

Title of report: Eastern River Crossing and Link Road

Meeting: Cabinet

Meeting date: Thursday 2 March 2023

Report by: Cabinet member Infrastructure and transport;

Classification

Open

Decision type

Key

This is a key decision because it is likely to result in the council incurring expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant having regard to the council's budget for the service or function concerned. A threshold of £500,000 is regarded as significant.

This is a key decision because it is likely to be significant having regard to: the strategic nature of the decision; and / or whether the outcome will have an impact, for better or worse, on the amenity of the community or quality of service provided by the authority to a significant number of people living or working in the locality (two or more wards) affected.

Notice has been served in accordance with Part 3, Section 9 (Publicity in Connection with Key Decisions) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

Wards affected

Backbury; Dinedor Hill; Tupsley;

Purpose

This report seeks Cabinet approval of the scheme objectives included in the body of the report which sets out the progress made to date in developing the Strategic Outline Business Case. The report also identifies the interrelationship with the Hereford City Masterplan and the Local Transport Plan, and suggests a broad timetable to take the scheme through to construction and operation.

Recommendation(s)

That:

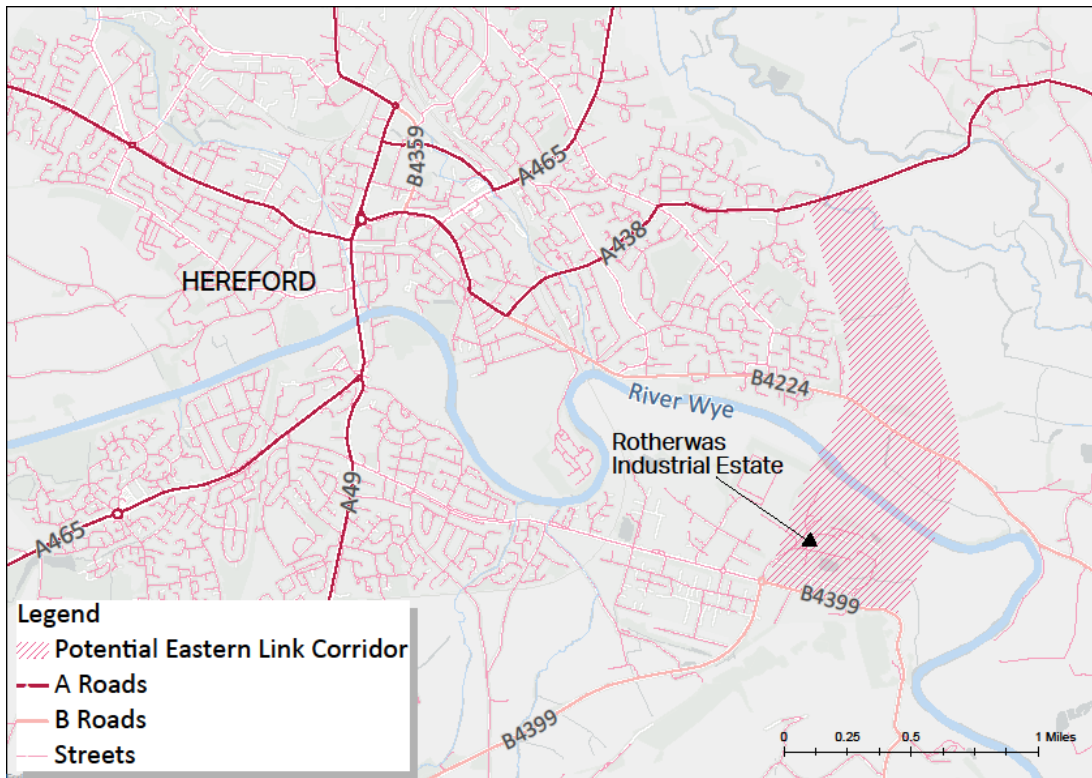
- a) Cabinet approves the project objectives as set out in this report;**
- b) Cabinet notes the progress in developing the Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) for the Eastern River Crossing and Link Road; and**
- c) The Service Director for Highways and Transport in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Transport and Infrastructure is authorised to take operational decisions associated with progressing the SOBC in respect of the project.**

Alternative options

1. The Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) will use the objectives recommended in this report to develop a long list of options. Benefits, risks and constraints will be considered before a short list of possible options is included in the SOBC report that will be finalised in the spring of 2023. There are currently no options that have been considered and rejected.

