

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker:	Executive Lead Member for Transport and Environment Strategy
Date:	3 October 2022
Title:	Transport Proposals Supporting Economic Development in Farnborough
Report From:	Director of Economy, Transport and Environment

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Purpose of this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to outline the highway interventions proposed as part of the Farnborough Civic Quarter development and their role in supporting the regeneration objectives of Rushmoor Borough Council. Approval is being sought to establish a local policy position in relation to this masterplan to guide the County Council's highway response to the proposals as they progress through the planning approval process.

Recommendation

2. That the Executive Lead Member for Transport and Environment Strategy agrees a policy which supports the principle of reallocating road space in order to enable development of the Farnborough Civic Quarter Masterplan, subject to the conditions of support outlined in this report.

Executive Summary

3. The Farnborough Civic Quarter (FCQ) Masterplan is being proposed by Rushmoor Borough Council and is subject to a live planning application process. The masterplan proposes transformational change including up to 1,006 new homes, and up to 45,072sqm of community, leisure, retail and civic uses, all in the heart of the Town Centre.
4. In transport planning principles the intensification of town centre uses and greater mixture of land uses (particularly residential) has the potential to enhance transport sustainability by encouraging more local and shorter trips which can be made by a wide choice of modes. It is the sort of development that results in the integration of both land use and transport planning objectives and outcomes and is highly sustainable in terms of transport. It aligns well with the decarbonisation agenda which supports regeneration in town centres and economic recovery.
5. It is also a plan that has important implications for the highway authority in determining what changes to the local highways, including the A325 to the east

and the A327 to the south of the Town Centre, are acceptable and desirable, noting that whatever is agreed has long term implications for the form and function of both A roads as well as wider access and traffic management issues. The transport proposal in the Masterplan enables the development to take place and without the Highway Authority's support, large elements of the plan would be undeliverable.

Context

6. Farnborough like many other Town Centres is needing to reinvent itself in light of the challenges caused by systemic changes in shopping trends, high street decline and the Covid-19 pandemic. Farnborough has a higher-than-average proportion of residents who are of working age and employed in professional jobs and has good transport links by rail and road. However, the town is located within a short distance of a number of large, strong competing retail and employment centres, including Guildford, Woking and London.
7. The town centre benefits from two shopping malls, Kingsmead and Princess Mead, and significant town centre development has occurred in recent years. Surrounding the mostly pedestrianised town centre are a number of retail parks and bulky retail units, all served by free parking. There is limited office space within Farnborough town centre, with office uses instead focused on edge-of-town locations such as Farnborough Business Park.
8. Farnborough is a popular location for residential development. Within the town centre this is focused around the railway station. Many of the community and leisure facilities available to Farnborough residents are located in the Civic Quarter, a site that is currently underused and in need of updated facilities. Farnborough Civic Quarter (FCQ) Masterplan therefore seeks to address some of these issues and is part of the Borough Council's ambitious plans to regenerate the Town Centre.
9. The Masterplan transport proposals are the subject of a live planning application process meaning that some elements of the Masterplan including the redesign of junctions on the A325 and A327, new crossing facilities and a new interchange arrangement for buses are being considered by Rushmoor Borough Council for outline planning approval. This is an important stage in the planning process, as outline approval for the main accesses and key transport infrastructure elements sets the framework under which the detail of the next stages are then built. Of particular note in this report are the junction changes proposed on both A roads. These effectively reallocate road space currently used by vehicles to create new public realm, better development plots or to support other modes of transport.
10. The historic approach to both A roads, which form part of the strategic road network, has been to operate and manage the roads with the dominant functional imperative being about facilitating the movement of vehicles. As a result, these roads are not attractive or comfortable to cross on foot or by cycle except at some of the higher quality subway crossing points. The Masterplan proposals are aiming to better connect the town centre with its immediate residential catchment area and to improve the attractiveness of sustainable access options.

