

## **Still Too Far West**

### **The Response of Weston Longville Parish Council to the Norwich Western Link Options Consultation**

Individuals, organisations and businesses will all respond to the Norwich Western Link consultation. For the majority building the new road might mean a saving of time, an easier journey, greater profitability. All are important considerations, but they are not lifechanging. But it is not an overstatement to say that for the parishes and residents of Weston Longville, Great Witchingham, Ringland, Attlebridge, Morton and Honingham the decision as to which option is chosen will have a permanent and fundamental impact on their environment and quality of life. So, it would seem only just that the voices of these small parishes should be heard, and their views given significant weight. We hope, and expect, that Norfolk County Councillors will be committed to finding a balanced solution that will work for all. Getting this decision right is critical if the Council is to achieve its own objectives and avoid creating future hostages to fortune.

#### **Solve the right problem**

In 2004, when the decision to build, what was then the Norwich Northern Distributor Road (NDR), was taken the final link across the Wensum was part of the scheme, and the objective was:

*‘To reduce through traffic from the city centre and provide a means of travelling between the different routes into north Norwich without having to use urban residential streets or unsuitable county lanes’ (Stage 2, Consultation Document 2004)*

The failure to complete the final link has created a further set of problems, which the current proposals are also designed to resolve. In addition, much development has taken place over the last 14 years, and future development to the south and west of the Southern Bypass (A47), and adjacent to the Broadland Northway, will increase pressure on the existing road networks.

This is the last chance to choose an option, which gives full value to the Broadland Northway, and still meets the original objective. All but four of the 82 options identified in the current exercise have been discounted. The focus has narrowed considerably, and given the original objective in building the NDR, it is a surprising omission that the Norwich Western Link Appraisal Report (NWLAR) (October 2018) contains no prediction of the impact of the remaining westerly options on traffic volumes on the Norwich Inner Ring Road (modelling which was undertaken in 2004). In 2004 the equivalent of the B, and a variant of the C route, estimated a reduction of only 12% in traffic numbers on the Boundary Road at ASDA as compared to doing nothing.

There is much less room for manoeuvre now than there was in 2004, but evidence from the 2018 Appraisal Report suggests that it remains true that the further west the chosen option the less likely it is to achieve the strategic and local level objectives agreed by the County Council.

## **Weston Longville Parish Council Position**

### **1. The Norwich Western Link and the A47**

While supporting the principle of the NWL, Weston Longville Parish Council does not support any option (A, B, or C) which has a junction with the dualled A47 at Wood Lane. Proposals for a Norwich Western Link must be seen together with the proposals for dualling the A47. They are inextricably linked. We believe that a junction at Wood Lane with the dualled A47 is unnecessary, and will create as many problems as it solves, whereas there are significant economic and practical advantages to a junction with the new dualled A47 adjacent to the Food Hub and Taverham Road / Blind Lane, west of Easton.

The Parish Council believes that retaining the existing road structure alongside the newly dualled A47 will allow the free movement of north/ south local traffic, and the diffusion of the flow of north/ south traffic across a wider area, thereby reducing the risk of creating new rat runs. It will eliminate the need for new side roads, reduce costs and offer a Plan B option in case of accidents and major disruptions on the new dualled section.

Introducing a major new junction at Wood Lane would encourage traffic to leave the dualled A47 and continue to cut through north to the A1067 and south towards Wymondham using the existing local roads and creating further problems south of the A47. If either of the B or C options are adopted, three routes (the Norwich Western Link, the B1535 HGV route, and the C167 through Weston village) will all converge from the north with the new dualled A47. Consequently 32,000 – 40,000 vehicles a day will be funnelled through the parish, thereby increasing pressure on minor, unsuitable roads, and on the totally unsuitable A 1067 junctions at Lenwade and Morton. The total cumulative impact will be massive and, in terms of basic fairness, unacceptable.

### **2. Traffic impacts and journey distances**

In 2005 variants of B were rejected as being uneconomic because the Wood Lane junction was too far west. Route A didn't even get a mention. Nothing has changed, and neither the A, B or C routes will relieve traffic sufficiently in Costessey, Drayton, Ringland, Taverham and Lower Easton to justify the cost. The routes look awkward on the map, requiring traffic to go back on itself. As such they do not represent the natural direction of flow of north/south travel from north Norfolk to the strategic road network and the A11. What will SATNAV software make of this?