Key considerations

2. The Eastern River Crossing and Link Road (ERiC), formerly known as the Eastern Access Road, was identified in the Hereford Transport Strategy Review (HTSR) as essential to provide an alternative route for vehicular traffic to address the resilience issues around the A49 in the city centre. By providing an alternative route for traffic into and around the city, ERiC is considered vital to bring about the reductions in traffic levels and severance along key roads in the city that will enable achievement of the wider objectives of the Hereford City Masterplan (HCMP).
3. A broad route, connecting the B4399 (south) and the A438 (north) was identified in the HTSR as the preferred option, taking environmental, social and economic considerations into account. An indicative location for a new link road is shown on the plan below for illustrative purposes only; further detailed assessment and design will be required before a preferred alignment can be identified.



4. Major transport projects are typically progressed using the Department for Transport's (DfT) transport business case guidance (dated December 2022). This is a rigorous appraisal process that refines and develops transport proposals by considering the strategic, economic, financial, commercial and management dimensions of the project. This is necessary to ensure that transport proposals are aligned to the strategic context they operate in, represent value for money, are commercially and financially viable and are delivered efficiently so that users can realise the benefits sooner.
5. The first stage of any major transport project assessment is usually the preparation of a Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC). In this case, however, to ensure that there was proper consideration of the scheme objectives and underlying evidence base as a result of the HTSR, it was decided to undertake a full gap analysis of the original options appraisal work. This would also include other current developments such as the HCMP and the emerging Local Plan before starting the SOBC.
6. In June 2022 consultants AECOM were commissioned to carry out the gap analysis work, involving a comprehensive review of existing policies, strategies and previous studies. Alongside the Gap Analysis Report the consultants produced a Funding Options Report.
7. The broad recommendations and conclusions of this pre-feasibility assessment were that:
 - a) the strategic need for an additional river crossing and the traffic situation within Hereford is well evidenced and that the SOBC should be progressed.
 - b) an initial list of potential core funding sources has been identified, including government grants, revenue generating opportunities and financing options which involve the private sector.
8. Initial estimates at this stage put the scheme cost at around £56m.

9. The next stage, to develop the SOBC, was subsequently commissioned and work is currently under way in accordance with DfT guidance, to include:
- a) refining and further developing the case for the scheme particularly, at these initial stages, the strategic and economic cases;
 - b) identifying the technical feasibility and deliverability of the scheme;
 - c) refining and developing the scheme's alignment;
 - d) mapping and understanding constraints, including environmental constraints such as the location of high flood risk areas for the River Wye;
 - e) developing mitigation plans;
 - f) developing a detailed programme through to scheme opening;
 - g) developing a high level cost estimate for delivery of the scheme.
10. An important element of the SOBC is the development of a set of scheme objectives against which scheme options will be assessed and either rejected or retained for further investigation. It is important that these objectives are carefully considered and agreed as they will form the basis against which the scheme will be assessed as it is progressed. The objectives for which Cabinet approval is sought are:

Resilience	Improve resilience (reduce risk of disruption) in relation to incidents on, and maintenance of, the existing A49 Greyfriars Bridge.
Active travel	Increase mode share of active travel trips.
Public transport	Increase mode share for public transport trips.
Congestion	Reduce congestion on the existing river crossing and in Hereford city centre.
Safety	Improve road safety and reduce the frequency and severity of incidents.
Environment	Minimise impact on the environment, improve biodiversity and contribute and contribute towards making Herefordshire "nature rich".
Carbon	Reduce transport carbon emissions and contribute towards achieving Net Zero.
Growth	Improve transport links between residential and employment areas to the east of Hereford.
Health and Wellbeing	Improve health and quality of life for local residents.

11. Given the UK Government's commitment to achieving Net Zero, a recent announcement by the Welsh Government suggests an important shift towards the assessing the value of new road links in achieving wider transport and environmental aims. In future in Wales, support will only be granted for road schemes that:
- a) reduce carbon emissions and support a shift to public transport, walking and cycling.
 - b) improve safety through small-scale change.
 - c) help to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

d) provide connections to jobs and areas of economic activity in a way that maximises the use of public transport, walking and cycling.

