause was ultimately included in the 2014 adopted Christchurch local plan which states – *“In Christchurch, development will be focused on the existing public transport corridors on the A35 and A337 and better links will be made to Christchurch and Hinton Admiral Stations, with the urban extension also linked to the transport network. Christchurch Borough Council will continue to press for the development of options for long term solutions to the town’s traffic problems beyond the plan period, including the possible future*

*provision of a by-pass, subject to any options proposed at the time meeting the necessary local and national policy requirements.”*

### **3. Future Growth in Christchurch and Need for a Relief Road**

- 3.1 Since identifying the need for a Relief Road in 1993, “through” traffic using all the main approach roads to Christchurch Town Centre has increased dramatically. A Feasibility Study could compare previous and more recent traffic count surveys. Surveys have been carried out periodically by Dorset County Council on all “through” roads surrounding Christchurch Town Centre, the most recent being in June 2015.
- 3.2 The huge increase in “through” traffic whose occupants do not visit the town centre retail/other facilities, impedes and discourages those who do actually want to come into the town centre as they are faced with traffic queues. “Through” traffic does not make any contribution to local business or retail outlets, therefore town centre economic viability is being hampered by traffic congestion.
- 3.3 In December 2013 Christchurch and East Dorset Councils worked with Hardisty Jones Associates (HJA)<sup>1</sup> to develop an evidence base, to properly understand the challenges and opportunities facing the local area. A framework for a Growth Plan was developed, including targets for future economic growth
- 3.4 The HJA report said “The economy of the area is centred on the service sector with more than half of all firms falling into two broad categories – distribution, hotels and restaurants, and banking finance and insurance. There is a relatively high proportion of manufacturing firms within both districts. Tourism is a key part of the local economy...”
- 3.5 It has been noted in the HJA Report that:
- a) GVA (Gross Value Added) per job filled, is forecast to rise strongly in Christchurch above the rate for the UK
  - b) Road traffic congestion has been identified as an issue that needs to be addressed
  - c) There are significant concerns about the poor strategic connectivity of Christchurch and East Dorset, especially as the area is served by Bournemouth Airport and the Port of Poole, but barely has adequate road and rail links
  - d) The concerns about strategic accessibility to Christchurch represents a threat to the future growth and economic competitiveness of the area
  - e) Strategic aspirations for future growth include improving public transport and the road network, as the private car is more important than any other means of transport, and many of the drivers of productivity will be affected by the lack of strategic connectivity of the area
- 3.6 The adopted Christchurch Local Plan 2014, paragraph 6.10 identifies that over the plan period 2013-2028 *“In Christchurch there is the capacity to build approximately 2,250 new homes in the urban area and 995 in the Christchurch new neighbourhoods”*. The 2 new neighbourhoods being at Roeshot and Burton. New, much needed housing will generate additional traffic.
- 3.7 The Christchurch Local Plan, paragraph 16.1, also identifies that *“Christchurch faces significant challenges in stimulating local business growth, inward investment, and facilitating sustainable development of the tourist industry”*. To face that challenge, 60 hectares of strategic employment land is identified for development on the Bournemouth Airport Northern Business Park, together with a range of other high

quality sites across the Borough. The aspiration for Christchurch is 10,000 extra jobs at the Airport site and 16,000 for the whole of Dorset. These new employment opportunities will bring forward with them, all the implications of more traffic in the Christchurch area.

