



shaping norfolk's future

The County Economic Development Partnership

Local Public Inquiries
Into the
A11 Fiveways to Thetford Improvement scheme
under the
Highways Act 1980 and Acquisition of Land Act 1981

Proof of Evidence
Of
Shaping Norfolk's Future
In support of the scheme
November 2009

1 Opening Statement

- 1.1 This statement of evidence has been prepared by Chris Starkie, on behalf of economic development partnership Shaping Norfolk's Future
- 1.2 I am the chief executive of Shaping Norfolk's Future, with overall strategic responsibility for the work of the partnership. I have coordinated the partnership's activities, working alongside other partners and agencies, to bring forward the dualling of the last remaining stretch of the A11, between Fiveways and Thetford.
- 1.3 This proof of evidence outlines why we are fully supportive of the Highways Agency's A11 Fiveways to Thetford Improvement Scheme.

2 Shaping Norfolk's Future partnership

- 2.1 Shaping Norfolk's Future is the private-sector led economic development partnership for Norfolk. The partnership is made up of all the local authorities in Norfolk, other public bodies including EEDA, Business Link and Job Centre Plus, together with key individuals from the private and voluntary sectors.
- 2.2 The partnership is chaired by Mark Hodges, executive director of Aviva and board members include senior executives from many of Norfolk's leading businesses.
- 2.3 Our role is to work collectively to improve the economic performance of Norfolk, creating more and better paid jobs for the people of Norfolk.
- 2.4 Shaping Norfolk's Future identified the dualling of the last remaining single carriageway stretch of the A11 as its number one priority and has been working with a wide range of partners to achieve that goal.
- 2.5 Shaping Norfolk's Future worked with Norfolk County Council and other partners on a campaign to bring forward the dualling of the A11.
- 2.6 The campaign and associated petition were launched at a press conference at Elveden in August 2008.
- 2.7 The petition was signed by a total of 16,000 people, and the campaign was backed by MPs from all side of the House of Commons.
- 2.8 Shaping Norfolk's Future and the Norfolk Chamber of Commerce prepared a statement of support from more than 100 leading business figures from Norfolk and Suffolk. This letter, dated September 23, 2008, is attached, and highlights the desire from the business community to see the improvement scheme proceed.

3 Connecting Norfolk

- 3.1 Norfolk is a geographically isolated county, a situation that is compounded by the poor quality of its road network compared with other comparable locations such as Cambridgeshire and Essex.
- 3.2 The A11 trunk road is the key route which connects the county of Norfolk to London, the South East and other parts of the Eastern region, as well as the West Midlands and beyond. The single carriage status of the A47 and the A140 places even more emphasis on the strategic importance of the A11.
- 3.3 Whilst much of the route has been dualled over the past few decades, a crucial section between Fiveways roundabout and Thetford remains single carriageway and a significant bottleneck and barrier to growth. This last section of single carriageway means Norwich is the largest city in the United Kingdom not connected by a dual-carriageway or motorway.
- 3.4 This single carriageway section places Norfolk at a significant competitive disadvantage compared with most other locations in the UK.

4 Slower and unreliable journey times

- 4.1 The impact of the single carriageway section means travellers to and from Norfolk face slow and unpredictable journeys.
- 4.2 Journey time savings by the improvement are estimated at seven minutes for every traveller during the AM peak and 6.5 minutes for every traveller during the evening peak.
- 4.3 In addition the road scheme would significantly reduce accidents and the unforeseen road closures these bring. With only a single carriageway, any accident means the traffic is significantly delayed and often re-routed through the neighbouring town of Brandon.
- 4.4 There have been 94 injury accidents in the last three years – 50pc higher than the national average.
- 4.5 In addition travellers routinely face delays of 20 minutes or more simply because of the lack of capacity of the road, particularly due to the traffic lights at Elveden.
- 4.6 The slower and unreliable journey times mean the single carriageway stretch reinforces the negative and damaging stereotype of Norfolk as a rural backwater.

5 Wider economic benefits

- 5.1 A study conducted by Atkins on behalf of the East of England Development Agency identified time savings to users would be worth £557.5m – significantly greater than the cost of constructing the road.
- 5.2 In addition the study identified £136m of wider economic benefits – including agglomeration and the effects of imperfect competition.
- 5.3 We know from our discussions with businesses that business is being lost because of the single carriageway stretch of the A11.
- 5.4 A recent conversation with the managing director of coaches business National Express revealed that the business has held back from investing in more services between Norwich and London because of the single carriageway stretch. Instead the company chose to invest in routes in other parts of the country. National Express is a supporter of this road improvement scheme.
- 5.5 A leading retail chain decided not to open a store in Norwich because they were unable to guarantee being able to service the store with daily deliveries, because of the threat of hold-ups on the single carriageway stretch.
- 5.6 In addition Norfolk businesses find it harder to be competitive with their counterparts in Cambridgeshire and other counties to the west because of the difficulties of connecting to other markets via the A11. Businesses have either lost contracts or have not been able to gain contracts because of the belief that Norfolk is too far away – a perception reinforced by the single carriageway stretch.

6 Infrastructure for growth

- 6.1 We also contend that the improvement scheme is required to support the projected growth in jobs and houses planned for Norfolk.
- 6.2 Thetford, Norwich and King's Lynn have all been chosen by Central Government as growth point locations. The Regional Spatial Strategy predicts 78,700 new homes between 2001 and 2021 with at least 55,000 jobs. The A11 improvement scheme is vital to serve these new communities. Indeed it is hard to see how growth can be delivered without the scheme.
- 6.3 Norfolk's GVA already lags behind that of comparator counties and the A11 improvement scheme is an important step towards boosting the county's competitiveness.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 It has been commented that it is perhaps unusual for so many groups to wish to actively support this application at the inquiry. The simple reason for this is that there is such a great weight of support from the business community and the wider public for what is perceived as a crucially important road improvement project.
- 7.2 Shaping Norfolk's Future is fully supportive of the A11 improvement project.
- 7.3 The scheme is needed to finally connect Norfolk to the national dual carriageway network and help dispel the perception of the county as a trading backwater.
- 7.4 The scheme will improve journey times and ensure more reliable journey times. It will remove an accident black spot from a key road
- 7.5 The scheme will provide a significant economic boost – which will aid the county as it recovers from recession and help facilitate the growth which is planned in Norfolk over the next 20 years.
- 7.6 In summary this scheme has been ranked as the number one priority for Shaping Norfolk's Future because of the significant positive impact it will have on the Norfolk economy now and in the future.
- 7.7 We respectfully request that the Inspector gives due consideration to the major economic benefits this scheme will bring to the region, when considering objections to the proposal.
- 7.8 Shaping Norfolk's Future believes, particularly in the light of the recession and tighter Government finances, a speedy decision is of paramount importance so work can begin as soon as possible on this crucial improvement project.