

38/2008/045

SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL

CONSTRUCTION OF “THIRD WAY” ROAD INCLUDING A NEW BRIDGE OVER THE RIVER TONE BETWEEN CASTLE STREET AND WOOD STREET, TAUNTON

322500/124685REG 3/4:OBSERVATIONS - SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL DECISION

PROPOSAL

The proposal is an application by the County Council for the provision of the Third Way road between Castle Street and Wood Street. The development includes new sections of road and a new bridge over the River Tone and is a scheme being delivered and grant funded by the Department of Transport, together with contributions from Somerset County Council and relevant developers. The scheme is part of Taunton Transport Strategy which seeks to remove traffic from key shopping streets in the town centre thereby providing a more convenient and safer environment.

The identified objectives of the “Third Way” as part of the Taunton Transport Strategy are specifically to meet the requirements of the Strategy and Project Taunton, to reduce the rate of growth in congestion in the town centre, to improve air quality in the town centre, to provide additional road capacity to accommodate planned growth and to provide a safe and well linked pedestrian and cycle network. The overall scheme includes works within and adjacent to the highway as well as the application site involves the construction of a new bridge over the River Tone west of Goodlands Gardens, a new bridge over the Mill Stream to replace the temporary bridge, construction of 150m of new carriageway and realignment of a further 300m, provision of two signalised junctions to serve adjacent development sites, improvements to the Bridge Street/Wood Street junction and provision of pedestrian and cycle facilities. The road will be single carriageway varying in width throughout its length, but will be 6m wide across the Tangier Bridge, widening for junctions and tie ins to existing roads. The new River Bridge will be a classic arch form that comprises two skeletal steel arches carrying a road deck and two pedestrian walkways. The footways will be boarded and will be cantilevered from the sides of the structure to separate them from the road and enable open views. The height of the bridge allows for continued cycleway/footway passage under the bridge on the north side and ensures that navigation of the river is not restricted.

The application is accompanied by a Planning Supporting Statement, Design and Access Statement, Landscape Design Statement and Draft Management Plan, Transport Assessment and Traffic Modelling final report, Noise Assessment, Ground Investigation Report, Flood Risk Assessment, Ecological Surveys and Archaeological Investigation.

CONSULTATIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS

LANDSCAPE OFFICER - The proposals do not show any scope for shrub planting on the embankments. Is there a tree planting scheme associated with the proposals but not within the red line area? If not I would be concerned that the proposal will look stark.

RIGHTS OF WAY/DIVERSIONS OFFICER - A footway runs parallel to the River Tone at this point. It is not recorded as a public right of way on the definitive map or in any path statement relating to it. However having been used by the general public without let or hindrance for in excess of 20 years it would be difficult to deny use by the public and therefore a temporary closure order is recommended during the period when construction (if approved) takes place.

LEISURE DEVELOPMENT - Manager: No observations.

DRAINAGE OFFICER - No objection to the drainage proposals contained in the Flood Risk Assessment and the Conceptual Drainage Design Report. As both the River Tone and Mill Stream are both main rivers the Environment Agency should be consulted regarding flood risk, land drainage consents and flood storage compensation.

FORWARD PLAN UNIT –

1.0 General

- 1.1 While the principle of the Third Way is supported, the design of the scheme does not adequately reflect the planning context for the area through which it passes.
- 1.2 The supporting statements make reference to policy guidance (National Policy, Regional Policy & Local Policy). There is only passing reference to the Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan (TCAAP), which was submitted to the Secretary of State in October 2007. Unfortunately, there is no detailed consideration of the content of the Urban Design Framework or the supporting Design Code (Terence O'Rourke), both of which date from 2004. There is also no reference to the Taunton Town Centre Design Code SPD (currently subject to consultation).
- 1.3 There is concern that the scheme design does not reflect recent (2007) Government advice on highway design, contained in the publication *Manual for Streets*. *MfS* is not solely applicable to residential roads, and its main principles need to be applied to urban streets like the Third Way. This is especially true in terms of materials, landscaping, the relationship to adjoining development sites and provision for non-motorised users.

