

A31 IMPROVEMENTS - RINGWOOD

1.0 PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to approve a positive consultation response to Highways England in light of the proposals to improve the A31 at Ringwood between the A338/B3347 (Ringwood junction) and the B3081 (Verwood) junction.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Highways England are consulting on an option to improve the A31 at Ringwood between the A338/B3347 (Ringwood) junction and the B3081 (Verwood) junction with the consultation open from 23 June to 4 August 2017. A plan of the proposals can be seen at Appendix 1 of this report and the full scheme brochure produced by Highways England can be seen here: https://highwaysengland.citizenspace.com/he/a31-ringwood-improvement/supporting_documents/S170097%20A31%20Ringwood%20consultation%20%20brochure.pdf
- 2.2 A public exhibition was held, as part of this consultation, over 2 days at Ringwood Town Council's office, at which District Council officers were present. The feedback received from the exhibition was generally positive with people keen to see improvements in the area.
- 2.3 The A31 is a critical route in maintaining the diverse economy of the New Forest. The route supports the significant incidence of cross commuting both into and out of the district as well as providing the single most important route onto the motorway network.
- 2.4 Surveys have also shown that around 70% of domestic day visitors to the New Forest each year are from Hampshire and 18% from Dorset. With around 85% of people using a car as their primary mode of transport a significant proportion of these visitors will be using this route.

3.0 PROPOSALS

- 3.1 Over the past year, Highways England have been looking at a number of options and assessing whether they met their objectives for this scheme.
- 3.2 The proposal being consulted upon contains a number of elements as outlined below:

Addition of a third lane on the A31

- 3.3 This extra lane would be westbound on the off-side, to the right of the existing carriageway, utilising part of the existing central reserve and will be approximately one kilometre (0.6 miles) in length.

- 3.4 This would relieve the existing bottleneck, where traffic slows down or comes to a stop on this section of the A31.
- 3.5 As part of the addition of a third lane there would be a need to widen the existing bridges crossing the River Avon and Bickerley Millstream. Surveys are currently being carried out on the bridges to assess their condition to inform the design.

Closure of West Street access to the A31

- 3.6 Highways England have identified that there is a safety issue where traffic joins the A31 from West Street. The difference in speed between joining traffic and traffic already travelling on the A31 leads to lane changing and weaving manoeuvres which in turn leads to nose to- tail 'shunt' type incidents.
- 3.7 To reduce the number of incidents at the junction, Highways England propose to close West Street where it meets the A31. They propose to provide space for vehicles to turn around at the end of West Street and traffic signs along approaching routes stating that there is no access to the A31 from West Street.
- 3.8 Traffic surveys undertaken by Highways England have shown that on a typical weekday, 84% of traffic using the West Street access to the A31 is using it as a short cut to avoid using the current bottleneck section of the A31. The remaining 16% is made up of people who stop in the town centre.
- 3.9 To improve safety, the proposal would also close the access and egress to and from the Fish Inn directly onto the A31. The access to the Fish Inn from West Street would remain open.
- 3.10 Highways England has indicated that, based on their funding arrangements, the works must commence by March 2020, although they anticipate a start in 2019 with an 18 month construction period.

4.0 CONSULTATION REPONSE

- 4.1 The Council welcomes and supports the proposals put forward by Highways England and believe that these improvements to the A31 are very much needed and are essential for economic prosperity of the area. It is believed that the proposals will significantly improve the capacity of the junction and the closure of West Street will improve safety. It is therefore proposed that a positive response is made to Highways # England on the consultation and a draft letter is attached at Appendix 2.
- 4.2 It is worth noting that the transport modelling undertaken as part of the Local Plan preparation has indicated that implementation of these proposals will fully accommodate the anticipated traffic flows from new development.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no financial implications to this Council arising from this report. The estimated cost of the scheme is between £12-£13.5 million and is being fully funded by Highways England

6.0 CRIME AND DISORDER / EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY / ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 At times when traffic is heavily congested in Ringwood, between these junction points, then some traffic currently diverts from the A31 and on to the local roads in the New Forest. The improvements to enhance the capacity at this point should reduce the instances of this happening and therefore have positive environmental implications.
- 6.2 There are no Crime and Disorder or Equality and Diversity implications arising directly from this report.

7.0 COMMENTS OF PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION PORTFOLIO HOLDER

- 7.1 The A31, between its Junction with the M27 at Cadnam and the County boundary west of Ringwood, is one of the key transport routes within the District. It is a major commuter route for residents working in the Bournemouth and Poole conurbations and provides access for goods travelling to the South West and overseas via Poole Port and Bournemouth Airport. Current congestion at the Junction with the A338 at Ringwood has an adverse impact on the local economy and the environment and the proposed improvements will seek to alleviate the problem. The District Council will continue to work with Highways England (who have responsibility for the A31) and Hampshire County Council (as the Highways Authority for the connecting network), along with Ringwood Town Council, to implement the improvements when agreed.

8.0 RECOMMENDED:

- 8.1 Cabinet is recommended to approve that the letter of support, as set out at Appendix 2 to this report, is sent to Highways England for the improvements to the A31.