11. To be supportive of these proposals it is necessary for the County Council as Highway Authority to confirm that it is acceptable to change the balance of consideration for operation of the roads towards being more supportive of placemaking, regeneration and other modes over the movement of motorised vehicles. This would set a precedent that would then need to be applied consistently to other junctions and links on the A325 and A327 that are not currently in scope of the masterplan e.g. the Clockhouse Roundabout.
12. Hampshire County Council's Local Transport Plan 3 creates a policy base which is somewhat supportive of the proposals but is not necessarily explicit enough in the local context of the transformational change proposed in the Masterplan. The County Council's emerging draft Local Transport Plan 4 proposes a new approach and framework for considering how to better balance the movement and place needs of specific roads and streets. It is not currently adopted policy, but if it were, it would be generally supportive of the objectives of the FCQ masterplan.
13. A report to Hampshire County Council's Cabinet on 15 March 2022 adopted a new model of engagement for local regeneration and growth partnerships with the districts and boroughs of Hampshire. This marks a change in the way the County Council is seeking to engage with and support the regeneration agenda. Discussions are ongoing with the Borough Council but at the time of writing there is no formalised partnership. Developing such a partnership would enable the two local authorities to work collaboratively on issues that benefit Rushmoor's residents and ensure that both authorities can share expertise and commit appropriate resource to the shared priorities.

Proposals in Farnborough

14. The FCQ masterplan includes proposals for up to 1,006 homes; a new leisure centre; a civic hub including new office floorspace, a new library and community floorspace; retail/commercial floorspace; a hotel; a replacement skate park; a new high quality central park and play space.
15. Figure 1 shows the red line boundary of the area under consideration in the Masterplan.



Figure 1: Location of the Farnborough Civic Quarter Site (Farnborough Development Partnership,

16. Following the relocation of the police station that was previously located in Farnborough's civic quarter (see Figure 1) and the requirement to replace the existing leisure centre, library and community centre, Rushmoor Borough Council has included the Civic Quarter site as a strategic site allocation in its Local Plan under Policy SP2.3. This site allocation is supported by the Civic Quarter Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) that sets the framework for developing modern and accessible community facilities for residents to enjoy. The SPD considered the spatial framework and opportunities for the site and included the suggestion for the Pinehurst Roundabout to be replaced with a T-junction. The SPD noted the potential of such intervention to unlock significant new development capacity and create an improved and expanded Civic Quarter.
17. Since the adoption of the SPD, Rushmoor Borough Council, working with its development partners, Hill Investment Partnership Ltd, has established the Rushmoor Development Partnership to deliver a number of major regeneration schemes across the borough, including the Farnborough Civic Quarter.
18. Following public consultations in 2019 and 2021 the Rushmoor Development Partnership submitted an outline planning application for the Civic Quarter Masterplan in March 2022 (application reference: 22/00193/OUTPP).
19. The vision of the masterplan development on the town centre is outlined and embedded as being to:
 - create a community heart for the town;
 - improve health and wellbeing;

- promote sustainability;
 - encourage community;
 - connect the town;
 - develop arts and culture;
 - increase footfall and spend; and
 - increase participation.
20. These aspirations are designed to have a positive impact upon the long-term economic sustainability of the town centre, as the development will be created in order that everything needed to live, work and enjoy leisure time is in reach within a fifteen-minute walk or bike ride. This concept is envisaged to help create a thriving community and sustainable local economy and is perceived to be “21st Century” thinking for the future of Farnborough.
21. The County Council has responded initially to the application for the Civic Quarter Masterplan. From a highways perspective the County Council is now actively engaged in detailed dialogue to ensure the outline application for the transport elements can be made to be acceptable.
22. The key transport proposals currently subject to outline planning processes are:
- replacing Pinehurst roundabout with a signal operated T-junction with at grade pedestrian crossing points rather than subway crossings;
 - changes to the Town Centre bus interchange arrangements;
 - multiple new access arrangements onto the two A roads from the development; and
 - new formal and informal crossing schemes.
23. To support these development plans it is proposed that the County Council adopt the following policy principle which is subject to the detailed qualification in this report:
- Policy Principle: The County Council supports the principle of reallocating road space in order to enable development of the Farnborough Civic Quarter Masterplan, subject to the conditions of support outlined in the main body of this report.
24. The Pinehurst roundabout is a large junction with segregated facilities for pedestrians and cyclists to cross. The masterplan proposals seek to replace the roundabout with a T-junction that takes up less space and which replaces the underpasses with at-grade crossings. The freeing up of highway land also creates a greater developable area.
25. In replacing the Pinehurst roundabout with a T-junction, the intention is to improve facilities for pedestrians and cyclists whilst at the same time maintaining sufficient vehicle capacity. This is expected to be achieved through the replacement of existing underpasses (considered to be low quality and inhospitable) with at-grade pedestrian crossings along both the A327 Meudon Avenue and A325 Farnborough Road. This will include signalised crossings at the new T-junction to facilitate both north-south and east-west movements; a new signalised crossing on the A325, along the east-west desire line connecting

