

Agenda item 5(j) – Revised Appendix A

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Masterplan
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Mr. J.R. Harrison
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Dear Mr Hewitson

RE: Consultation on the draft West Lancashire Highways and Transport Masterplan

Thank you for allowing West Lancashire Borough Council the opportunity to comment on the above masterplan document.

The Council would like to express its overall support for the masterplan and, in particular, its very positive proposals for the development of the Borough's highways and transport infrastructure. The Council are pleased that Lancashire County Council are supportive of proposals to enhance infrastructure in West Lancashire and we look forward to working more closely on these proposals over the coming years.

The Council also value Lancashire County Council's support for the Skelmersdale Rail Scheme and how this, together with other improvements in Skelmersdale and the rest of the Borough, can bring significant investment and economic benefit to the town of Skelmersdale and the wider Borough. Skelmersdale in particular has great potential given its advantageous location lying between Liverpool, Manchester and Preston on the strategic highway network and so close to the Port of Liverpool, enabling the town to benefit from the wider Liverpool City Region Superport proposals. Creating a rail link, and station, into Skelmersdale with access to both Liverpool and Manchester, as well as the wider public realm and public transport improvements included in the masterplan, will generate a once in a generation opportunity for Skelmersdale and West Lancashire, and the Council wholeheartedly supports these proposals.

Proposals elsewhere in the Borough are welcomed as well, with the highways and movement improvements proposed in Ormskirk town centre bringing a timely benefit as the historic proposals for an Ormskirk Bypass prove to be unfruitful and the support for the electrification of the Ormskirk to Preston rail line providing hope for an improved service between these two Lancashire towns while also opening up rail access to Liverpool from Burscough alongside major Local Plan developments in Burscough (although the Council would like to see greater clarity within Milestones for this project at the back of the

masterplan to be clear that there will be a separate first phase electrifying from Ormskirk to Burscough, as referred to on p.35 of the masterplan). Support for improvements to the cycle network across the Borough is also welcomed, along with the projects and studies to address highways issues and public transport access in the rural areas of the Borough.

Therefore, West Lancashire Borough Council does wish to lend their support to the Highways and Transport Masterplan for the Borough.

However, there are a few specific areas in the masterplan that the Council does have concerns about.

Firstly, the proposals relating to the Derby Street Railway Bridge in Ormskirk. The draft Masterplan (on page 36) concludes that LCC “*will therefore work towards a scheme to replace the Derby Street Bridge*”. This seems a very definite conclusion to draw before any consideration has been given to the alternative options available and before any consultation with other bodies, including West Lancashire Borough Council. This conclusion only seems more premature when viewed alongside other proposals in the draft Masterplan, such as the route management plan for Ormskirk on the following page of the draft Masterplan.

The route management plan could not only look at moving through-traffic from Southport to the M58 off the A570 in Ormskirk, but also through-traffic from Burscough and the Northern Parishes to the M58. This through-traffic would of course include HGVs. Therefore, if HGVs and other through-traffic are removed from the A570 along Derby Street, there may not be a need to replace the Rail Bridge. Even if the conclusion is that the actual carriageway on the bridge needs to be widened, West Lancashire Borough Council would want to ensure that all other options were explored before the bridge, a Grade II Listed Building which also has a Grade II Listed Building attached to it, is considered for replacement.

Secondly, the draft Masterplan does not fully address some of the issues on key highway routes through, into and out of the Borough, most notably the A570 through Scarisbrick into Southport, the A59 through Burscough or the A577 between Ormskirk and Skelmersdale (with the latter becoming particularly relevant given the case for the Skelmersdale Rail Link serving a wider hinterland for provision of rail access to Manchester and Manchester Airport). The Council would like to see consideration of all key highway routes in the masterplan, especially those that suffer from congestion or could come to suffer from congestion as a result of proposals in the masterplan, and how they fit in a wider movement framework of the Borough and surrounding destinations.

Thirdly, while the Council welcomes the positive impact the proposals within the draft masterplan will have on sustainability and sustainable forms of transport, reducing the carbon footprint of the Borough, the Council would like to see mention of electric vehicles and a charging network. This would complement the West Lancashire Local Plan’s emphasis on encouraging use of electric vehicles and the Council’s Sustainable Energy Strategy.

Fourthly, the Council would like to see a greater positivity and commitment regarding the Burscough Curves within the masterplan. While it is acknowledged that any proposal to

reinstate the Curves may not be imminent, to effectively “shelve” the Curves with no plan of action as to when they will be reviewed again, or any commitment to explore feasibility further, will only make it less likely that the Curves are investigated in the future. The Council would like to see a commitment to commission a more detailed study as to the feasibility and options for re-opening the Curves in the masterplan to ensure that the Curves remain on the list when considering transport schemes in West Lancashire and the wider County. This is particularly relevant given that the re-opening of the Curves would not just be beneficial for Ormskirk and Burscough but for Southport and Preston as well, with perhaps the greatest benefit be a direct rail link between Southport and Preston.

Finally, the Council would like to see more clarity on how the various projects may be funded. In particular, the Council would emphasise that, while it is hoped a CIL Charging Schedule will be adopted in April 2014, generating significant funding for infrastructure projects in the Borough, this funding will be limited and will be needed to address a number of infrastructure issues generated by new development in the Borough. As such, at this time the Council can neither confirm that CIL funding will be available for transport-related projects in the masterplan or how much CIL funding will be available for transport-related projects. While the Council is, overall, supportive of the draft masterplan, we therefore cannot guarantee what funding the Council will be able to contribute to the large-scale projects that are proposed in the draft masterplan.

In addition, and perhaps more crucially, there is the wider issue of the certainty of funding for the range of projects proposed in the draft masterplan, particularly the larger (and more costly) projects. The draft masterplan refers to the Single Local Growth Fund (SLGF) as a source of funding that will be available through the LEPs from 2015/16. However, in order to secure such funding, any proposals will need the support of, and commitment from, the Lancashire LEP and, in some cases, the Liverpool LEP, who will be receiving several competing bids for that funding from various projects in their areas. For example, within Lancashire there will be five Highways and Transport Masterplans, all of which will have significant transport-related schemes. It is unclear at this time how LCC or the LEP will prioritise these schemes and so it is uncertain how any of the larger projects in the masterplan will be funded.

However, notwithstanding these specific concerns, I would like to reiterate West Lancashire Borough Council’s overall support for the draft West Lancashire Highways and Transport Masterplan and the Council look forward to working with Lancashire County Council on refining the masterplan and then delivering its welcome proposals.

Yours sincerely,

John Harrison
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Planning