

# Report to Cabinet

17 January 2024

<b>Subject:</b>	Smethwick to Birmingham Inclusive Growth Corridor – Initial scheme approval
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Cabinet Member for Regeneration & WMCA, Councillor Peter Hughes
<b>Director:</b>	Director- Regeneration & Growth, Tony McGovern
<b>Key Decision:</b>	Yes Type (b) - an executive decision which is likely to result in the Council incurring expenditure, the making of savings or the generation of income amounting to more than £1m.
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## 1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That approval in principle be given to the proposed sustainable transport and highway improvements that make up the Smethwick to Birmingham Inclusive Growth Corridor Transportation Package as shown on Drawing no. 5216493-ATK-HI-ZZ-DR-D-0113 (attached at Appendix A).
- 1.2 That the Cabinet Member for Regeneration & WMCA be authorised to approve the carrying out of public consultation in connection with 1.1 above.



- 1.3 That any objections received in connection with 1.2 above be considered by the Cabinet Member for Environment & Highways in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration & WMCA at a future Decision Making Session.
- 1.4 That the Director Regeneration & Growth be authorised to approve the submission an Outline Business Case to the West Midlands Combined Authority.
- 1.5 That approval be given for the Cabinet Member for Environment & Highways to authorise the Assistant Director-Legal & Assurance in conjunction with Assistant Director-Highways to enter into an agreement with Birmingham City Council under section 8 of the Highways Act 1980.
- 1.6 That approval be given for the land coloured red on Drawing No. SBIGC-IMPLINE-001 (attached at Appendix B) as land comprised within the sites of highways which it is proposed should be constructed, improved or altered for the purposes of Schedule 13, paragraph 15 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

## 2 Reasons for Recommendations






- 2.1 The Smethwick to Birmingham Inclusive Growth Corridor Transportation Package forms part of the West Midlands City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) Programme approved by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Board on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2022. The Sandwell elements of this programme were approved by Cabinet in July 2022.
- 2.2 The project is now at the stage where specific approvals are required to enable it to progress through the WMCA Single Assurance Framework Process, be consulted on with the public and stakeholders, and then be taken to the next stages of design and business case preparation.
- 2.3 The proposed scheme will involve construction on land that currently sits outside of the boundary of the public highway and in some cases not in the ownership of the Council. The precise extent of this land will depend on the detailed design of the proposals. However, in order to safeguard the land from development which might otherwise prevent the proposals from being implemented, it is proposed to impose highway improvement



lines using powers conferred on the Council through the Town & Country Planning Act, 1990.

- 2.4 The project is likely to include works within highways for which Birmingham City Council is the Local Highway Authority (LHA) as well as those within Sandwell’s jurisdiction. An agreement under section 8 of the Highways Act 1980 will enable these works to be carried out by one LHA on behalf of the other. The precise details of these works, and which LHA will carry them out, is dependent on detailed design.
- 2.5 Once detailed design is completed, and the Outline Business Case has been assessed by WMCA, further approvals may be necessary to enable the scheme to proceed to Full Business Case and delivery.

### 3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	The Smethwick to Birmingham Inclusive Growth Corridor Transport Package includes extensive measures designed to encourage walking and cycling thus contributing to the health benefits of sustainable active travel.
	Successful communities need access to jobs, services and facilities to enable them to remain healthy and vibrant. The transport network is an important enabler of this.
	New and existing residential developments rely on good quality access and links to shops, services and leisure facilities in order for them to be successful. The proposals will make a significant contribution to this objective.
	The provision of a high-quality transport network will reduce journey times and improve journey reliability for Sandwell business who rely on it to connect to their suppliers and customers.
	The provision of a high-quality, sustainable transport network catering for all modes is vital to enable Sandwell residents to access jobs, education and services both within and beyond the Borough’s boundaries.



## 4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 Consultants Atkins were commissioned in July 2023 to undertake a design feasibility study and develop a Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) looking at options for a highway improvement scheme along the Smethwick to Birmingham A457 corridor. The study area is centred around the B4135 Cranford Street and A457 Grove Lane corridors, leading to the borough boundary with Birmingham and adjacent to the Midland Metropolitan University Hospital (MMUH).
- 4.2 The A457 is one of the key arterial routes into Birmingham and provides east-west connectivity between Sandwell and Dudley to the west and Birmingham to the east. The B4135 provides wider east-west connectivity between Birmingham to the south-east and the wider local highway network. As a result, at present there are a large number of east-west strategic through trips, linked to the morning and evening commuter peaks. Not only does this cause significant traffic queues, but the highway layout and current environment makes it an unpleasant and unsafe environment for pedestrians and cyclists. Currently there is little or no infrastructure provision for pedestrians and cyclists at this location.
- 4.3 Given the significant regeneration proposals for the area and increase in trips to and from development sites, there is a need to improve traffic flow and infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists to encourage more sustainable methods of travel for short journeys within this area. The aim of the design feasibility study is to look at options for a highway improvement which considers the following:
- A new junction improvement scheme at the A457 Soho Way/Grove Lane and Cranford Street junction which addresses existing capacity and safety issues and considers options for pedestrian and cycle infrastructure.
  - Options for improving capacity and reducing queuing along Cranford Street and addressing issues such as obstructive parking and poor environment for pedestrians and cyclists.
  - A new junction improvement scheme at the Cranford Street/London Street junction which assists in reducing congestion on surrounding streets and overall network but also addresses capacity issues and provides facilities for pedestrians and cyclists.
  - An overall improvement in congestion within the North Smethwick area.



