

Highways Committee

4 July 2013



Proposed Signalisation of Northlands Roundabout, Chester le Street, County Durham

Report of Ian Thompson, Corporate Director of Regeneration and Economic Development

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To consider objections received in relation to the proposed junction improvement at the A693/A167 Northlands Junction, Chester le Street, County Durham.
- 1.2 Having considered the objections, the Committee are recommended to endorse the proposal to introduce a signal controlled junction at the above location.

2. Background to project

- 2.1 The project has origins within the Economic / Transport Corridors programme and the Transit 15 Programme of interventions as set out in the Local Transport Plan 3. The proposed junction improvement would serve to manage traffic flow at Northlands Roundabout. The scheme has been developed in response to the following factors:
 - Requests for the introduction of formal pedestrian crossing facilities at the junction;
 - Concerns regarding a lack of facilities for cyclists particularly between Chester-le-Street and Birtley.
 - Delays to buses (north/south) at peak times due to high volumes of traffic (east/west);
 - Delays to all traffic at peak times; and
 - Concern at A693 Blind Lane traffic queues reaching back to the A1 (M) junction 63 roundabout in the PM peak.
- 2.2 Although the concerns relating to traffic flow have been debated over the past 5 years, request to improve facilities for pedestrians have been ongoing since at least 2005.
- 2.3 Currently the A693 carries an average of 15,000 vehicles per day, which has remained relatively constant over the past 8 years. The accident history of the junction is that there have been 14 accidents in the past 5 years resulting in 16 casualties of which 1 was a cyclist and 2 were pedestrians.

3. Proposal

- 3.1 The project consists of a traffic signal based junction improvement to the A693/A167 Northlands junction situated to the north of Chester le Street, County Durham. The scheme involves the introduction of traffic signals with pedestrian and cycle crossing facilities to Northlands Roundabout.
- 3.2 The proposal involves the reconfiguration of the Park Road North Entrance to Northlands Roundabout, making use of an area of highway land to the south of the roundabout, to introduce a crossover priority junction. This enables Northlands Roundabout to be improved as a four arm compact signalled roundabout. In order to provide for sufficient vehicle stacking space at traffic lights within the junction, the triangular splitter islands have been amended in scale and location.
- 3.3 In order to provide a traffic signal layout with sufficient capacity to deal with the volume of traffic, it is proposed that the carriageway is to be widened to provide additional lanes on the A693 Blind Lane and A167 North Road approaches to and exits from the junction
- 3.4 The proposals can be viewed at Appendix 2.

4. Consultation

- 4.1 On the 20th of November 2012, representatives of Durham County Council attended a North Lodge Parish Council Meeting. This meeting was also attended by representatives of North Lodge Residents Association, a Governor of Park View School and County Councillor Peter May.
- 4.2 The meeting provided a means to set out the proposals and forthcoming wider public consultation exercise for comment. The proposal was well received and it was agreed that the concept seemed to work. The proposals were seen as an improvement on past proposals for the junction, especially the inclusion of pedestrian crossing facilities. It was welcomed that the proposals were largely contained at the junction, in comparison with previous proposals, but it was noted that there would be an impact on residents living close to the roundabout.

Public consultation and information 'drop in' events

- 4.3 On the 5th of December 2012 letters were sent out to residents. Those properties that are adjacent to any proposed carriage way widening works were sent a consultation letter which highlighted that the proposal included carriage way widening works adjacent to their property. Each of the residents receiving this letter were also sent a copy of the consultation plan prior to the event in order that they could be clear on the proposed works before attending the 'drop in' sessions.

Properties that were not immediately adjacent to associated works but were on the approach to the junction were sent a letter advising them of the project and the associated drop in event. In total, letters were sent out to 104 properties. The location of the properties consulted is shown in Appendix 3

- 4.4 A press release was prepared to further publicise the scheme and associated events. The press release was published on Durham County Council's website, formed the basis of articles in The Northern Echo, The Advertiser, The Chronicle and the Durham Times and was circulated by North Lodge Parish Council to their mailing list.
- 4.5 In recognition of the likely interest in the scheme, the public information 'drop in' events provided a means to support the consultation process through assisting residents in understanding the proposal, and providing a means to capture comments. The events were held on Thursday the 13th December (between 5pm to 8pm), Friday the 14th December (between 10am to 4pm) and Saturday the 15th December (from 9am to noon). Over 60 people attended across the three days and the proposals were, in the main, well received.
- 4.6 The Council has welcomed comments on the proposal throughout the process. The Council has received comments prior to the events, at the events themselves and following the events. Following discussions with County Councillor Peter May, it was confirmed that the Council would accommodate representations made following the North Lodge Residents Association Meeting on the 14th of January 2013 and the North Lodge Parish Council Meeting on the 21st of January 2013.