The existing and predicted volumes of traffic for Lower Easton and Taverham Road provide evidence that north/south is the dominant direction of travel. Therefore, it is more accurate to measure journey distances and times from the end of the Broadland Northway to the nearest point on the A47 (offered by the consultation) which is the Taverham Road/ Blind Lane junction (including for A, B and C a section of the A47).

Option A 14.4km / 9 m

Option B 11km / 6.8m

Option C 9.25km/5.7m

Option D 5.8km/3.6m.

Option D is much the shortest.

### **3. Costings**

The public consultation costings for the four options appear remarkably precise. The figures offered in the Norwich Western Link Appraisal Report are much broader with margins of up to 50 million. This seems more realistic since at this stage when the exact alignment and nature of the groundworks have not been determined. For the present the costings given in the consultation document ought to be considered as indicative only.

### **4. Loss of public access and amenity**

Weston Longville is a parish boxed in north and south by two major roads, the A1067 and A47 and crossed by two link roads, including an HGV route. The parish is bounded in the south, east and west by a golf course, the Dinosaur Park, and the Morton, Ringland and Easton Estates (to which there is no public access). It has two wind turbines, two solar farms, and an extensive poultry farm on the old airfield, not to mention electricity pylons, a gas pipe and the Orsted cable corridor.

Both B and C routes will cut across high and open ground in an area of peaceful and pleasing countryside, which crucially is the last area that remains accessible via footpaths, woods and minor roads for walking, riding and cycling for the residents of Weston Longville in particular, and residents of the wider area generally.

It is a stated objective for the project '*to improve the quality of life for local communities*'. A reduction in the volume of traffic through the village of Weston should not need to be paid for by the major loss of a public amenity which options B and C represent.

### **5. Severance**

The Norwich Western Link Appraisal Report which provides the evidence base for the four options is a detailed piece of research which makes extensive use of data and modelling to reach its conclusions. It identifies constraints such as veteran trees, listed buildings, potential archaeology etc. but it is '*a high-level desk-based assessment*' and says little if anything about the social costs to communities of the various options. Nothing about the impact of option A on the community cohesion of Great Witchingham, nothing about the impact of B on the collaboration between Weston, Morton and Attlebridge, nothing about option C cutting off access to the walks and minor roads to the east of Weston, the very reason many people chose to live in the parish. Weston is a scattered parish, but nonetheless works hard to maintain a sense of community, despite being under intense pressure from development and traffic, particularly since the opening of the Southern Bypass. Options A, B and C will all add to the pressure, and inevitably people will shrink into their homes, and an active community will turn into a dormitory.

## **Recommendation**

Weston Longville Parish Council requests that Norfolk County Council consider and approve the following proposal:

1. That the northern junction for the Norwich Western Link should be as close as is feasible to the junction of the A1067 to the Broadland Northway, and that the southern junction should be adjacent to A47 Taverham Road / Blind Lane junction (the option closest to Easton)
2. That the County Council work with local stakeholders (parish councils, landowners, businesses etc.) to reach a consensus on a route alignment between the two junctions.

## **Option appraisal**

### **Option A**

Whilst avoiding the construction of a new crossing of the River Wensum, this route is no more than a further upgrading of the existing B1535 (HGV route). As a single carriageway route with a capacity of 10,000 vehicles per day and it will not cope with the 30,000 vehicles forecast. This route will pass very close to properties in the parish and will be unattractive to cars leaving the Broadland Northway and wishing to travel south. It seems fair to assume that they will continue to use the existing 'rat runs' through Taverham, Ringland, Lower Easton and Weston Longville as shortcuts. It has a Wood Lane junction to which we are opposed and will involve the construction of a major junction in Lenwade. Insufficient thought has been given to the combined impact of Option A and the A1067 on the community cohesion of Lenwade /Great Witchingham, and for this reason alone this option should be rejected. Traffic figures indicate that the further east the junction with the Broadland Northway, the lower the traffic flow in Lenwade. This should also be a consideration.