- All identified improvements will be designed taking into consideration LTN 1/20 cycle design guidance and the National Bus Strategy in addition to standard highway design guidance.
- Consideration of the importance of blue light emergency response times within the designs.
- Consideration of how the scheme ties in with existing and planned highway improvements within the area.
- Consideration of future demand and pressures on the network based on planned regeneration within the study area.

4.4 Atkins has produced a SOBC which looks at options for a two-way, off road segregated cycleway which connects to the cycle route currently being delivered along the A457 Soho Way as part of the Smethwick Town Deal in one direction, and to the cycle route being delivered by Birmingham City Council on the A457 Dudley Road in the opposite direction. This will ultimately deliver a continuous segregated cycle route from the two railway stations in Smethwick and the High Street into Birmingham city centre. Options also include a signalised junction at the Grove Lane and Cranford Street junction as well as Cranford Street's junction with London Street. All the options being considered will require land that currently sits outside of the boundary of the public highway and in some cases not in the ownership of the Council. The precise extent of this land will depend on further detailed design of the proposals. However, to safeguard the land from development which might otherwise prevent the proposals from being implemented, it is proposed to impose highway improvement lines using powers conferred on the Council through the Town & Country Planning Act, 1990.

## 5 Alternative Options

5.1 The alternative option is to not deliver a highway improvement scheme at this location using the allocated City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement for this project and for this funding to be used for an alternative project which may not necessarily be in Sandwell. There is therefore a risk of losing significant investment for transport infrastructure improvements in Sandwell.





5.2 Considering the current congestion issues, poor active travel provision and the significant amount of development growth that is planned and wider change in movement to, from, through and within the areas as a result of the Midland Metropolitan University Hospital opening, the impacts of not making any changes to the A457 Grove Lane and B4135 Cranford Street corridor is likely to result in the following:

- Low walking and cycling use within the area, resulting in lost health, wellbeing and environmental benefits
- Increased road traffic accidents.
- Increased levels of congestion which is likely to increase queues and delays along both corridors in both directions, with negative implications for local air quality.
- Blue light access delays with ambulances caught up in general traffic queueing; and
- Development growth unable to be accommodated due to concerns of the ability of the local highway network to cope with additional demand

## 6 Implications

<b>Resources:</b>	The project will be funded through devolved allocations to the West Midlands Combined Authority as part of its City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement. All fees, including SMBC staff time recharges, are including the estimated scheme cost.
<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	The scheme primarily involves the Council carrying out works in its capacity as Local Highway Authority. Where new cycle routes pass through third-party land which is not part of, or adjacent to, the public highway, this may require planning consent. The delegations described in this report are in accordance with paragraph 1.3 of Part 4 (Executive Procedure Rules) of the Constitution.
<b>Risk:</b>	A full Risk Assessment will accompany the Outline Business Case. This is a precondition of funding.
<b>Equality:</b>	An Equality Impact Assessment will accompany the Outline Business Case. This is a precondition of funding.



<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	The project includes measures aimed to encourage the use of sustainable, non-car, modes. This will contribute towards improved air quality. In addition, the emphasis on active travel
<b>Social Value:</b>	There are no social value implications arising from the recommendations contained in this report. When the scheme moves to the delivery stage, the appointed contractor(s) will be required to adhere to the Council's Social Value policies.
<b>Climate Change:</b>	Decarbonisation of the transport system is central to the government's aims and objectives for CRSTS. It is also a principle theme within the West Midlands Local Transport Plan. All projects within the programme need to demonstrate how they address climate change and contribute to decarbonisation through their business cases. The project includes measures aimed to encourage the use of sustainable, non-car, modes.
<b>Corporate Parenting:</b>	There are no implications for Corporate Parenting responsibilities arising from the recommendations contained in this report.

## 7. Appendices

Appendix One - Drg. No. 5216493-ATK-HI-ZZ-DR-D-0113  
Appendix Two - Drg. No. SBIGC-IMPLINE-001

## 8. Background Papers

West Midlands Strategic Transport Plan: Movement for Growth (2016)  
Report to WMCA Board 14 January 2022  
Report to WMCA Board 18 March 2022  
Report to Cabinet 23 March 2022  
Report to WMCA Board 13 January 2023  
Report to Cabinet 15 February 2023