2.0 **Bridge Street Junction**

- 2.1 While some changes are proposed to this junction, the scheme does not appear to change the relative priorities. There is no visual indication to

encourage southbound traffic using Bridge Street to turn right onto the Third Way, with what is now the 'straight ahead' movement towards The Bridge being downgraded. Removal of non-essential traffic from The Bridge and North Street is a key proposal of the TCAAP, so that priority can be given to pedestrians, buses and cyclists. As designed, the junction looks as though it may not be compatible with future creation of a 'gateway' feature leading into the core of the town centre.

- 2.2 We are concerned about the lack of detail regarding remedial finishing of the elevation to Bridge Street following the demolition of the corner building.
- 2.3 Whilst not an element of this scheme, we would like to see the County and Partners working towards 'off-peak' (and possibly 'full-time') pedestrianisation of Taunton Town Centre. We should move quickly to scheme design (options) and then consultation. Pedestrianisation works need to be implemented at the same time or very shortly after the opening of The Third Way.
- 2.4 The footways in this area should be 'tied in' to the existing surfaces in Bridge Street using paving slabs, rather than tarmac as indicated (see also comments below).

3.0 Yarde Place

- 3.1 The scheme drawings appear to suggest that the junction between Yarde Place and Wood Street will be closed. However, if it is to be closed, then how are vehicles to turn on Yarde Place? The new arrangements may also present difficulties for delivery vehicles (Poundstretcher). We understand that the current arrangement is for such vehicles to reverse in to the Poundstretcher service yard, which requires manoeuvring in the mouth of the junction of Yarde Place.

4.0 Land adjoining Greenbrook Terrace

- 4.1 Land west of the road at Greenbrook Terrace is allocated for housing development under Policy Tg 1 of the TCAAP. The road scheme shows part of this area being used for a bus stop. The residual area of land after construction of the road (without the bus stop) will already be small, and addition of a bus stop would further reduce the site's development potential. Indeed, parts of the site may become undevelopable. The land belongs to the Borough Council, who could be faced with a substantial loss of receipts from future development.
- 4.2 Providing a bus stop as shown would also make it very difficult to achieve a satisfactory built form of development along a key main road frontage. For example, it would not be appropriate for the building line to have to 'zigzag' around lay-bys, shelters and other features. Moreover, a greater setback of the building line (at least 5m) should be provided for than that on Standish Court to the north (which has virtually none, despite being on what will be a busy main street). We note that there is a loading bay to the east of this proposed bus stop. Can this be extended to be used as a bus stop? We question the need to have buses passing along The Third Way. Surely they

should be using the town centre. We request that the proposed bus stop be eliminated from the scheme.

4.3 Continued access will be needed to the Borough Council's street sweeping compound or, if this is not possible, a suitable alternative location will need to be found as part of the scheme.

4.4 The bus stop on the opposite side of the road, west of Lidl, also involves taking additional land belonging to the Borough Council.

5.0 South Bank Riverside Path

5.1 The scheme does not show how connections will be made to the south bank riverside path, which will form a key link in the strategic pedestrian and cycle network serving Taunton town centre. The path on the upstream side of the bridge across the River Tone is to be provided by developers. It is essential that the design of the scheme provides for a continuous south bank path with a suitable crossing of the Third Way. The illustrations of the proposed bridge imply that there will be no continuous path at all, either over or under the Third Way, which would not be acceptable.

5.2 Can the bridge design be modified to enable pedestrians and cyclists to pass under the bridge? Alternatively, can the riverside path be lowered to enable access under the bridge? If neither of these is possible, then a crossing point should be provided that will enable pedestrians/cyclists to cross The Third Way in a safe and convenient manner? A crossing point should be direct and not circuitous. A pedestrian/cycle refuge may be a solution.

6.0 Access to the Enfield Car Park

6.1 The Enfield car park is a redevelopment sites (retail and residential). The current access road is narrow and may need to be widened to enable appropriate vehicular movements to and from the site.

