

Bexhill to Hastings Link Road

Chapter 17: Conclusion

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17 Conclusion

17.1 Basis for the Scheme

17.1.1 The Scheme is primarily a regeneration scheme and an integral part of the package of measures within the Hastings and Bexhill Five Point Plan (FFP), a ten year investment programme developed by the South East England Development Agency and the Hastings and Bexhill Task Force launched in March 2002. Also during 2002, the Government-commissioned South Coast Multi-Modal Study (SoCOMMS) explored and tested the FFP transport package and concluded that the Bexhill to Hastings Link Road should be taken forward as the one local road proposal element of the regeneration measures for Hastings.

17.2 Summary of Impacts

Policy and Planning

17.2.1 The Scheme meets national, regional and county level transport objectives and policies and is linked with the development strategy for the area in terms of local plan policies and the longer term regional spatial strategy. In releasing land for development, the Scheme provides the basis by which the regeneration and the growth of Bexhill and Hastings can take place in a sustainable manner given the constraints that face East Sussex. In doing so the Scheme meets policy objectives at all levels in relation to social and community effects. As a result of the adoption of a comprehensive package of mitigation measures and proposed compensation, the Scheme performs well in terms of environmental policies which enable development to proceed subject to acceptable mitigation. Nonetheless, the Scheme would still involve residual environmental impacts.

17.2.2 When considered in the round, the Scheme has as far as reasonably practicable sought to minimise its impacts upon the environment whilst addressing the need to enable the provision of job opportunities, affordable housing and enhanced accessibility within areas of identified concentrated need as part of a development strategy which is considered to be the most sustainable option for East Sussex. On balance, the Scheme would therefore result in a moderate beneficial and significant effect in terms of meeting the thrust of key policies and plans.

Travel and Transport

17.2.3 The forecast traffic impacts show that the overall number of vehicle trips on the highway network would increase with the Scheme by 0.3% in the Opening Year (2010) and by 3.2% in the Design Year (2025) compared with the Do-Minimum (i.e. without the Scheme). However, the Scheme would achieve large reductions in traffic along the A259 Glyne Gap between Bexhill and Hastings and a reduction in traffic volumes on the A259 seafront route through Hastings. Traffic would also reduce on the Harley Shute Road and the A2036 on the east side of Bexhill, together with a significant reduction on rural

roads, largely in the AONB, to the north of Bexhill and Hastings. This would result in less traffic through local villages, including Crowhurst and through Battle. By the Design Year (2025) there would be more traffic on the overall highway network which would erode these benefits to some degree, although traffic levels would remain less than those forecast in the same year without the Scheme.

17.2.4 Traffic is forecast to increase on some roads in Bexhill parallel to and approaching the Scheme. Within Hastings traffic levels along the B2092 Queensway and B2093 The Ridge are forecast to increase with the Scheme, with the increased number of trips between Bexhill and Hastings resulting in traffic increases in the Hollington area of Hastings. The Scheme would result in improved journey speeds and reduced delays at junctions on the A259 between the two towns and significant reductions in delays at junctions on the approach to Battle on the A2100 and at the junction of the B2204 with the A269 at Bexhill. Bus journey times would considerably improve along the A259 corridor between the two towns, with bus priority measures expected to be implemented some time after the opening of the Scheme helping to secure these benefits for the future.

17.2.5 The Scheme would result in a slight increase in accidents during the construction phase due to the additional vehicle movements associated with construction related traffic. Despite the overall increase in traffic as a result of the Scheme, accidents and casualties would be reduced once the Scheme is opened as traffic switches from roads with high accident rates onto the Scheme. Over a 60 year period the Scheme has been forecast to result in a reduction in nearly 900 accidents and 1,300 associated casualties equating to a saving of an average of 15 accidents per year.

17.2.6 The Scheme would have a moderate beneficial impact upon the security of the travelling public as a result of the introduction of lighting at the junctions at either end of the Scheme and the provision of the Greenway to accommodate activities such as cycling, walking and horse riding. On balance, the Scheme would result in a neutral impact upon driver stress during both the construction and operational phases.