In supporting the Hereford Masterplan and its step change for increased active travel and use of public transport, the objectives for the proposed Eastern River Crossing can be seen to align with emerging priorities for transport policy in the UK.

12. Early work on the SOBC has identified a number of constraints for any scheme that might be built, including the River Wye flood plain, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), scheduled ancient monuments and environmental conservation areas.
13. The SOBC is expected to be completed by late spring 2023. The report will consider the scheme's strategic, economic, financial, commercial, and management dimensions in line with DfT guidance to outline a long-list of possible options and a short-list of options recommended for further investigation.
14. Should the SOBC recommend further development of the scheme, the next stages of the project are set out below. The timescale has been developed using the template of a typical DfT-funded project and includes allowances for public consultation and any public inquiries.

Timescale	Stage	Detail
2023-2025	Outline Business Case (OBC)	Includes further option identification, assessment and selection, and including submission of a planning application
2025-2029	Full Business Case (FBC)	Includes preliminary design, statutory processes such as compulsory purchase powers, detailed design and preparation of documentation for construction
2029-2031	Construction and hand over	New scheme becomes the responsibility of the council following a maintenance period.

15. It should be noted that many of the stages included in the timeline are statutory processes and naturally follow a step-by-step approach. Experience of other similar schemes suggest that these are realistic, with typical project delivery timescales of between eight and ten years. While every effort would be made to implement the scheme as soon as possible it is too early to identify with any confidence the circumstances that would significantly alter the timeline set out above.

Community impact

16. The County Plan's Delivery Plan 2022-23 makes specific reference to delivering the Hereford Transport Strategy and the HCMP. The scheme both complements and supports the HCMP as set out in this report, thereby delivering the objective EN2.1 by beginning to implement the preferred options of the transport strategy.
17. In addition, by helping to remove traffic from the A49 corridor and the city centre, the project assists in the delivery of EN2.2 to continue to deliver and extend the Choose How You Move sustainable and active travel programme to increase levels of walking and cycling.

Environmental Impact

18. As part of the development of the project, the SOBC will include an assessment of the likely environmental impact of various scheme options and their possible mitigation. The development of this project will seek to minimise any adverse environmental impact and will actively identify opportunities to improve and enhance environmental performance.
19. Should the proposal progress beyond the SOBC stage to an Outline Business Case, the preparation of a planning application is expected to require the production of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). This will be a thorough assessment of the project's environmental impact and mitigation measures prepared in conjunction with statutory and non-statutory consultees and subject to public consultation as part of the planning application process.
20. In supporting the implementation of the HCMP the project seeks to deliver the council's environmental policy commitments and aligns to the following success measures in the County Plan.
 - a) Reduce the council's carbon emissions.
 - b) Work in partnership with others to reduce county carbon emissions.
 - c) Improve the air quality within Herefordshire.
 - d) Increase the number of short distance trips being done by sustainable modes of travel – walking, cycling, and public transport.

Equality duty

21. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to –

 - a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
21. The Equality Act 2010 established a positive obligation on local authorities to promote equality and to reduce discrimination in relation to any of the nine 'protected characteristics' (age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; marriage and civil partnership; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation). In particular, the council must have 'due regard' to the public sector equality duty when taking any decisions on service changes. Further development of the project will include an equality impact assessment.

Resource implications

22. The report to Cabinet on the HTSR of 24 June 2021 agreed to allocate £400,000 for the Eastern River Crossing and Link Road in order to commence feasibility work and develop the

business case. An additional £1,000,000 was committed from earmarked reserves at the Cabinet meeting of 29 September 2022 for the further development of the ERiC business case.

23. AECOM consultants were appointed through the Midlands Highways Alliance in June 2022 to carry out the pre-feasibility work as described in this report for a cost of £36,909. AECOM were further commissioned to prepare the subsequent SOBC for a cost of £159,382. Another £250,000 of the overall budget will form a contribution towards the development of a new Herefordshire Transport Model. This should be completed by the spring 2024 and is considered essential for developing and refining the business case at OBC and FBC stages. The balance of funds at the end of the SOBC stage will be reserved until a decision is made to advance to develop the OBC.
24. The majority of the work in the SOBC is being produced by AECOM, with support from council staff in the transportation team and the Programme Management Office (PMO).
25. The decision to move to the Outline Business Case will need to be agreed by Cabinet as it will include the preparation of a planning application supported by a number of detailed and complex work streams. Revised project management and delivery arrangements will be needed for such a project, together with a detailed financial plan, that will form part of a subsequent report to Cabinet.

