

Report for Resolution

Report to Norwich Highways Agency Committee
25 September 2008

Joint Report of Head of Transportation and Landscape and Director of
Planning and Transportation

Subject Norwich Growth Point Scheme - Grapes Hill Public
Transport Improvement

Item

11

Purpose

To ask members to approve the extension of the dedicated left turn lane on the northbound section of Grapes Hill, to benefit public transport.

Recommendations

Members are recommended to approve the proposal to extend the left turn lane on the northbound section of Grapes Hill as shown on plan number PA1005-GP-002.

Financial Consequences

The budget estimate for this scheme is £180,000 and it will be funded by the DCLG Norwich Growth Point project.

Strategic Objective/Service Priorities

The report helps to achieve the corporate objective to make Norwich safe and secure, building strong and proud local communities and the service plan priority of improving safety on roads and providing realistic sustainable transport options.

Contact Officers

Joanne Deverick, Transportation Manager,	01603 21 3430
Mark Kemp, Project Team Manager (Growth Point Schemes)	01603 22 3248

Background Documents

West Norwich Bus Priority Study – Prepared by Mott Macdonald

Report

Introduction

1. Improving public transport is one of the major elements of the Norwich Area Transportation Strategy. Continued significant investment in public transport has resulted in greatly improved conditions for bus services and passengers, which has led to increases in bus patronage in the city. This is against a backdrop of general decline in patronage across the rest of the country.
2. The County Council has set up punctuality improvement partnerships with all major bus operators with the aim of working together to improve punctuality, and First have recently signed a joint investment plan with the county and city councils which will see an investment of £10.6m in new vehicles by 2010. Each year, around 10 million people catch a bus from the award-winning bus station, which was built as part of a £10million package of improvements to public transport, including bus priority measures through the city centre, and a new interchange at the rail station. More recently a low emission zone has been implemented in Castle Meadow.
3. There remain a number of pinch points across Norwich for buses, and continued investment will maintain the momentum in delivering the transport strategy. The northbound section of Grapes Hill has been identified as causing delays for buses that serve the west of the City and a scheme has been prepared to reduce those delays.

The Need for the Scheme

4. One of the aims of the Norwich Growth Point Programme is to provide high quality public transport routes to serve the development areas to the west of the City in Longwater, West Costessey, Lodge Farm and Bowthorpe.
5. The majority of buses that travel northbound (down hill) on Grapes Hill are turning left into Dereham Road. At present there is a very short left turn lane and which means that buses (and other vehicles) wishing to turn left on to Dereham Road are often delayed by vehicles wishing to continue straight ahead at the junction. There are several high frequency bus routes running through this junction by different operators and by examining the BusNet data it can be seen that all services show the same delays are occurring.
6. The traffic model indicates that if a longer dedicated left turn lane were provided, there would be substantial benefits for the 31 scheduled buses using Grapes Hill in the AM Peak period (0730-0930 - Mon-Fri) with time savings of 21 seconds per bus (based on 2006 figures), rising to 46 seconds in 2010. No benefits were identified in the PM Peak. However, during the whole day, there are 218 buses using this stretch of highway.
7. The proposal is to provide that extended left turn lane by widening the northbound section of Grapes Hill. The original proposal was to widen the western side but this had a major impact on the mature trees, would involve utility diversions and took the road closer to the homes in West Pottergate. It was therefore decided to widen the eastern side, into the central reservation, and to realign the lanes on Grapes Hill. A plan of the proposal is attached as

appendix 1.

8. The proposed scheme involves the loss of 2 existing young street trees. The City Council's tree officer has confirmed that she has no objection to this, and suitable replacement trees will be planted.