17.2.7 The Scheme would provide the opportunity to improve the view for drivers in comparison to the existing view from the urban section of the A259 between Bexhill and Hastings. Drivers would not have long views out from the Scheme but would experience a well designed green corridor with managed planting either side. Drivers using the country lanes to the north of the Scheme would also experience an improvement in the view from the road as a result of the reduction in traffic in the rural areas. Overall the Scheme would provide a significant benefit over the views from the existing road network.

Agriculture and Forestry

17.2.8 The implementation of the Scheme, with the appropriate reclamation of agricultural land following construction, would lead to the permanent loss of 38.6ha of Grade 2 and 3a 'best and most versatile' land resulting in a moderate adverse and significant impact upon agricultural land quality. The Scheme would also result in loss of farm land and severance management difficulties for a number of local farms within the Combe Haven Valley. Glovers

Farm and Hillcroft Farm would both experience a major adverse impact during construction, with Acton's Farm, Decoy Farm and Upper Wilting Farm likely to be moderately adversely affected during the construction period. These impacts would reduce following the implementation of a range of mitigation measures including the provision of replacement land and reclamation of certain areas of agricultural land temporarily lost during construction. However, the overall impact of the Scheme upon farm holdings after mitigation would be moderately adverse and therefore significant.

Geology and Soils

17.2.9 Several possible contaminant sources have been identified within both the Bexhill Connection and rural sections of the Scheme. Further intrusive investigation would be carried out to establish the scale and significance of possible contaminants, followed by the implementation of remediation measures on site or the removal of contaminated material off-site where this proves impracticable. The implementation of appropriate mitigation measures to contain, remediate or remove contaminated material would result in an overall neutral impact. The implementation of appropriate slope design to prevent slope failure and the adoption of best practice relating to the stripping, storage and respreading of topsoils on site would result in a neutral impact upon the local geological and soil resource.

Water Quality and Drainage

17.2.10 The Combe Haven has a catchment area of 51.5km² comprising 10 sub-catchments including its Main River tributaries. Those Main Rivers to the north of the Combe Haven have a 'good' water quality rating, whilst the Combe Haven itself has a 'fairly good' water quality rating. The Scheme is underlain by a minor aquifer along its entire route, with vulnerability varying from low to high and a depth predominantly at or very close to the surface. The Scheme would not cross any Groundwater Protection Zones for public water supplies.

17.2.11 The implementation of good site working practices through the Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) would ensure that the water environment would not be significantly affected during the construction period. The inclusion of containment measures to control any spill as part of the drainage design for the Scheme would adequately reduce the risk of spillages polluting the surrounding receiving waters as a result of a road traffic accident or vehicle fire. The provision of swales and attenuation ponds would pretreat routine highway surface water runoff from the road prior to being returned to the flood plain or water courses. Whilst the Scheme would result in the loss of part of the flood plain, the provision of flood compensation within the valleys adjacent to the Scheme would accommodate a 100 year return period (plus 20% global warming factor). With the adoption of appropriate mitigation measures the Scheme would be likely to have a neutral impact in terms of potential ground water and surface water pollution and flooding.

Nature Conservation and Biodiversity

17.2.12 The alignment of the Scheme has been designed to avoid direct impacts upon the Combe Haven and Marline Valley Woods Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). However, visual intrusion and noise associated with construction activity on site could result in a temporary moderate adverse and significant impact upon these designated habitats during the construction period. The impact of the Scheme upon habitats, flora and fauna during construction would not be significant due to the implementation of good site working practices to prevent pollution of receiving waters through the CEMP and other mitigation such as the erection of animal, reptile and amphibian fencing and translocation of protected species.