7.0 Pedestrian and cycle facilities

7.1 We understand that Sustrans are providing detailed comments on these aspects; also that the Smarter Choices Team (SCC) may also have comments to make.

7.2 We note however that no pedestrian crossing is shown on the eastern arm of the junction in Castle Street, adjoining the Scout and Guide Centre. It is preferable to have on road cycle lanes in both directions, rather than encouraging cyclists to ride on the pavement as indicated on the north side of Castle Street.

7.3 The cycle route emerging from Goodland Gardens on Castle Street needs to be properly linked to new cycle lanes

7.4 The cycle connection from French Weir along Mill Stream appears to involve a significant detour along the Third Way and the use of a refuge in the centre.

This is not appropriate. Cyclists and pedestrians must be able to cross TTW in one manoeuvre.

- 7.5 As a general point, crossing points with a central refuge should be avoided. There are a number of these along the route of TTW. They are not convenient for pedestrians and cyclists. As above, pedestrians and cyclists must be able to cross TTW in one manoeuvre.

8.0 Footway surfaces

- 8.1 Footways along the scheme are shown as being surfaced in tarmac. This is not a sufficiently high quality material for what will become key town centre streets. Where new footways are being constructed, or significant changes are being made to existing footways, paving slabs should instead be used. Otherwise, the overall visual effect of the new road will be drab, and particularly unwelcoming to pedestrians (of whom there are likely to be increasing numbers walking, for example, between Tesco and the town centre).

- 8.2 There are some areas where the footways are likely to have to be widened or replaced when subsequent development occurs. In these areas a lower standard of finish may be acceptable, but this is an issue that needs further discussion and clarification.

- 8.3 The choice of surfacing material should be guided by the emerging Taunton Design Code SPD. (Copies of the draft SPD have been supplied to the County Council).

9.0 Soft landscaping

- 9.1 No trees are shown within the footway areas. Instead, planting is indicated on the embankments at the rear of the footways. This does not reflect the UDF (particularly as regards Castle Street) and emerging development proposals for the Tangier and Wood Street areas, in which building lines will adjoin the back of the footway.

- 9.2 The scheme seems to adopt a conservative approach to the planting of trees on the highway. This seems contrary to recent Government advice in *Manual for Streets*, which suggests that trees can be planted in footway areas, including in some cases within visibility splays. Traffic flows on the Third Way will be no higher than on many established urban radials on which street trees, as well as shops and kerbside parking, can be found.

- 9.3 There are considerations which go beyond 'traditional' highway design standards, such as the need for urban regeneration through creating a better street environment, shading for pedestrians from summer sunshine, etc. In combination with tarmac footways, the absence of street trees in the scheme as drawn will result in a very bleak urban environment.

9.4 Soft landscaping needs to take the form of trees within the footways, close to the kerb line, in the form of avenue planting. Any trees or other soft landscaping planted to the rear of footways in Castle Street are likely to need to be removed within a few years to enable shop fronts, dwellings and other development to be erected. To avoid wasted expenditure, further discussions may be useful to clarify precisely where this issue may arise.

1 LETTER OF OBJECTION - on the basis that the road is unnecessary, it will bring more chaos to Bridge Street and Station Road, the idea for the road is out of date, it will cause misery to the people who have to negotiate the junction of Wood Street/Bridge Street, previous views have been ignored and oppose the road to nowhere.