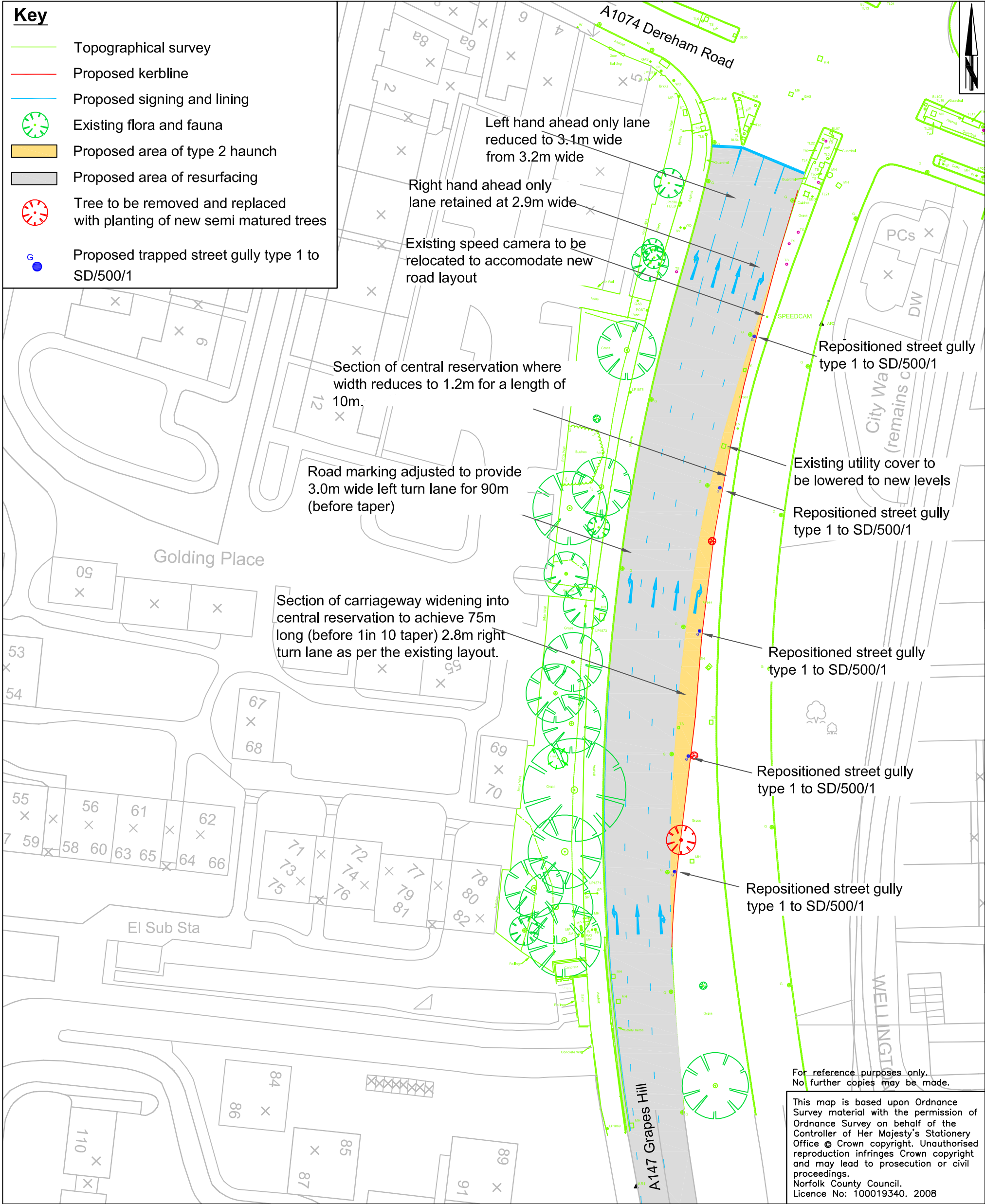
Consultation.




9. All stakeholders, and the direct frontagers were sent copies of the plan showing the proposed scheme, and comments were invited.
10. The Norwich Cycling Campaign has objected to the proposed scheme on the grounds that it is detrimental to the safety of cyclists using Grapes Hill, that it adds capacity for all vehicles, not just buses and that it is out of scale with an urban setting. A copy of the response is attached as appendix 2.
11. County Councillor Andrew Boswell has verbally indicated that he has concerns about the scheme similar to those raised by the Norwich Cycling Campaign.
12. A resident of The Avenues has raised concerns about the loss of daffodils planted in the central reserve and that this outweighs any modest traffic benefits and they would not like to see the scheme go ahead. A copy of the response is attached as appendix 3.
13. A resident of Valentine Street, which overlooks Grapes Hill, is opposed to the proposed widening as they consider this will encourage speeding traffic, encourage more traffic into the city and make the boundary between the two carriageways unacceptably small. A copy of the response is attached as appendix 4.
14. No other responses have been received.