17.2.13 The operational phase of the Scheme would not have a direct impact upon the Combe Haven and Marline Valley Woods SSSIs. However, noise and visual disturbance from road traffic and users of the Greenway would have a slight adverse impact upon these designated sites. The Scheme would result in a statistically significant increase in nitric acid deposition within these areas. Nitric acid is rapidly absorbed on contact with surfaces such as soil and vegetation. It is difficult to quantify the effect of such deposition as there have been few relevant studies relating to the habitats present within the study area, although there is general evidence to suggest that damage can be caused to such ecosystems as a result of nitric acid deposition. As a result of this uncertainty, the potential impact upon ecosystems close to the Scheme as a result of nitric acid deposition has been assessed as slight to moderate adverse.

17.2.14 Extensive habitat creation as part of the environmental compensation package for the Scheme would result in a gain in all of the principal habitats currently present within the study area. However, there would be a slight adverse impact prior to the establishment of these areas of new habitat and as a result of the reduction in open farmland adversely affecting species that use this form of habitat.

17.2.15 The Scheme would have a slight adverse impact upon bats due to the road corridor acting as a partial barrier to movement. Whilst mitigation measures to enhance habitat networks for the local Dormouse population would largely offset the impact for the Scheme upon this species, there is the possibility that small populations to the south of the road would become isolated. The loss of foraging habitat for Badgers within the Bexhill Connection and associated disruption would be mitigated to some degree by sett relocation and the provision of Badger tunnels, although this species would be likely to experience a residual slight adverse impact after mitigation. Despite the overall net gain in breeding and feeding habitat for the Red and Amber List birds present, breeding densities would be likely to reduce adjacent to the Scheme for some species largely due to increased noise from traffic.

17.2.16 The overall impact of the Scheme upon nature conservation and biodiversity interests within the study area would be slight adverse and therefore not significant. However, East Sussex County Council is proposing to investigate the possibility of raising water levels within the Combe Haven SSSI in co-operation with local landowners and the Environment Agency. Should this prove possible and the relevant land be entered into a Higher

Level Environmental Stewardship Scheme, water levels could be raised to an optimum level for wildlife thereby further helping to off-set the adverse impacts of the Scheme.

Air Quality

17.2.17 The Scheme would be likely to have a moderate adverse and potentially significant impact in terms of construction dust. However, the implementation of good site working practices managed through the CEMP would help to reduce the risk of construction dust causing a significant adverse impact upon human health and soiling of vegetation.

17.2.18 Once operational, the Scheme would have a significant beneficial impact in terms of the air quality effects upon human health. Nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and particulate matter (PM₁₀) concentrations would reduce, particularly along the A259 road corridor and within the Hastings Air Quality Management Area contributing to the delivery of the Air Quality Action Plan being developed by Hastings Borough Council.

17.2.19 The Scheme would elevate nitrogen oxides (NO_x) concentrations along the line of the route breaching the air quality limit for the protection of vegetation in the vicinity of the Combe Haven and Marline Valley Woods SSSIs. The Scheme would result in a statistically significant increase in nitric acid deposition within these areas.

17.2.20 Greenhouse gases would marginally increase as a result of the Scheme, although the degree of change from the Do-Minimum scenario (i.e. without Scheme) would be negligible and therefore not significant.

Noise and Vibration

17.2.21 Having regard to existing guidance, it is considered that a 75dB L_{Aeq, 12 hr} daytime noise limit should apply to properties near existing roads and a 70dB L_{Aeq, 12 hr} daytime limit should apply to properties currently not exposed to significant existing levels of traffic noise in relation to the assessment of construction noise impacts. A total of 49 residential properties may receive construction noise levels in excess of these limits for an aggregate of less than 10 months of the construction programme. One commercial property would experience noise levels above the relevant limits for an aggregate of 22 weeks during the construction period. No community facilities are predicted to receive noise levels above the limits during the construction phase of the Scheme.

17.2.22 Noise mitigation would be an essential part of the Scheme, with noise barriers in the form of 1.8m high close boarded fencing due to be provided in appropriate locations along the Bexhill Connection and a combination of noise barriers and bunding proposed to help mitigate noise impacts along the rural section of the Scheme. In addition, a Thin Surface Course would be specified for the road surface which would provide some improvement over the use of traditional hot rolled asphalt surfacing.

17.2.23 A total of 520 residential properties would experience a significant increase in traffic noise once the Scheme becomes operational, of which 59 would experience a major change of 15 dB $L_{A10, 18 \text{ hr}}$ or greater. A total of 1740 properties are expected to benefit from a minimal to slight reduction in traffic noise of between 1 and 5 dB $L_{A10, 18 \text{ hr}}$ and to benefit from an up to 10% reduction in noise nuisance as a result of the Scheme. In comparison, 3,067 properties are predicted to receive a minimal or slight traffic noise increase of between 1 and 5 dB $L_{A10, 18 \text{ hr}}$ due to traffic growth without the Scheme.

17.2.24 The Scheme would also result in a significant traffic noise increase of between 10 and 15 dB $L_{A10, 18}$ for one commercial premises and three community facilities based at Bexhill High School and the leisure centre off Down Road in Bexhill.

17.2.25 Based upon the numbers of properties likely to be affected by traffic noise and the balance of the associated range of potential noise increases, the Scheme would be likely to have an overall moderate adverse and significant impact in terms of noise changes.

Landscape and Visual Impacts

17.2.26 The urban section of the Scheme would lie predominantly within the disused railway corridor within the townscape of north Bexhill. The rural section of the Scheme would pass through the Combe Haven valley to the north of Bexhill which is an area of pleasant rural farmed landscape between Bexhill and the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) further to the north.

17.2.27 The majority of construction activity within the urban section of the Scheme would be contained within the disused railway corridor. However, the movement of vehicles into and out of the site and disruption caused by bridge demolition and reconstruction would have a moderate adverse and significant temporary effect upon the local townscape during the construction phase of the Scheme. The scale and nature of construction activity within the Combe Haven valley associated with the construction of the road, associated structures and extensive earthworks would result in a substantial adverse and significant landscape impact during the construction phase.

17.2.28 The construction of the Scheme would result in an overall moderate adverse and significant impact upon a range of residential and commercial properties. The visual impact upon users of the public rights of way and permissive paths which cross the Combe Haven valley during the construction phase would be substantially adverse and therefore significant.

17.2.29 The integration of the Scheme within the local townscape and landscape and reduction of potential visual intrusion has been central to the development of the design for the Scheme. Townscape impacts would be likely to be neutral with the Scheme largely contained within the disused railway corridor. Any relatively minor adverse impacts would be balanced by reductions in traffic along the A259 east of Belle Hill junction and London Road and secondary benefits associated with traffic reductions in Bulverhythe and Harley Shute Road.

17.2.30 The considerable earthworks associated with the Scheme would help to enclose the new road and associated traffic to a greater degree and coupled with noise fencing would help to reduce the noise impact on the surrounding countryside and enable the retention of remoteness in part of the Combe Haven valley. Nevertheless, the Scheme would be likely to have a moderate adverse and significant landscape impact in the Opening Year (Year 1), reducing to slight adverse by the Design Year (Year 15) by which time proposed mitigation planting would have established to help integrate and contain the Scheme.

17.2.31 The reduction in traffic within the AONB to the north of the Scheme and within the historic town of Battle and within the Hastings seafront Conservation Areas would result in a slight beneficial impact in both landscape and townscape terms.

17.2.32 The Scheme would result in a moderate adverse and significant visual impact upon 76 residential properties in the Opening Year, reducing to 4 by the Design Year when mitigation planting would have established an effective visual screen. A further 82 properties would experience an initial slight adverse visual impact, reducing to 72 by the Design Year. These visual impacts would be marginally offset by the slight visual benefits for 42 properties in the Opening Year as a result of a reduction in traffic. The overall visual impacts on commercial properties would be slight adverse in the Opening Year reducing to negligible for the majority by the Design Year.

17.2.33 The visual impact of the Scheme would be more significant for users of the public rights of way and permissive paths within the Combe Haven valley. Views from 845m of path would experience an initial substantial adverse visual impact upon the opening the Scheme, reducing to 580m by the Design Year. Views from a further 3,863m of path would experience an initial moderate adverse visual impact, reducing to 885m by the Design Year. However, the majority of paths within the study area would experience either no change in visual amenity or an insignificant visual impact as a result of the Scheme. Additionally, paths within the AONB to the north of the Scheme would be visually unaffected by the Scheme.

17.2.34 On balance, the landscape, townscape and visual impacts of the Scheme would be slight adverse and not significant by the Design Year after mitigation planting matures to enclose the new road and associated traffic.

Cultural Heritage

17.2.35 A range of mitigation measures are proposed in response to the potential impacts of the Scheme upon cultural heritage resources, including buried archaeology. These comprise the recording of standing structures that would be removed and a two stage program of archaeological evaluation agreed with the ESCC Archaeological Officer. The archaeological evaluation would make a substantial local and regional contribution to the understanding of human settlement and exploitation of the Combe Haven valley and of the Sussex coastal hinterland.

17.2.36 After mitigation, the Scheme would result in a large adverse and significant indirect impact upon the settings of the three Grade II Listed Buildings at Bynes Farm, Adam's Farmhouse and Royal Oak Cottage. An Archaeologically Sensitive Area (around a Roman bloomery located south of Bynes Farm) would be directly impacted by the Scheme, the significance of which would remain uncertain until the proposed program of archaeological evaluation is implemented to clarify the archaeological potential of this receptor.

17.2.37 The impacts of the Scheme upon non-designated cultural heritage receptors such as historic buildings and structures, elements of the historic landscape and below-ground archaeological deposits would range between moderate adverse and slight adverse after mitigation, and would include uncertain impacts to seventeen receptors. These impacts would be marginally offset by the predominately beneficial impacts upon designated cultural heritage receptors such as Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas as a result of changes in road traffic flows. Nevertheless, on balance, the Scheme would be likely to have a slight adverse and therefore not significant impact upon the cultural heritage of the Scheme area.

Pedestrians, Cyclists and Recreational Users

17.2.38 The recreational survey together with extensive personal interviews has established that the study area is popular with pedestrians, the vast majority of whom live locally. However, whilst there are many equestrians in the area, little use is made of the Combe Haven and surrounding countryside due to the limited bridleway network and safety concerns on the local road network. An integral part of the Scheme is the provision of the Greenway which would provide additional benefits for pedestrians, cyclists and recreational users including those with disabilities, especially if linked to new or upgraded paths within the proposed Pebsham Countryside Park.

17.2.39 Construction activity would adversely affect the visual quality and tranquillity on a number of paths, particularly within the rural section of the Scheme. Temporary diversions of paths including the 1066 Country Walk long distance footpath would also have an adverse impact upon path users. On balance, the construction phase of the Scheme would be likely to have a temporary but significant moderate adverse impact upon existing rights of way.

17.2.40 The Greenway associated with the Scheme would provide real benefit for pedestrians, cyclists and recreational users. Additionally, the new footpath along Queensway would provide a much needed pedestrian link and the proposed Toucan Crossing on Queensway would improve safety for people crossing that busy road. However, the Scheme would create an element of visual and noise intrusion within the Combe Haven valley, reducing the otherwise very positive impacts for pedestrians, cyclists and recreational users. The Scheme would also adversely affect recreational shooting activity within the Combe Haven and surrounding valley due to the potential danger to road users and reduction of area available for shooting.

17.2.41 Therefore, on balance, the Scheme would have a slight beneficial impact upon pedestrians, cyclists and recreational users during the Opening

Year, improving to moderate beneficial and significant by the Design Year by which time the visual impacts of the Scheme would be substantially reduced by mitigation planting.

Social and Community Effects

17.2.42 The construction phase of the Scheme would result in a slight adverse and not significant impact on those communities adjacent to the Scheme arising primarily from noise, visual impacts and impact upon temporary accessibility. Other communities would experience only negligible or no impacts during the construction period.