- 3.8 In addition, Tourism in Christchurch currently contributes around £111 million per annum to the local economy, with predicted future growth. Most tourists arrive by car.
- 3.9 Mineral extraction, planned at Roeshot by both Hampshire and Dorset County Councils in the next 10-15 years, will have a further negative affect on the existing highway infrastructure by increasing traffic congestion. Hampshire's traffic assessment identified 100 HGV trips per day (50 in and 50 out) from their site. Dorset County's traffic movement estimation for their Roeshot site, is between 120 (60 in and 60 out) and 160 (80 in and 80 out) per day. All of this traffic will use the A35 with the majority leaving Fountain Roundabout via Barrack Road or Fairmile to access other strategic routes out of Christchurch, such as the A338.
- 3.10 Nationally the trend for use of cars, vans and lorries continues to rise. A Department of Transport Report<sup>2</sup> notes "a stronger economy often results in more traffic on the roads", and the latest figures (August 2015) reveal a 2.3% rise in vehicular traffic compared with the same period last year which tops the previous peak in 2007. Data showed the rise was linked to the growth in Britain's GDP (Gross Domestic Product).
- 3.11 For the future of Christchurch, and noted in the HJA Report – "further development of employment sites will be needed, as an additional 11,600 jobs would be required to bring Dorset into line with the national average. Higher value companies could be encouraged to locate to higher quality sites, such as Bournemouth Airport, however sites must be attractive to inward development with strategic accessibility". However, as noted at paragraph 3.7 above, Christchurch and this area is actually assessed to be creating 16,000 jobs from the Airport site, which will be higher than the national average. More employment will mean more traffic.
- 3.12 The HJA Report states that "the highest level of future growth in population in Christchurch is in those aged 0 to 15 years". This gives a clear indication of the population aspect for the future, the demographic of Christchurch is changing. A growth in population will mean a growth in traffic.
- 3.13 Christchurch is a growing, vibrant community, with an adopted Local Plan identifying housing and economic growth which will in turn cause an increase in vehicles on Christchurch roads.
- 3.14 Multi modal transport has not solved traffic congestion since 1993 when the problem was identified, and alone, will clearly not solve future congestion in Christchurch.
- 3.15 Christchurch requires highway infrastructure in the form of a strategic Relief Road, to ensure adopted Local Plan policies can be implemented.

#### **4. Benefits to Community, Economy and Environment**

- 4.1 A Christchurch Relief Road would ensure a more sustainable, more effective and safer transport system in accordance with integrated transport principles by –
- safeguarding and promoting the future planned economic growth and the well-being of the area
  - improving and enhancing the environment

- improving access so that amenities may be better enjoyed by all
- improving the quality of life for those living adjacent to existing traffic congested roads

4.2 There are many national, regional and local policies which will apply to construction of a Relief Road, however, sustainability is a theme which runs through many of them. Without planning for a Relief Road, Christchurch will become an unsustainable town in the future.

4.3 Residents, current and future, must be able to easily access a vibrant Town Centre

4.4 Employees, current and future, must be easily able to access their employment

4.5 Tourists must be able to easily reach Christchurch as their holiday destination

4.6 Through traffic should be able to travel “through” without hampering the viability of the town

4.7 Free flowing traffic will ensure good air quality and minimal air pollution

4.8 The quality of lives of residents living on the currently congested routes will be significantly enhanced

4.9 Facilitation of travel by cycle and on foot can be enhanced, and will become a safer and more pleasurable experience if “through” traffic is reduced

## 5. Conclusion

5.1 The amount of vehicles predicted to use Christchurch “through” roads by the end of the Local Plan period (2028) is unsustainable with the current highway infrastructure. Future planned economic growth will be impeded if no action is taken. This must be addressed by the long term solution of planning for a Christchurch Relief Road now.

5.2 A Feasibility Study should be instigated urgently.

5.3 This report should be used by Officers at Christchurch Borough Council as:

- c) A Policy lead for them to take forward to Dorset County Council as the local Highways Authority and/or any other appropriate Highways Authority/Agency, to request a Feasibility Study be carried out into the provision of a Christchurch Relief Road
- d) A vehicle to enable them to apply to the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) for funding to carry out that Feasibility Study

5.4 It is requested that Officers carry out research and add/include any supporting information and data which they consider necessary, in order to produce a robust report for the purposes noted at 5.3.

### Report prepared by:

Cllr. Margaret Phipps, Environment Portfolio Holder, CBC

In consultation with The Leader and other Portfolio Holders

August 2015

<sup>1</sup> Hardisty Jones Associates Report, December 3013

<sup>2</sup> Department of Transport Report, August 2015