

## **Proposed Abandonment of Protected A701 Road Realignment in Adopted Midlothian Local Plan**

**Report by Ian Johnson, Head of Communities and Economy**

### **1.0 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1** This report recommends Cabinet to agree to abandon the protected A701 realignment route as shown in the adopted Midlothian Local Plan 2008, and to recommend that Council approves the relevant change to that Plan.

### **2 Background**

- 2.1** Recognition of the need to ease congestion and to provide a road transport link to best serve the development potential of the western part of Midlothian extends as far back as the 1990s. In 1998 the Council applied for planning permission for “A701 Transport Improvements”, comprising a new alignment of that road from its junction with the A720 Edinburgh City Bypass in the north, to its junction with the B7026 (Auchendinny Road) in the south. As this application was submitted under the former Notice of Intention to Develop procedures, the planning permission was deemed to be granted by letter from Scottish Ministers dated 1<sup>st</sup> February 2000.
- 2.2** Construction of a part of the scheme took place in 2002, that being the Gowkley Moss Roundabout and spur roads off it, including the link to the A7026 junction. There has been no other significant work undertaken on the remainder of the scheme. However, it was considered to remain of sufficient importance to be retained as a safeguarded realignment route in the current Midlothian Local Plan, as formally adopted in December 2008. That protected alignment commenced at a proposed new roundabout close to the A720 junction and a route then running southwards to the west of the current A701 road, crossing to the east of the current road in the vicinity of land which has more recently been developed by Asda, to a roundabout within Nivensknowe Road some 150 metres to the east of that road’s junction with the current A701; thereafter running southwards along a route parallel to the current road but about 200 metres to the east, to join the since constructed Gowkley Moss Roundabout, with the final spur to a new junction with the B7026 Auchendinny Road.
- 2.3** By 2012 it was becoming apparent that the remainder of the scheme may not be implemented. In explaining the continued need for a solution to the A701 route by way of a realignment, the Main Issues Report of the Midlothian Local Development Plan as published in May 2012 stated, “*There is a consented road proposal for a realigned A701 which, if constructed, would provide good strategic access to the corridor, with the existing road providing improved local access, public*

*transport priority and enhanced provision for cycling. However, economic factors, ground conditions and difficult engineering solutions have made it increasingly unlikely that the consented road scheme will ever be delivered and work has therefore been carried out to try to identify an alternative road alignment which may offer better prospects for delivery.”*

- 2.4** The Council’s Proposed Midlothian Local Development Plan as published in May 2014 does not show the original consented realignment route, but rather it proposes a route further to the west of the existing A701 road, running to the west of Bilston to a new junction with the A703 and a new spur from there to link to the A702 trunk road.

### **3 Process of Abandonment**

- 3.1** In normal course, as the new Local Development Plan progresses to adoption in 2016/early 2017 it would supersede the existing adopted Local Plan of 2008, and the previous protected alignment would fall. Similarly, although the planning permission for the scheme remains valid, as work has already started through the building of the Gowkley Moss Roundabout and spur to the B7026 junction, this permission will simply remain unimplemented in full due to another road option potentially being built.
- 3.2** However, whilst the road alignment remains protected in the adopted Local Plan, any proposals for development on that line would be regarded as contrary to the Local Plan and should be refused.
- 3.3** At one point, the protected road line runs adjacent to a long-established and successful employer which wishes to further develop their business and to expand their premises onto land which is currently protected for the A701 realignment. The land is in the ownership of the Council and negotiated heads of terms for its disposal have been agreed. To await the formal conclusion of local development plan procedures runs a significant risk of delay to the extent that the existing business may be constrained to relocate, possibly outwith Midlothian. Accordingly, there are sound business and economic development reasons for pursuing abandonment of the protected road line at an early date; although this does not guarantee that planning permission for any form of development will be granted by the Council as planning authority in the determination of any planning application that may subsequently be submitted.

### **4.0 Report Implications**

#### **4.1 Resources**

There are no financial implications arising from this report that cannot otherwise be accommodated within existing budgets. There are no personnel or other implications arising from this report.

#### **4.2 Risk**

There is no demonstrable prospect of the A701 road being realigned along the route protected in the adopted Midlothian Local Plan, for the reasons identified in paragraph 2.3 above. By contrast, there is a significant risk that retaining the protection until formal adoption of the new Local Development Plan could result in a long-established medium-sized business suffering undue constraint to its further development, with the added risk of relocation outwith the local area.

#### **4.3 Single Midlothian Plan and Business Transformation**

Themes addressed in this report:

- ☐ Community safety
- ☐ Adult health, care and housing
- ☐ Getting it right for every Midlothian child
- ☒ Improving opportunities in Midlothian
- ☒ Sustainable growth
- ☐ Business transformation and Best Value
- ☐ None of the above

#### **4.4 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan**

Opportunities for Midlothian based businesses to expand within Midlothian directly supports the key priority of economic development and business support.

#### **4.5 Impact on Performance and Outcomes**

See 4.4 above.

#### **4.6 Adopting a Preventative Approach**

Not directly relevant to this report.

#### **4.7 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders**

The adopted and emerging Local Plans have been subject to extensive public and stakeholder consultation. There is no substantial body of support for retention of the currently protected road line.

#### **4.8 Ensuring Equalities**

As this report does not propose any new policies or strategies it has not been the subject of an equalities assessment. The Local Development Plan is the subject of a formal equalities assessment.

#### **4.9 Supporting Sustainable Development**

Abandonment of the protected road line would release otherwise sterilised land for productive use.

#### **4.10 IT Issues**

None

### **5.0 Summary**

#### **5.1**

It is evident that there is no genuinely realistic prospect of the A701 road being realigned along the route as protected in the adopted Midlothian Local Plan 2008. Indeed, the emerging Local Development Plan shows a radically different proposed running for its entirety to the west of the existing A701. Whilst it would be reasonable to allow the

development plan procedures to ultimately allow this protected line to be superseded, the time taken for that could adversely impact on the opportunity for an existing long established medium-sized business to expand onto this otherwise sterilised land. Accordingly, this report looks to expedite the process of abandonment to assist economic development through enabling business expansion.

## **6 Recommendations**

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- a) agrees to abandon the protected route of the proposed A701 road realignment as shown and included in the adopted Midlothian Local Plan 2008; and
- b) to recommend to Council that it formally approves that decision of Cabinet.

**Date 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2015**

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**Background Papers: None**

### **Declaration Box**

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**Title of Report:** *Proposed Abandonment of Protected A701 Realignment in Adapted Midlothian Local Plan*

**Meeting Presented to:**

**Author of Report:** *Ian Johnson*

*I confirm that I have undertaken the following actions before submitting this report to the Council Secretariat (Check boxes to confirm):-*

- ☒ *All resource implications have been addressed. Any financial and HR implications have been approved by the Head of Finance and Integrated Service Support.*
- ☒ *All risk implications have been addressed.*
- ☒ *All other report implications have been addressed.*
- ☒ *My Director has endorsed the report for submission to the Council Secretariat.*

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*Likewise, please advise the Council Secretariat if any report for Midlothian Council has an education interest. The Religious Representatives are currently entitled to attend meetings of the Council in a non-voting observer capacity, but with the right to speak (but not vote) on any education matter under consideration, subject always to observing the authority of the Chair.*