POLICY CONTEXT

RPG10 – Regional Planning Guidance for the South West

Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review

STR1 – Sustainable Development

STR4 – Development in Towns

POLICY1 – Nature Conservation

POLICY11 – Areas of High Archaeological Potential

POLICY40 – Town Strategies

POLICY42 – Walking

POLICY43 – Access for the Mobility Impaired

POLICY44 - Cycling

POLICY54 – Transport Proposals and the Environment

POLICY55 – Major Highway Improvements

Taunton Deane Local Plan

S1 – General Requirements

S2 – Design

M5 – Cycling

EN3 – Local Wildlife and Geological Sites

EN23 – Areas of High Archaeological Potential

EN25 – The Water Environment

T30 – Walking Encouragement

T31 – Pedestrian Priority Measures

T32 – Major Highway Schemes

Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan Submission

Tg1 – Wood Street sites

ASSESSMENT

The proposal for the Third Way road is a scheme that has been a long term commitment in both the Structure and Local Plan and also forms part of the Taunton Transport Strategy. The proposal forms part of a range of transport proposals which seek to provide a more sustainable transport infrastructure across the town. The

scheme forms an element of the redevelopment of the Tangier area and given that the funding is now in place the implementation of this scheme is considered an important element of this redevelopment which should be supported in principle.

The red line application site includes the new stretch of road and the bridge over the River Tone. The remainder of the works are within or adjacent to the existing highway and are proposed under the permitted rights afforded to the Highway Authority.

The proposed Tangier Bridge design consists of a lightweight steel arch structure with the deck supported by a fan-shaped array of steel hangers and boarded footways to the sides of the structure separating pedestrians from road traffic. The bridge design as proposed is considered to be an acceptable one in principle.

Policy Tg1 of the Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan (TCAAP) has the area south of Greenbrook Terrace allocated for housing. This is a triangular area of land and the road proposed will be set 1.8m above existing ground level and with the proposed bus stop and adjacent banking this will take up more of the land making development here more difficult. The view of the Forward Plan Unit that the bus stop in this location should be deleted is recommended.

The cycleways proposed involve a mixture of on street and off street provision. The route along the north side of the river is maintained with the bridge designed to carry over this route. The intention in the TCAAP is to provide a riverside route along the southern side of the river. This is to be provided by developers on the up-stream side of the crossing. The current scheme would not appear to be able to achieve a continuation of this due to the increase in height levels of up to 2m required to achieve the level of the road and the bridge abutment. An alternative route to achieve the crossing of the Third Way road on the southern side will therefore be necessary and should be addressed before permission is granted.

The pedestrian and cycle route facilities outside of the red line application site also need to be reconsidered to ensure safe and convenient links are provided. The provision of appropriate street furniture also needs to be considered and only details of new lighting columns have been indicated. These are standard street lighting columns. Lighting of the new bridge is proposed through low level light sources set within the structure. Lighting of the new road and bridge are important issues in terms of the use of the river corridor by wildlife including protected species such as bats and otters. Alternative detailing of lighting columns in design terms should be considered as should the extent of any lighting impacts of the scheme. The footway surfaces are currently shown as tarmac other than the bridge crossing which is timber. The improvement of surface materials on this important new route to reflect the emerging Taunton Design Code should be considered in order to achieve a friendlier urban environment and this should be incorporated into the scheme.

The proposal involves a loss of a number of riverside trees due to the construction proposed and a number of new trees are proposed to compensate for this loss. Replacement planting will be of native trees and shrubs, which will enhance the wildlife resources in the area. Where trees are lost to the north of the river, including some of the existing smaller poplar trees these will be replaced with extra Heavy

Standard trees of an appropriate species. The scheme does not include any trees within the footways and there is a concern that this will result in a bleak urban environment and it is recommended that this issue be considered further as part of any landscaping scheme.

The proposal is a long-standing commitment, is part of the Local Plan and has the necessary funding. It is therefore considered appropriate to raise no objection to the principle of construction. However the concerns raised in respect of the design, layout and landscaping issues are valid and it is recommended that these should be addressed by the applicant prior to any permission being granted.

RECOMMENDATION

Taunton Deane Borough Council raise NO OBJECTION subject to further consideration be given to the design in terms layout and pedestrian/cycle crossing points including the proposed strategic route, details of lighting columns and extent of lighting impacts, materials of footways and landscaping of the scheme.

REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION:-

In preparing this report the Planning Officer has considered fully the implications and requirements of the Human Rights Act 1998.

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NOTES: