



Agenda Item 10

Meeting	Full Council
Date	22 June 2022
Report Title	Green Infrastructure and A350 Dualling Scheme
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1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 This report seeks to gain agreement from Councillors to progress green corridor proposals originating in the Draft Chippenham Neighbourhood Plan with Wiltshire Council Highways, to see if they can be incorporated within the scope of the A350 dualling scheme. It represents a 'once in a lifetime' opportunity to try to punch openings in the A350, which currently forms a barrier to wildlife and humans moving from the town to the countryside and vice versa. Proposals have been informally developed with representatives of Chippenham Without Parish Council.

2.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2.1 In the spending review in October 2021 the government announced that it would allocate £26.625 million for the scheme to dual the remaining single carriageway sections of the A350 route round Chippenham.

2.2 Wiltshire Council are now pressing forward to complete the design of the remaining Phases 4 and 5 of the scheme, and preparing the Full Business Case (FBC). Subject to the FBC being approved by the DfT, it is anticipated that construction works will be undertaken during 2024 and 2025.

2.3 The key elements of the Phase 4 & 5 project are:-

- Phase 4 dualling: widening the A350 to dual 2-lane carriageways between Chequers Roundabout (A4) and Lackham roundabout. The dualling would take place within the existing wide highway verge to the west of the current carriageway;
- Phase 5 dualling: widening the A350 to dual 2-lane carriageways along the full stretch between Cepen Park South Roundabout and Bumpers Farm Roundabout (A420). The dualling would take place within the existing wide highway verge to the west of the current carriageway;
- A significant remodelling of the Bumpers Farm roundabout junction to provide capacity enhancements and full signalisation; and
- Alterations will be made to Lackham Roundabout capacity to accommodate the additional carriageway.

- 2.4 The dualling project will be contained wholly within the existing highway boundary extents/red line site boundary for the planning permission obtained several years ago. The existing bridges along this route were constructed to accommodate the additional carriageways without needing further major works.
- 2.5 Wiltshire Council are currently undertaking site investigations to inform the development of the design. These include such works as walk over environmental surveys along the line of the carriageway and with adjacent land; topographical surveys; drainage investigations, and ground investigations.
- 2.6 Wiltshire Council anticipate that a public engagement exercise regarding the dualling scheme will be held during summer 2022. The focus of that engagement will be regarding Bumpers Farm Roundabout, and the proposed alterations which will ease traffic congestion and improve safety at that location.
- 2.8 Policy GI3 of the Draft Chippenham Neighbourhood Plan identifies key green corridors (green spaces that link together to form linear corridors for the movement of wildlife and humans through the town) and requires new development to protect and enhance these corridors. Figure 6.3 of the Plan, attached at **APPENDIX A**, identifies a series of Neighbourhood Green Corridors in the town, and also 'Countryside Connection Points' where there are opportunities to link Neighbourhood Green Corridors with the surrounding countryside. There are at least three 'Countryside Connection Points' identified in the Plan in the area of the A350 dualling works, where Neighbourhood Green Corridors have the potential to continue across, over or under the highway.

3.0 SYNERGY WITH NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN GREEN CORRIDORS WORK

- 3.1 Both the Town Council and Chippenham Without Parish Council are at similar stages in progressing their respective Neighbourhood Plans, with both Plans identifying improvements in green infrastructure as being an important priority.
- 3.2 With Wiltshire Council Highways in the process of carrying out site investigations for the A350 dualling scheme it was considered prudent to informally investigate whether there were opportunities for the dualling scheme to be designed to also realise any of the 'Countryside Connection Points' set out in Policy GI3 of the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 3.2 The Head of Planning and Cllrs Murry and Cape, representing the Chippenham Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, met informally with Cllrs Eades and Ham, representing the Chippenham Without Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, in April 2022, to informally discuss and arrive at some joint proposals that could be put to Wiltshire Council Highways regarding potential improvements to green corridors across the A350 as part of the dualling works. It became clear in discussions with Chippenham Without that an existing public right of way and a further footpath crossing would be extinguished as part of the dualling scheme and should therefore be replaced in any proposals.
- 3.3 The outline proposals jointly agreed by representatives of both Neighbourhood Plans (and which broadly align with the locations of the three 'Countryside Connection Points' set out in the Draft Chippenham Neighbourhood Plan) are:

Area 1 - Rugby Club/Frogwell Lane Footbridge

- Existing crossing from Chippenham Without to Chippenham (CHIW6 - CHIP33) would be become illegal upon dualling.
- CHWI6 which currently lies north of the A350 footbridge to have a new extension (mitigation) which links it to the footbridge at Frogwell Lane, and so connects with CHIP116.
- Create a new link in Chippenham involving CHIP33 to CHIP116 (at present they are very close to one another, but not actually connected), so that this joined Chippenham footpath (CHIP33/CHIP116) crosses over the existing A350 Frogwell Lane footbridge to join with a diverted Chippenham Without CHIW6.

Area 2 - Priors Copse to Vincients Wood Nature Reserve

- The brook that runs just north of Priors Copse and originates within Chippenham Without (Starveal Farm) also runs on the northern side of Vincients Wood, making use of an existing culvert under the A350.
- This culvert to be developed as a wildlife corridor between Vincients Wood Nature Reserve and Chippenham Without, with any necessary up-grading of the culvert undertaken during the dualling of the A350.

Area 3 - Drake Crescent/Derriads Pond

- At present Cepen Park South (Chippenham) has access to the countryside (Chippenham Without), and this access will cease following dualling. Existing crossing from Chippenham to CHIW8/10 bridleways would be become illegal upon dualling.
- Create extension of CHIP34 to A350, i.e. Derriads Pond.
- Create a link between CHIW8/10 at A350, for both human and wildlife use, with extended CHIP34, either by bridge or underpass.

3.4 **APPENDIX B** of this Report shows the location of the three areas above in map form.

3.5 At the time of discussions with Chippenham Without it was not known that a significant remodelling of the Bumpers Farm roundabout would form part of the A350 dualling works and that this area might be also be an area where green infrastructure proposals could also be focused.

3.5 This report seeks agreement from Full Council to progress the above proposals with Wiltshire Council Highways on behalf of the Town Council. It also seeks to give delegated authority to the Chief Executive to continue to liaise with Wiltshire Council Highways and/or Chippenham Without Parish Council in trying to progress green infrastructure improvements under this joint initiative.

3.6 This report also presents an opportunity for Ward Councillors to be consulted on the proposals and add value to the process through any local knowledge.

3.6 Whilst it is recognised that there may be a number of other issues relating to the A350 dualling e.g. noise, pollution, traffic speeds, it is recommended that the Town Council comments on these aspects when Wiltshire Council formally consults the Town Council on the dualling scheme in due course. For now, it is considered that a focused approach on green infrastructure proposals only (including walking and cycle routes which may follow green corridors) is taken forward with Wiltshire Council Highways, as an opportune point in time, as survey work and design work commences, to initiate early engagement.

3.7 Wiltshire Council Highways have informally agreed to share any survey work/environmental that might be of benefit to the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, in terms of being used as evidence to justify the Green Corridors policy and other policies in the Plan.

4.0 CONTRIBUTION TO CORPORATE PLAN PRIORITIES

4.1 Engagement with Wiltshire Council Highways on the green infrastructure priorities of the Draft Neighbourhood Plan with regard to the A350 dualling scheme, will contribute to the following corporate priorities:

- Play an active role in the future development of the town through collaboration with partners, stakeholders, and our community.
- Maintain and create opportunities to enhance our green spaces and provide a clean and safe environment.
- Help to create a future that is carbon neutral, environmentally sustainable and resilient to the impact of climate change.

5.0 STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no staffing implications.

6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no financial implications for the Town Council.

7.0 RECOMMENDATION

7.1 i) That Councillors agree the proposals listed in Paragraph 3.3 of this Report as a basis for future discussions with Wiltshire Council Highways on potential green infrastructure improvements for the A350 dualling scheme; and

ii) That Councillors delegate authority to the Chief Executive to represent the Town Council going forward in discussions with Wiltshire Council Highways and/or Chippenham Without in respect of green infrastructure improvements for the A350 dualling scheme, including reviewing potential green infrastructure improvements at Bumpers Farm Roundabout.