to the central part of the site with Farnborough Road; a signalised crossing on the A327 east of Meudon House; and an uncontrolled crossing on the A327 between the signalled crossing the new T-junction.

26. A key policy consideration for this junction is to determine if it is acceptable in highway terms to change the balance of consideration between movement of vehicles towards a more place and people focused design on the two A roads impacted. Both A roads form a part of the strategic road network and this means there is a disposition towards placing the balance of consideration in favour of movement of vehicles because of their strategic status. However, this needs to be considered within the local context of a town centre location where the A325 and A327 create a boundary to the town centre that is imposing for those seeking to walk or cycle.
27. The other matter of context for consideration is the function of the A roads in the local context of other parts of the local strategic network. Historically the construction of the Blackwater Valley relief road which runs parallel to the A325 was intended as a road to take the strategic through traffic away from the A325 with a long-term intention that this would then allow a future rebalancing on the A325 in favour of local traffic and transport needs. Since the construction of the relief road traffic growth on the A325 has been fairly static suggesting the relief road is performing the strategic through traffic role it was intended to. This context gives a justification to accept the principle to reallocate road space.
28. The wider policy implication of this is that it establishes a precedent to make similar changes to other parts of the town centre network. Clearly this could only be done as other opportunities arise. It also means that other changes and decisions made by the Highway Authority or Local Planning Authority need to complement each other and be consistent. In this case it means that the land use planning and off-street parking operations and practices need to adopt a similar rebalancing principle. These are both District/Borough Council responsibilities. The approach to off street parking management, supply and pricing is probably the most critical of these. Particularly so as the traffic modelling used to support the applications is based on there being modal shift which reduces the demand for parking. At present there is a high supply of off-street parking in the town centre, available to users at a relatively low cost. Failure to adopt complementary approaches would undermine the modelling work and result in congestion.
29. A technical consideration of the proposals is underway and ongoing as part of the development control process. Detailed work is progressing with the applicant to determine the transport capacity and vehicle flow issues. Initial assessments are that it can be made to work in traffic flow terms. Modelling undertaken by consultants Transport Planning Associates on behalf of the Farnborough Regeneration Partnership suggests that due to the improved walking and cycling infrastructure modal shift away from private car use is a key factor in the traffic assessment. This places a great deal of emphasis on ensuring that the active travel infrastructure is of high quality.
30. Further work is being requested to be done on pedestrian modelling. Whilst subways are considered inhospitable and are considered to present security concerns for some, they are also segregated from traffic and provide a route for frictionless movement for pedestrians and cyclists. To date, no pedestrian

modelling has been done, so it is not possible to assess if the at-grade crossings proposed offer an enhancement to journey time and experience over the subways or if they can manage the volumes of pedestrians likely to cross. Alternative options including setting back the crossing at points away from the T Junction but at grade or well designed subways applied to the T junction proposal should not be ruled out of consideration at this time.

31. A further consideration is how land no longer required for highways is used. The majority of land within the Masterplan area which is currently public highway is also in the freehold ownership of Hampshire County Council. The Masterplan seeks to make use of some of this to enable some of the development plots. This raises a number of issues around removing highway rights, and then subsequent land ownership. The County Council could transfer its land interest to Rushmoor Borough Council or could potentially retain an interest in the development. These issues, together with the future of Farnborough Library, which is also within the Masterplan area, are yet to be agreed between Rushmoor Borough Council and Hampshire County Council.