### **Option B (both versions)**

Option B offers the exchange of 5,000 vehicles per day through the village of Weston Longville for a dual carriageway carrying 30,000 vehicles, including HGVs, 500m away. There are around 156 properties within 300m of the B route (NNDR Consultation 2004). The road would cross open, high ground and the noise and visual impact would be significant. Nor does this option offer any guarantee of a reduction in traffic volumes in Taverham, Costessey, Lower Easton, and Drayton. Whilst shorter than route A it is longer than the other routes, and hence clearly has a greater environmental impact across the open countryside of the Wensum valley, and it disrupts the existing minor road and footpath network to the east of Weston.

What Option B also puts at risk is the community cohesion which exists between the parishes of Weston, Attlebridge and Morton. We share a village hall, we are currently working together on a parish plan, and we collaborate in community events. Whatever option is chosen will emphasise the physical barrier of the A1067, but Option B (1) will have

the most impact and will in effect divide communities which have gained enormously from working together.

### **Option C**

This route has one junction close to the existing Broadland Northway and the other at Wood Lane on the A47. Our major concern is that traffic leaving the A47 will have 3 options; to use the existing route through Weston Longville, or the B1535 if they are heading to towns and villages north and north west of Norwich, or the Norwich Western Link. It creates a perfect funnel for up to 40,000 vehicles per day.

Route C is 2 miles longer than route D (Broadland Northway to Taverham Road, A47), has a westerly direction of travel which means traffic goes back on itself in order to reach the A11, and involves building the longest viaduct across the river Wensum.

Option C is an exposed and open route crossing high ground near the top of Breck Road. The visual impact and the impact of noise will transform the whole area. One has only to look at the Broadland Northway, and to imagine 32,000 cars and HGVs per day, to realise that visually, and in terms of noise, the whole area will be unrecognisable.

Weston Longville, whilst being a rural community, has a limited number of public footpaths, bridleways, and areas of open access. One of the few areas accessible to the public is the woods and walks to the east of the village. This route will cut across Weston Road, the top of Breck Road and the Broadway which lie between the area of woodland and the bridleways, and if route C is chosen Weston Green and Weston will be cut off from an area widely used by walkers, cyclists and horse riders.

Most of the traffic currently cutting through Weston Longville or using the B1535 turns east onto the A47 at Wood Lane, which indicates that it is going either to Norwich or the south of the county. This is more evidence that the Taverham Road / Food Hub junction is more logical and will maximise the amount of traffic that the link road takes, and hence removes from other routes. Whatever happens the Food Hub will need its own junction. So why build two?

### **Option D**

This route is the environmental option. It is the shortest and most direct route and will take most of the traffic crossing the valley away from the existing countryside allowing for regeneration, and safer public access to green lanes and minor roads. Route D joins the A47 much further east than the other options at the access point for the new Food Hub. This makes sense in that a lot of the agricultural traffic coming from the north of the county will in future be heading for the Food Hub, the sugar beet factory, or for the A11, and hence a more easterly junction will take much of the traffic.

The topography of this route means that it cuts round the back of Ringland and is screened behind existing woods and hills so that there is less visual and noise impact on the village. Ringland is a compact village, and there is the potential to develop this route to reduce still further the visual and noise impact on the village itself, and on the surrounding countryside.

It would be possible, if there was the will, to 'hide' this route in a way that it is not possible for A, B or C.

Option D is largely confined to the Morton, Ringland and Easton Estates. It has a minimal impact on public footpaths (Slade Hills), and if the alignment is modified to take advantage of existing roads and estate boundaries it will mitigate its economic and visual impact.

Finally, the direct route that D takes means that it will remove virtually all the traffic from the current 'rat runs' through Ringland, Taverham, Costessey, Drayton and Weston Longville. Thus, at a stroke, the project will achieve one of its most significant local objectives.

## **Recommendation**

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2. That the County Council work with local stakeholders (parish councils, landowners, businesses etc.) to reach a consensus on a route alignment between the two junctions.

Ruth Goodall (Parish Councillor)

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On behalf of Weston Longville Parish Council

13 January 2019