Discussion.

15. While it is accepted that the proposal does improve capacity for all vehicles, it is not possible to provide a solution that benefits buses only. The provision of the left turn lane will reduce the amount of time all left turning vehicles are stopped with their engines running, and this should benefit air quality. Members may recall that in the 1990s there was concern about the air quality in Grapes Hill and an air quality management plan was prepared for the area.
16. There is already a left turn lane at the junction. The proposed scheme extends the left turn lane. The safety concerns expressed have been discussed with the Safety Audit Team and their response is that the A149 Grapes Hill is an A class road and as such it is reasonable to expect that any cyclist using this route would be competent and able to position themselves so as to minimise the risk. There are alternative less heavily trafficked routes and it is possible to dismount and use the footway, particularly near the junction with Dereham Road.
17. Surveys have been undertaken and these show that there are 4 cyclists travelling northbound on Grapes Hill between 8am and 9am, 4 between 12 noon and 1pm and 15 between 5pm and 6pm.

18. Grapes Hill is not part of the City's cycle network and therefore it is suggested that at this location the benefits to public transport users should be given greater weight than the concerns of the Cycling Campaign.
19. Whilst recognising the concerns of the Cycling Campaign and others, on balance it is felt that the scheme should be implemented as proposed.



**Norfolk** County Council
working with


DRAWING TITLE

A147 Norwich - Grapes Hill Public Transport Improvement Consultation Plan

Mike Jackson
Director of Planning and Transportation
Norfolk County Council
County Hall
Martineau Lane
Norwich NR1 2SG

REV.	DESCRIPTION	CHECKED	DATE

	INIT.	DATE	DRAWING No. PA1005-GP-002 PROJECT TITLE Grapes Hill Public Transport Improvement SCALE 1:500 FILE No. PA1005
SURVEYED BY	OS	2008	
DESIGNED BY	MA	07.08	
DRAWN BY	MA	07.08	
CHECKED BY	MAK	08.08	

Matthew Williams

Sent: 03 September 2008 22:04

To: Auger, Mike

Cc: Richard Bearman; oliver Stretton-downes

Subject: Norwich Growth Point Highway Works – Grapes Hill

Mike

I refer to your letter addressed to Norwich Cycling Campaign dated 15 August 2008 ref.

PM/GP/PA1005/MA in connection with the above proposals.

I am writing on behalf of Norwich Cycling Campaign which was founded in 1990 and is supported by about 150 paid-up subscribed members. The organisation wishes to see a significantly increased modal share of cycling as a viable means of transport, for the good of all in the city.

We object strongly to these proposals on the following grounds:

1. We consider the proposed linear extension of the six lane wide highway section on Grapes Hill to be grossly out of scale with its urban setting. It appears to merely be the opportunistic removal of existing landscaped grass verge as a further step by the County Council towards its 1970s aim of creating an 'urban motorway' around the city centre.
2. The scheme is being misleadingly described as a 'public transport improvement' when its main purpose is to increase capacity for general vehicles including private cars. There is no logic in this move in modern transport planning terms, because it does nothing to encourage the use of more efficient travel modes and if anything does the opposite. A genuine public transport improvement at this location would reallocate roadspace from general traffic to provide a dedicated bus lane which could of course also be used by cyclists.
3. The scheme as designed would have a specific negative impact on the amenity of bicycle users wishing to use Grapes Hill as a rapid link, significantly worsening the present cycling conditions and thus reducing the attractiveness of cycling. This is because the proposed extension of the left turn only lane creates a situation where cyclists travelling straight on (i.e. on the dominant desire line) are being overtaken on both sides by motor traffic, which is extremely intimidating and potentially hazardous.
4. Implementation of this scheme would add incrementally to the transportation difficulties already caused to local people as the result of previous County Council highways design projects seeking to provide priority for private motor vehicles and increased journey distances, to the detriment of the local economy. It is disappointing that this outmoded and incorrect approach has lately been promoted covertly under the false guises of improving safety, air quality and in this case public transport.

Please will you acknowledge receipt of these comments by return.

Regards

Matthew Williams

Consultations Officer

Norwich Cycling Campaign

42-46 Bethel Street

Norwich NR2 1NR

From: *****
Sent: 06 September 2008 18:17
To: Auger, Mike
Subject: Consultation 969

Mike,

The central reservation on Grapes hill is beautiful in the spring when all the daffodils are in bloom.

It seems to me that this outweighs any modest traffic benefit and I wuld not like to see the scheme go ahead

Resident
The Avenues, NR2 3PH

From: *****
Sent: 13 September 2008 16:15
To: Auger, Mike
Cc: *****
Subject: Widening of Grapes Hill

Dear Sir,

Ref: PM/GP/PA1005/MA

I am a resident of ** Valentine Street, which over looks Grapes Hill.

I hereby give notice that I am opposed to the proposed widening of Grapes Hill, as I consider that the will encourage speeding traffic, encourage more traffic into the city and make the boundary between to two carriage ways unacceptably small.

Yours Faithfully

Resident

**Norwich Highways Agency Committee
25 September 2008**

**Norwich Growth Point Scheme –
Grapes Hill Public Transport Improvement**

Four further responses to the consultation have been received up to and including 19 September. An email of support was also received from the Police.

1) Objection from the Norwich Green Party Councillors

Response from Norwich Green Party Councillors

From: Rupert Read
Sent: 16 September 2008 16:13
To: Auger, Mike
Cc: *****
Subject: Grapes Hill consultation
Importance: High

Dear Mike;

thanks for the phone call just now, and I was glad to read in the EVENING NEWS that you are allowing members of the public in fact to continue to have their say up until the end of this week.

My colleague Councillor Dylan first drew this to my attention; please consider the attached an objection *on behalf of all the Norwich Green Party Councillors* to the scheme.

Let me add however that we do *not* mean to imply by anything that we have said (e.g. in the attached) that the kind of 'scaled down' consultation that you have undertaken here, where you ask only local and transport councillors, and sometimes very local residents, is something we do not support in principle (with a few caveats).

It saves time and money for all, when you are able to do such smaller scale consultations. Of course you the officers need to make a judgement about what qualifies as minor works, and *we would argue that Grapes Hill should not have been considered as such a case.*

However that doesn't mean that the idea of 'narrower' consultation in many cases is necessarily a bad one. The missing link, we believe, is that there should be a commitment from officers that a wider consultation be carried out *if members deem that a particular issue is of wider concern in the community. We hope that that will turn out to be the case here...*

And we look forward to your answers to our questions italicised on the attached.

Thanks for your time;
C'llr. Rupert Read, Norwich Green Party Transport Spokesman.

Objection to the Grapes Hill scheme, from the Norwich Green Party Councillors:

We object strongly to the proposed changes at Grapes Hill, on the following grounds:

- 1) The presentation of this project as a 'public transport improvement' is highly misleading. It is simply a junction-expansion, i.e. a road-building measure. We would far rather this money were spent on (e.g.) specific bus improvements (see 3 below), bus and bike lanes, cycling improvements, pedestrianisation or pedestrian safety measures, etc.
- 2) There would be significant disruption for a long period while this work is being carried out.
- 3) The changes would make the road even more hazardous for pedestrians and cyclists.
- 4) Turning the Grapes Hill road into a 4-lane quasi-motorway / 'urban highway' is hardly likely to conduce to the other aims of your transport strategy. *Could you please supply us with information about the expected effect of this change on carbon emissions in Norwich, including effects of further induced traffic? How does this proposed change fit with your carbon-reduction plans (CRed targets)? How will it incentivise modal shift away from the private car? How will it add to the ease of entry into the city centre for pedestrians?*
- 5) If you were really wanting to make it easier for buses to turn left at this junction, then there are clearly things that could potentially be done instead of this. E.g. You could have a special bus (and bike) -only lane for turning left (a bit like the one on Rose Lane) which allowed a left turn continuously, even when other vehicles were not permitted to turn left (e.g. while vehicles from the southbound carriageway were turning right at Dereham Road.).
- 6) It seems that there has been an effort to slip this change in almost 'through the back door'. Most Councillors were not informed. The very small distribution list for the 'consultation' included only a handful of very local residents – but this is a big change which will affect lots of residents and will in fact have knock-ons on the whole Norwich transport network! The County seemingly hasn't considered the impact on the city centre conservation area and the City Wall: you haven't consulted any heritage bodies e.g. English Heritage or the Norwich Society!
- 7) Given, point 4, *we request:*
 - *That the consultation is redone now with a much increased distribution to councillors and local residents. We suggest that local residents within 100m. of Grapes Hill (both sides) should be consulted.*