Revenue or Capital cost of project (indicate R or C)	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Future Years	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Pre-feasibility Report (R)	0	37	0		37
Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) (R)	0	120	39		159
Contribution to new Herefordshire Transport Model (R)	0	250	0		250
TOTAL	0	407	39		446

Funding streams (indicate whether base budget / external / grant / capital borrowing)	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Future Years	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
One off revenue funding (Cabinet 24 June 2021)	400	0			400
Earmarked Reserves (Cabinet 29 Sept 2022)	0	1,000			1,000
TOTAL	400	1,000			1,400

Legal implications

26. Herefordshire Council is the Local Highway Authority and Local Transport Authority.
27. The Council as the Local Highway Authority undertakes through the public realm contract highways and infrastructure improvements using powers under relevant primary legislation

including the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, Highways Act 1980, Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, Traffic Management Act 2004, Transport Act 2000, and other related regulations.

28. The council is under a legal obligation to ensure that it continues to meet its statutory obligations with regards the improvement of the highway network and infrastructure as the Highway Authority and the Local Transport Authority under the relevant legislation.
29. There are no specific legal implications associated with the project at this stage but some projects within the programme will have legal implications and require legal assistance. For example, this may include the acquisition of land in third party ownership and development of Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) should the project progress.

Risk management

30. The following risks and mitigation have been identified:

Risk	Mitigation
Insufficient in-house capacity and/or expertise to progress the project to meet imposed deadlines.	The report identifies the commissioning of specialist consultants to provide specific technical expertise in a timely manner. This will assist in-house staff to manage and direct the overall project plan and individual work packages. Project management support will be provided by the PMO.
A number of major projects and plans are being developed on a similar timeframe, including the HCMP, the LTP, ERiC and the Local Plan. This runs the risk of confusion or consultation fatigue for partners, stakeholders and the public.	The development of these key strategies and plans will be coordinated through a single communications and engagement strategy so that the interrelationships between the various elements is fully understood.
Reputational risk of missed deadlines or budget overruns.	The report sets out how external resources have been procured in order to boost capacity and capability of the project teams. Resources from the PMO will provide project management resources to help deliver projects on time and to budget.
A new Herefordshire Transport Model is not procured to allow progress of future business case and scheme development.	A consultant is expected to be appointed in February 2023 to develop a new updated transport model for the county. Delivery of the new model is expected by March 2024 which will then be able to support the detailed work of any future Outline Business Case without impacting on the project's progress.

Consultees

31. Consultation with key stakeholders will form part of the development of the SOBC but this will be limited in nature. Should the project progress to Outline Business Case full stakeholder and

public consultation will inform the selection of the preferred option and the associated planning application.

32. Political Group Consultation took place on 31 January 2023 and the following key points were raised:
- a) The importance of the project was stressed and there was a case for further bridge crossings.
 - b) The timescale to deliver the project was challenged, being seen as taking too long.
 - c) There needs to be consideration of the measures needed to manage the impact on local roads from the change in traffic flows as a result of the new link road.
 - d) Whether detrunking of the A49 should be included in the scheme objectives in order to help create the reductions in traffic to allow the masterplan to be delivered.

Appendices

None

Background papers

None identified

Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

Governance	John Coleman	Date 01/02/2023
Finance	Louise Devlin	Date 24/01/2023
Legal	Sharon Bennett-Matthews	Date 26/01/2023
Communications	Luenne Featherstone	Date 24/01/2023
Equality Duty	Harriet Yellin	Date 01/02/2023
Procurement	Lee Robertson	Date 24/01/2023
Risk	Kevin Lloyd	Date 25/01/2023

Approved by
Date

Ross Cook, Corporate Director, Economy and Environment
02/02/2023

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

DfT	Department for Transport
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
ERiC	Eastern River Crossing and Link Road
FBC	Full Business Case
HCMP	Hereford City Masterplan
HTSR	Hereford Transport Strategy Review
LTP	Local Transport Plan
OBC	Outline Business Case
PMO	Programme Management Office
SOBC	Strategic Outline Business Case
TRO	Traffic Regulation Order