32. Therefore, the policy principle is made on the basis that:

- the Borough Council, in regard to its functions is encouraged to make a formal commitment to complement the principle to reallocate road space within its parking operations and land use planning role going forward. This should include an assessment and review of parking standards, operations and policy including the supply and pricing of off-street parking in Farnborough Town Centre;
- the T junction approach offers an acceptable level of service to vehicle traffic, accompanied by high quality and high capacity alternatives that provide a preferable mode of choice to using a private vehicle for local residents, visitors and workers;
- detailed pedestrian modelling is undertaken to ensure the best design solution for pedestrians and cyclists is achieved noting that this should consider other options as well as the current proposal;
- Rushmoor Borough Council enters into land ownership discussion and reaches agreement with the County Council to determine how such issues will be resolved (as outlined in paragraph 31 above); and
- Rushmoor Borough Council and Hampshire County Council enter into a formal collaborative working relationship through the formation of a Regeneration and Growth Board.

33. The Masterplan includes a number of other transport proposals. These can all be determined under existing local and national policies and do not require the agreement of any further policy principles. These include:

- a change to the interchange arrangement for bus services in the town centre. The current arrangement means all local bus services interchange at the end of the pedestrianised high street. This works well and provides a high level of service albeit that the services need to divert from the A325 which add to journey times. It will be necessary to maintain or enhance the levels of service for bus interchange in light of the Masterplan; and

- two town centre mobility hubs that will act as interchange points for multi-modal journeys, including electric vehicle charging, car share hubs, micro mobility solution such as cycle hire and micro consolidation services. It also includes a pedestrian crossing of the A325 to the north of the Pinehurst junction.

Consultation and Equalities

34. This decision seeks approval for a policy position to support the principles set out in the Farnborough Civic Quarter Masterplan and does not have a direct impact on residents at this stage. Therefore, it has been assessed as having a neutral impact on groups with protected characteristics.

Other Key Issues

35. This report has focused on the principle of highway changes only and has not ventured to consider viability issues, affordability or wider matters such as education, library or other services that County Council may operate in the locality.

Climate Change Impact Assessments

36. Hampshire County Council utilises two decision-making tools to assess the carbon emissions and resilience of its projects and decisions. These tools provide a clear, robust, and transparent way of assessing how projects, policies and initiatives contribute towards the County Council's climate change targets of being carbon neutral and resilient to the impacts of a 2°C temperature rise by 2050. This process ensures that climate change considerations are built into everything the Authority does.
37. As a statement of policy principle with limited planning status and one which has been developed to respond to another local authority's proposals, it is not considered appropriate or necessary to complete the climate change tool and carbon assessment at this time.
38. A carbon neutrality consideration is included in the approach to work on the local road network. It reflects the fact that recent audit work undertaken by the Carbon Trust for the County Council has identified that transport contributes 37% to carbon emissions from all sectors. Transport is also the sector which appears hardest to reduce when compared to other sectors like energy. It therefore places a high level of ambition on developers and the Local Planning Authority not only to look at a traditional approach to transport mitigation but also how that mitigation can support adopted carbon neutrality targets from the transport consequences of development.

REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Strategic Plan

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	yes
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	yes

Other Significant Links

Links to previous Member decisions:	
<u>Title</u> Local Regeneration and Growth Partnerships with District Local Authorities	<u>Date</u> 15/03/22
Direct links to specific legislation or Government Directives	
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents	
<p>The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)</p>	
<u>Document</u>	<u>Location</u>
None	

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

1. Equality Duty

The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant characteristic connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

2. Equalities Impact Assessment:

This decision seeks approval for a policy position to support the principles set out in the Farnborough Civic Quarter Masterplan and does not have a direct impact on residents at this stage. Therefore, it has been assessed as having a neutral impact on groups with protected characteristics.