5. Objections and responses

- 5.1 As part of the consultation the Council has received a total of 59 representations from the occupiers of 33 properties. The Council has also received objections from the North Lodge Parish Council and the North Lodge Residents Association. A 73 name petition was submitted in response to the proposal. A copy of this petition text is contained at Appendix 4.

Objection 1: Traffic volumes and speed

- 5.2 Some residents expressed concerns that the proposal is designed to increase the volume of vehicles on the A693 Blind Lane and that the proposal will result in an increase in traffic speeds

Response

- 5.3 The proposal has been designed to manage existing traffic flows at the Northlands Junction and to provide facilities for a range of road users. An allowance has been made for future increases of the volume of traffic on the network generally. The proposal has not however, been

designed to increase the volume of vehicles on the A693 nor does it include any amendment to existing speed limits.

Objection 2: Proposed carriageway widening, the impact upon pedestrian safety

- 5.4 Some residents along Blind Lane and residents adjacent to the junction on North Road have objected to the carriageway widening to be undertaken as part of the proposed junction improvement on the basis that the resultant reduction in the footpath and verge area will have a negative impact upon the health and safety of pedestrians.

Response

- 5.5 It is not considered that the changes to the width of the grass verges and footpaths will have any material effect on the footways. The footways will be maintained at a minimum width of 2 m, which remains more generous than the majority of footways in the County.
- 5.6 In addition, the proposal includes the provision for formal signal controlled pedestrian crossing facilities which will serve to improve crossing locations for pedestrians at Northlands roundabout. The Council has consistently received requests for the introduction of pedestrian crossing facilities at the Northlands Junction.
- 5.7 In response to the perception that the proposal will reduce pedestrian safety, should the project be approved we will seek to maximise the footpath space within the configuration of the highways layout associated with the proposed scheme, beyond the 2m minimum. This will include making use of existing verge space adjacent to residential properties, where possible, to extend the footway. The potential introduction of a pedestrian guard rail will also be considered during the next stage of the design process.

Objection 3: Proposed carriageway widening, the impact upon accessing properties

- 5.8 Some residents have expressed concern that the proposed carriageway widening and associated reduction in footpath / verge space will result in access and egress to and from drives being dangerous. It has been suggested that this is as a result of residents having to cross additional lanes of traffic as a result of the carriageway widening and as a result of reduced visibility through 'drive' lengths being reduced as the footpath and verge area is reduced to allow for carriageway widening.

Response

- 5.9 The carriageway widening is limited to the frontage of those properties within the vicinity of Northlands Roundabout. It is considered that the

proposed introduction of signals will serve to provide more regular breaks in the traffic than the current situation. In terms of crossing additional lanes as a result of the carriageway widening, drivers would have the option of avoiding crossing lanes by using the Northlands or the A1M Junction 63 junctions, although it is acknowledged that this is less convenient. In general terms, it is considered that access and egress from properties would be no worse than the present situation. However, in recognition of the residents concerns, as part of the detailed design stage of the project, we will undertake a further assessment on the visibility constraints associated with access and egress from properties adjacent to the Northlands junction.

- 5.10 We have also considered the specific user requirements of residents with larger vehicles and / or towing vehicles as part of the consultation process, this includes access to Broadway House, on North Road and 3 Blind Lane. We are satisfied that the proposed junction improvement does not prohibit vehicular access to properties.

Objection 4: Merging lanes

- 5.11 Residents have expressed concern that lane merging on Blind Lane and North Road will increase the risk of accidents, in particular adjacent to the bus stop on North Road.

Response

- 5.12 The design of the proposal has been subject to a preliminary design / feasibility stage safety audit which raised no concerns in respect of the lane merging arrangements. The lane merging meets current engineering safety standards.

Objection 5: Noise and vibration

- 5.13 In response to the consultation, it was suggested that the proposal would serve to increase the noise and vibration associated with vehicular traffic.

Response

- 5.14 It is not expected that the proposal will introduce noise levels materially in excess of existing levels. However, in response to the expressed concerns, it is proposed that a noise survey will be undertaken in the vicinity of the proposal site. This would be undertaken prior to the implementation of the junction improvement, in order to establish a baseline position, and following the implementation of the junction improvement. This will enable an assessment of the requirement for any appropriate noise mitigation measures.