For further information contact:

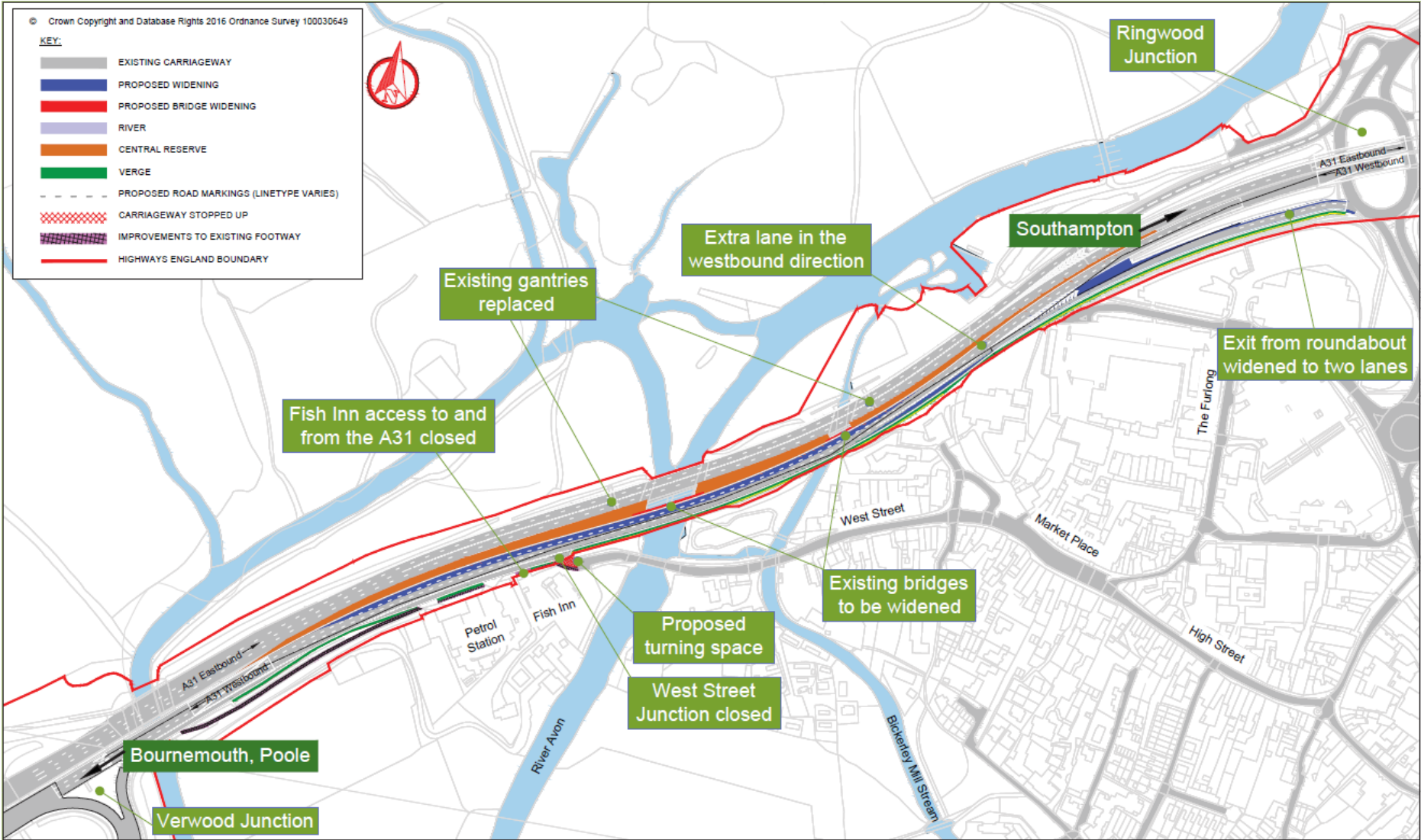
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Background Papers:

Published documents

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Highways England Proposals



Consultation Response Letter

Chief Executive

Executive Head: Bob Jackson

Highways England

My Ref:
Your Ref:

Date: 02 August 2017

Dear Sirs

Consultation on A31 - Ringwood

Thank you for the opportunity to consult on the plans for increased capacity on the A31 together with junction improvement.

This section of the A31 connects western Hampshire, and is a highly traffic sensitive location for the New Forest, and the District Council fully supports the proposals for improvements by Highway England.

The A31 is a critical route in maintaining the diverse economy of the New Forest. The route supports the significant incidence of cross commuting both into and out of the district as well as providing the single most important route onto the motorway network.

Surveys have also shown that around 70% of domestic day visitors to the New Forest each year are from Hampshire and 18% from Dorset. With around 85% of people using a car as their primary mode of transport a significant proportion of these visitors will be using this route.

Based on the proposed level of housing that is likely to come forward over the course of the Local Plan period (to 2036) there will be an increase of traffic in the area. However, recent transport modelling undertaken by the Council to inform the evidence base for the Local Plan has concluded that if the proposed works by Highways England area carried out then they will be able to fully accommodate future traffic flows,.

The District Council hopes to work closely with Highways England to deliver these enhancements.

Yours faithfully

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