

TITLE	Supplementary Estimate for Works to Address Traffic Congestion
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 20 February 2020
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director of Locality and Customer Services - Sarah Hollamby
LEAD MEMBER	Leader of the Council - John Halsall, Executive Member for Highways and Transport - Pauline Jorgensen

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

To secure approval for additional revenue funding for essential preparatory works to address traffic congestion within the borough. Securing additional revenue funding in the current financial year will enable the Council to commence an ambitious capital project aimed at addressing congestion in 2020/21.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive approves the supplementary estimate for additional revenue funding of £180,110 in 2019/20 in order to enable officer to progress essential preparatory works in support of the Congestion Capital project.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council's Strategic Development Location approach to growth within the Borough has brought benefits in terms of managing the overall number of houses being built each year and the amount of associated infrastructure that has been secured. However delivery of this infrastructure investment has not been able to address the pre-existing strains on the existing Wokingham highways network.

Disruption and congestion on the existing highway network as a result of the historic growth of the borough alongside the implementation of much needed infrastructure works has led to increasing levels of frustration amongst our residents. As a result of this Officers have been asked to undertake a study to look at how we might better understand the causes of the congestion, alleviate the frustration of residents and to find ways to manage and improve the efficiency of the existing highways network.

The first phase of the project includes three main work streams, a marketing research survey on congestion, production of an Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) Strategy and a review of our network of traffic Sensitive streets.

Officers are aware of the urgency of this work and have already put together a £20million capital project to deliver a step change in the use of Intelligent Transport Systems across the Borough over the next 5years. Without approval for this supplementary estimate it is very unlikely that the Council will be able to progress to

detailed design stage for the implementation of the congestion capital project until late in 20/21 which is likely to lead to further slippage in the delivery phase of the project in subsequent years of the project.

The Existing Highways and Transport revenue budgets are insufficient to cover this additional work.

BACKGROUND

The adoption of the Council's current Core Strategy document in January 2010 and subsequent Managing Development Delivery DPD in February 2014 have established the Strategic Development Location approach to growth within the Borough. This approach has brought benefits to the borough both in terms of the management of the overall number of houses being built each year and the amount of associated infrastructure that has been secured to address the impacts of that growth. Prior to the adoption of the 2010 Local Plan we were delivering around 800-900 dwellings per year and secured approximately £5,000 per dwelling in infrastructure contributions. Following the adoption of the 2010 Local Plan we were delivering an average 623 dwelling per year and securing over £28,000 per dwelling towards infrastructure. This position was further improved in 2015 when we adopted the Community Infrastructure Levy and we currently secure between £30-40,000 in infrastructure contributions.

However delivery of this growth has not addressed historic levels of congestion which leaves a strain on the existing Wokingham highways network in some areas. The formation of new accesses on to the highway network either for new housing parcels and/or new distributor/relief roads, and the provision of new utility supplies inevitably leads to some disruption in the short term. This increase in disruption on the existing network has led to frustration amongst residents with increasing congestion in some areas across the Borough. As a result of this officers have been asked to undertake a study to look at how we might better understand the causes of the congestion (and indeed the resident frustration with that congestion) and find ways to improve the management and efficiency of the existing highway network.

A project Group was established in summer of 2019 and three main work streams were identified.

1. A campaign aimed at both understanding what residents find particularly frustrating through a comprehensive survey and improving our processes for getting information to our residents in terms of a communications strategy.
2. Development of an Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) Strategy to look how we make better use of technology to keep the Borough moving. The ITS Strategy will investigate the use of real time monitoring of traffic flows on major routes (both through online tools and CCTV), an increased use of both mobile and fixed Variable Message Signs (VMS) at key locations on our network in order that we can improve the information that driver receive during their journeys and an accelerated role out of upgrades to our Intelligent traffic signal systems on key routes to enable the Council to take a more responsive approach to congestion management.
3. A Review of the Traffic Sensitive streets across the Borough. Where the Council identifies a street as traffic sensitive it is able to impose more stringent requirements on any proposed streetworks application, such as off peak only working, with a view to minimising any disruption caused during peak periods due to road works. It is worth remembering that eighty percent of streetworks applications are from statutory undertakers (mainly utilities companies).

The costs for providing the above work streams have been obtained either through our new Professional Services Contract with WSP or through an informal tendering process for the Market research elements.

Item	2019/20 Costs
Production of Intelligent Transport Systems Strategy	£22,260
Review of Traffic Sensitive Streets	£7,100
Purchase of Elgin Route Monitor (Live Traffic Data System)	£35,750 * ¹
Purchase and deployment of mobile VMS units	£100,000 * ²
Undertake market research on local perception on congestion agenda (before only)	£15,000
Total	£180,110

*¹ £52,000 is the annual cost for the full bundle Elgin route monitoring products, however currently we feel that only two items are worth purchasing at this stage (revised cost of £35,750)

*² estimated cost of purchasing 6 new mobile VMS units.

Officers are aware of the urgency of this work and have already put together a prospective £20million capital project deliver a step change in Intelligent Transport Systems across the Borough over the next 5years. Highway projects (especially those around existing junctions) are generally complicated and tend to have long lead in times, both in terms of the detailed design phase and in terms of securing road space for the implementation phase. In order to enable the Council to move swiftly to the detailed design phase early in the next financial year resources are needed to complete the information gathering and strategic elements of this agenda in this financial year. Without additional revenue funding to cover this work is likely to result in and overspend in the Highways and Transport budget

BUSINESS CASE

The work streams and the associated costs identified in this report are the essential first steps to progressing upcoming congestion capital project. Without approval for this supplementary estimate it is very unlikely that the Council will be able to progress to detailed design stage for the congestion capital project until late in 20/21 which is likely to lead to further slippage in the delivery phase of the project in subsequent years of the project. The existing Highways and Transport revenue budgets are insufficient to cover this additional work.

In the event that the supplementary estimate is approved then it is anticipated that the Council will have completed a review of the traffic sensitive streets, an Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) Strategy, the initial market research survey and rolled out the Elgin route monitoring software operationally.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council continues to face severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of reductions to public sector funding and growing pressures in our statutory services. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions of approximately £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£180,110	No – hence the Supplementary Estimate	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£1,500,000	Yes subject to approval of capital bid	Capital
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£3,500,000	Yes subject to approval of capital bid	Capital

Other Financial Information

Without additional revenue funding to cover this work is likely to result in and overspend in the Highways and Transport budget.

Members note that we are currently estimating general balance of £8.454m at 31st March 2020 before this supplementary estimate is deducted.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

A comprehensive market research survey of 1000 borough residents is an integral part of this project. The results will increase our understanding what residents find particularly frustrating and allow us to tailor our approach to address these concerns in the future.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Initial impact assessment undertaken (see enclosure 1) and a full Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) is not required.

List of Background Papers

None

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