17.2.43 Once open, the Scheme would have an overall moderate beneficial and significant impact on community severance and accessibility as a result of a reduction in traffic away from the Scheme and subsequent improvement in journey times. The Scheme would have a significant adverse impact in terms of direct impacts upon private property, with a range of landowners affected by the need to obtain land to construct the Scheme. However, the Scheme would also have an overall significant beneficial impact in terms of development allocations, predominantly due to the resultant release of strategic development allocations within Rother District.

17.2.44 Rural communities would experience a slight beneficial impact as a result of the Scheme due to the relief of traffic which would contribute to improvement in the pedestrian environment in Battle High Street and through rural villages. The urban communities of South St Leonards and East Bexhill would experience a significant overall beneficial effect principally due to improved accessibility to Hastings and Bexhill respectively and relief of pedestrian severance. The remaining communities would be likely to experience only slight or negligible benefits as a result of the Scheme. On balance, the overall impact of the Scheme on the community would be moderate beneficial and therefore significant.

17.3 Balance of the Effects of the Scheme

Construction Phase

17.3.1 The Scheme would be likely to have an overall moderate adverse and therefore significant environmental effect during the construction phase. The environmental resources likely to be significantly affected during this phase would be land use, the built environment, cultural heritage, local communities and non-motorised users, all of which or whom would experience a combined moderate adverse effect as a result of the Scheme. In addition, the landscape resource would experience a major combined adverse effect due to the combination of significant landscape character and historic environment impacts and the highly significant visual impacts associated with construction activity through the Combe Haven valley. The climate, vehicle travellers, water environment and ecological resources would only experience either a slight adverse or negligible combined effect during the construction phase of the Scheme.

Operational Phase

17.3.2 The Scheme would result in an overall minor to moderate adverse environmental effect in the Opening Year, reducing to negligible and not significant by the Design Year when mitigation planting matures to better integrate and enclose the Scheme and new ecological habitats become established. The combined moderate adverse effects upon land use, landscape, the built environment and the cultural heritage resource in the Opening Year would be partially offset by the moderate beneficial combined effects of the Scheme upon local communities, non-motorised users and vehicle travellers. The significance of combined effects upon the landscape and built environment resources would reduce by the Design Year as screening planting matures to form a more effective screen, whilst the effects of the Scheme upon local communities, non-motorised users and vehicle travellers would remain moderate beneficial.

17.4 Cumulative Effects

Construction Phase

17.4.1 The overall construction phase cumulative effects of the Scheme and the other major schemes likely to be constructed at the same time would be moderate adverse and therefore significant. However, the majority of these effects would be temporary and would only occur over a limited two year period.

Operational Phase

17.4.2 The cumulative effects of the Scheme have been assessed in conjunction with those of other 'more than likely' or 'near certain' major schemes proposed within Bexhill and Hastings up to 2025. It is likely that the adverse and beneficial combined effects of the individual schemes upon the range of environmental resources affected would balance, leading to an overall neutral cumulative effect.

17.4.3 The only significant adverse cumulative effect would be upon the cultural heritage resource, principally as a result of the combined effects of the Scheme and those of the A21 Baldslow Junction – Queensway Link Road upon buried archaeology, historic landscape character and the setting of designated and non-designated historic buildings and sites. These effects would be offset by the significant benefits of the various schemes upon local communities and non-motorised users as a result of improved accessibility to facilities, housing and employment, reduced severance, improved road safety and enhanced recreational access to the Combe Haven valley.

17.4.4 The benefits to local communities form part of a development strategy for Bexhill and Hastings and the revitalisation of deprived neighbourhoods within the area. In the absence of this established strategy, a less sustainable approach would evolve which could result in increased environmental damage without delivering a co-ordinated approach to addressing the need to improve job opportunities, increase affordable housing provision and enhance accessibility within areas of concentrated need.