Objection 6: Vehicle emissions

- 5.15 With regard to pollution resulting from vehicle emissions, residents have suggested that the proposal will increase pollution levels as a result of increasing the lanes on the approach to the roundabout and with traffic being brought closer to residential properties owing to the carriageway widening adjacent to the junction.

Response

- 5.16 The proposal is not expected to increase pollution resulting from vehicle emissions. The transport modelling undertaken to support the development of the proposal has indicated that the proposal will reduce overall delay to traffic and generally smooth traffic flow resulting in a reduction in queuing traffic at the junction during peak periods. On this basis, the proposal is expected to have a beneficial effect upon reducing emissions in the vicinity of Northlands Roundabout.
- 5.17 There is existing emissions monitoring underway in the vicinity of Northlands roundabout. At this stage the previous monitoring carried out has not determined that either the short term or long term National air quality objective for nitrogen dioxide is being exceeded. The monitoring will continue at these locations to fulfil the ongoing requirements of Local Authority Air Quality Review and Assessment. Monitoring locations are reviewed periodically to determine whether to revise the nitrogen dioxide monitoring network at all locations within the County.

Objection 7: The quality of the area and visual amenity

- 5.18 Some residents have suggested that the proposal will adversely impact upon the quality of the area and visual amenity. This concern relates to both the widening of carriageways and the reduction of grass verge spaces.

Response

- 5.19 The proposed scheme is not considered to be detrimental to the quality of the area or the visual amenity of the area. The junction improvement is contained to Northlands roundabout and the immediate approaches. The overall character of the area will not be affected. Furthermore, as part of undertaking the detailed design associated with the project, consideration will be given to landscaping of the scheme. The introduction of signals to the roundabout increases the opportunity for planting to the central area. In addition, in response to comments made on the proposal, the Council has explored the opportunity to introduce lighting to the central roundabout area to support festive displays. This will be further considered and addressed through the post consultation detailed design phase.

Objection 8: Impact upon property values

- 5.20 Some residents have suggested that the junction improvement would have a negative impact upon property values.

Response

- 5.21 The proposal is expected to have a positive impact upon reducing congestion at Northlands roundabout, and is not expected to have a negative impact upon the areas of concern as expressed by residents. However, it can be confirmed that the Council will collect evidence to monitor the impact of the proposed junction improvement.

Objection 9: Consideration of alternative proposals

- 5.22 As part of the consultation process, some residents have suggested alternatives to the proposed junction improvement.

Response

- 5.23 In undertaking an assessment of the suggested alternatives, initial consideration was given to whether the current proposal meets the stated aims and objectives and whether it would be possible to deliver an alternative proposal based on an examination of the road network. In addition consideration was given to the scale of a proposed intervention relative to the requirement for an intervention.
- 5.24 On the basis of this appraisal the suggested schemes were therefore are not considered to represent alternatives to the proposed junction improvement in terms of meeting the same aims and objectives, be viable based on the existing network or be appropriate based on network conditions.

6 Support

- 6.1 In the main, written comments have set out objections or concerns in relation to the proposal, in part at least because residents have been encouraged to provide concerns in writing to ensure that they are considered as part of the consultation process, there has been support submitted in writing for the proposal. There has been general support for the scheme and support specifically for the proposed introduction of traffic lights as a measure to improve traffic flow and to provide formal crossing facilities for pedestrians. Support has also been outlined for the proposed Park Road North entrance to the junction via Newcastle Road

7 Other consultations

- 7.2 Whilst the proposal does not require a TRO, the Council consulted the list of statutory consultees and standard list of other consultees prior to

the Stage 2 and 3 consultations. The Council has received comments to inform the further detailed design work associated with the project

8 Local Member consultations

8.1 The previous Councillor for the area, Councillor Cordon did not raised any objections to the proposal

8.2 County Councilor Cllr Peter May made the following formal application as part of the public consultation process:

- The Regeneration and Economic Development section reconsider the current project recommendations of widening the road in Blind Lane and North Road and produce an alternative proposal that considers the health and safety of not only road users/pedestrians but also locally impacted residents.
- That this alternative proposal be given more public scrutiny time than the current one.
- That the current proposals be postponed until an alternative proposal is produced and has general public agreement.

9 Recommendations and reasons

9.1 It is **RECOMMENDED** that the Committee endorse the proposal having considered the objections and corresponding responses provided in this report.

Appendix 1: Implications

Finance

The scheme to be jointly funded through the Economic / Transport Corridors and Transit 15 budgets.

Staffing

There are no staffing implications as a result of this report

Risk

Decision is such that a full risk assessment is not required. A full safety audit has been undertaken for of the proposed changes to the highway network.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

The proposal provides for formal pedestrian crossing facilities at the junction which will bring potentially significant benefits for people with mobility problems or for those with a visual impairment.

Accommodation

There are no accommodation implications as a result of this report

Crime and Disorder

There are no crime and disorder implications as a result of this report

Human Rights

There are no human rights implications as a result of this report

Consultation

Consultation has been undertaken as detailed in the report

Procurement

There are no procurement implications as a result of this report

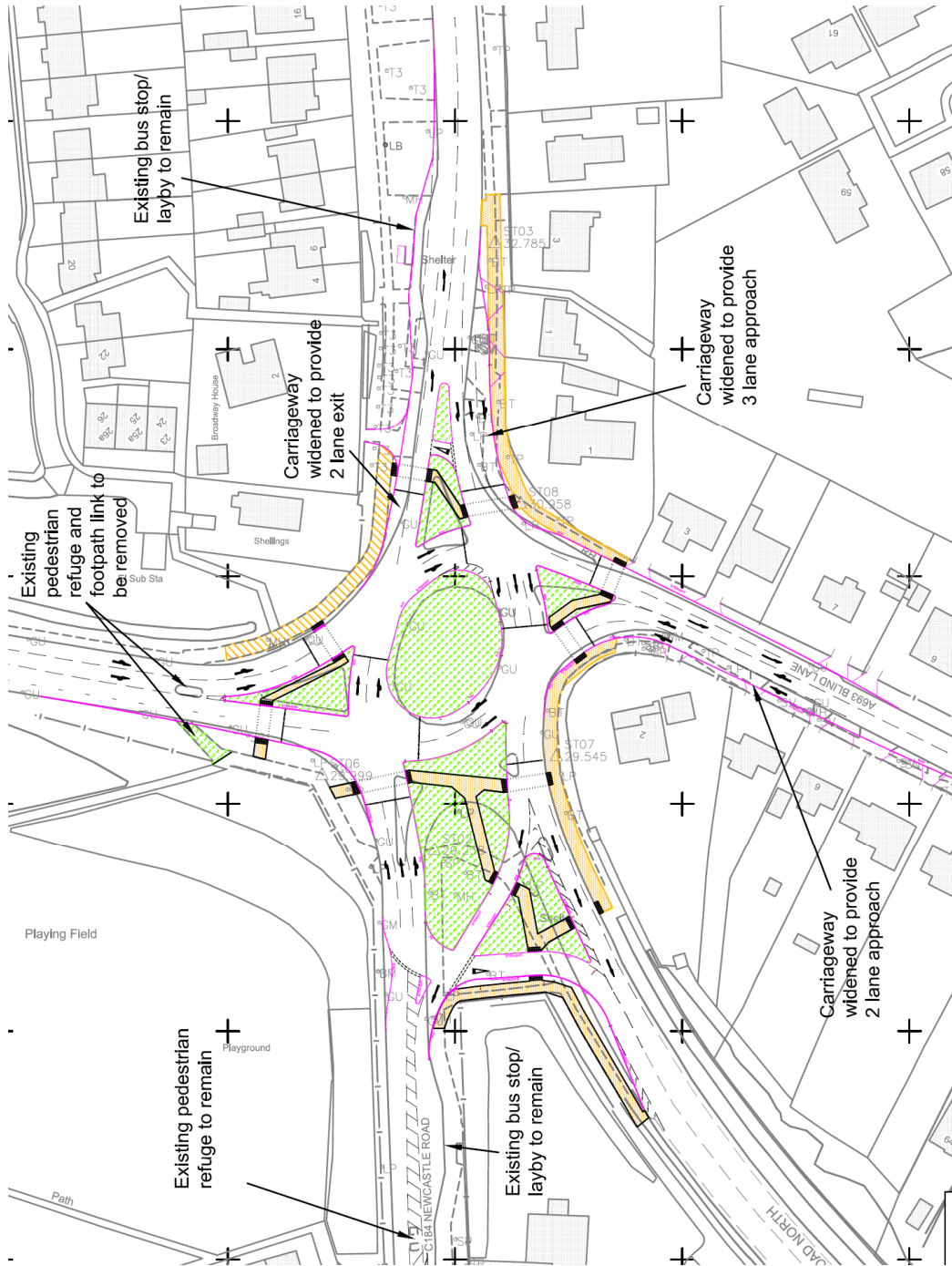
Disability Issues

See Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty above.

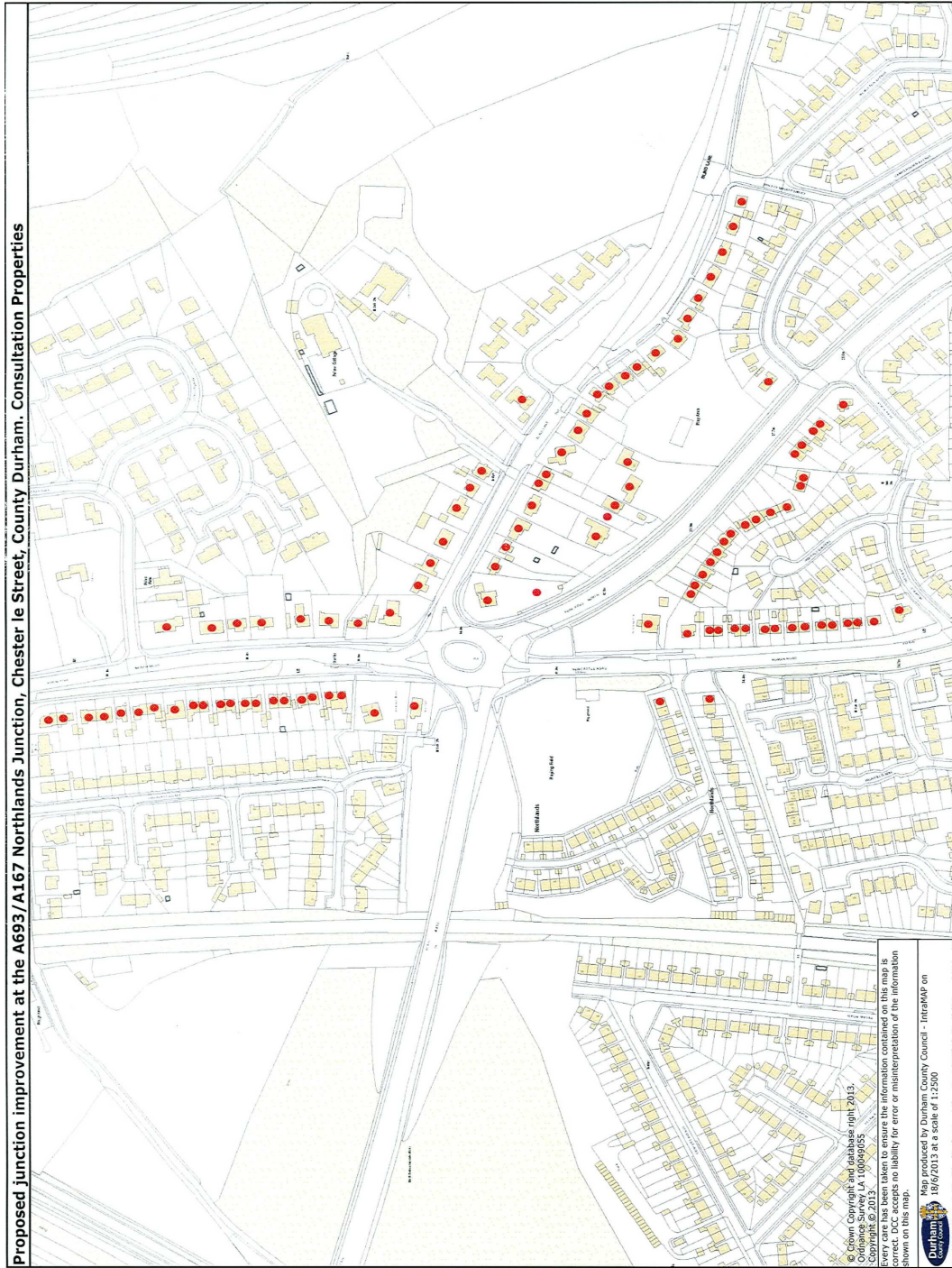
Legal Implications

There are no legal implications as a result of this report

Appendix 2: Scheme Plan



Appendix 3: Consultation Plan



Appendix 4: Petition Text

We (the undersigned) wish to register our opposition to the element of the proposals which directly affects the residents of Blind Lane. The residents of this area already experience high volumes of traffic and the associated noise, pollution and environmental impact. The widening of the carriageway will enhance the resident perception of and proximity to all the aforementioned issues. Whilst we appreciate the need for economic development and regeneration of the surrounding areas, it should not be at the detriment of the Blind Lane residents.