To sum up:

The setting of the city centre conservation area and the city walls makes this a wholly inappropriate scheme. Creating more capacity will only attract more traffic and result in greater air pollution problems (as per for instance Boundary Road). The proposals will create an even more harsh urban environment devoid of much greenery and unattractive (visually *and for use*) to pedestrians and cyclists.

Officer comment

- 1) The context of how the proposed improvement fits within the wider transport strategy is discussed in the first three paragraphs of the committee report;
- 2) Construction of the scheme will take approximately 6 weeks. During this time it will be necessary to restrict the use of the right turn lane for safety reasons. This disruption will be kept to a minimum. The carriageway will require resurfacing to clearly define the new lane markings. A road closure is being considered for this resurfacing work between 7pm and 7am over a period of 7 days to minimise disruption. The arrangements will be similar to those adopted during the recent resurfacing of the ASDA junction which worked very well. If the resurfacing is not carried out as part of this scheme it will be necessary to carry out this work as routine maintenance sometime during the next two years and we are taking the opportunity to address this problem at the same time;
- 3) The proposed scheme will have no impact on the safety of pedestrians. The impact on cyclists is discussed in paragraphs 16-18 of the committee report. The City Council's Cycling Officer has been consulted and has no objection to the proposed scheme;
- 4) This scheme is one of several public transport improvements that were identified during 2006/7 that would have a significant impact on improving journey time reliability along key radial routes in Norwich. This scheme has been included as part of the Joint Investment Plan (JIP) between the City Council, Norfolk County Council and First Group. The JIP provides an important opportunity to secure significant investment in public transport provision in Norwich by First.

The wider transport strategy is to protect the ability of the strategic roads to carry traffic, which is where it should be - not on minor residential roads. Any 'induced' traffic is likely to be transferring from these residential routes and that should be a benefit to pedestrians and cyclists.

With regard to the expected change in carbon emissions, the proposed scheme will see a small benefit in time savings for buses and general traffic in the morning peak. The impacts of the proposed scheme is expected to be marginal but should be viewed within the overall strategy, which is agreed and deliverable and not in this narrow focus;

- 5) The proposed scheme will improve bus journey time reliability. The introduction of a dedicated bus lane would provide no significant additional benefits to buses. The provision of a dedicated left turn for buses would however introduce some additional delays to general traffic or require the further widening of Grapes Hill at the signals to provide two left turn lanes. The introduction of additional delays to general traffic at this location would go against Norwich Area

Transportation Strategy policy. The widening work to provide two left turning lanes would require land acquisition from commercial properties in St Benedicts View;

- 6) This scheme has followed the normal and agreed process for consultation and the results of the consultation are reported to Committee for a decision on how to proceed.

The City Council's Conservation Officer has been consulted and has no objection to the proposed scheme;

- 7) The request for a wider consultation is noted. However, it is felt that all the concerns raised have been fully considered and that on balance the scheme should be approved by Committee and implemented as proposed.

2) Comments from a resident of Livingstone Street, Norwich

Response from resident

From: Tansley Thomas, Anne
Sent: 17 September 2008 10:03
To: *****
Cc: Auger, Mike; Angelbeck, Charlotte
Subject: RE: GRAPES HILL PLANS

Dear *****

Thank you for your comments about the Grapes Hill proposal.

I am sorry you couldn't find the consultation on Consultation Finder. This was because our consultation closed on 15 September so the record moved from being 'current' to being 'closed'.

http://www.consultationfinder.com/norfolk/consultation_Dtl.aspx?consult_Id=969&status=3&criteria=1

However I understand that we are still taking comments until the end of the week so have copied your comments below onto Mike Auger who is collecting the feedback on this. I will also make sure that we put the record back on as 'current' until the end of the week so that other people will be able to find it easily.

Thanks again for your interest in this scheme and for taking the trouble to feed in your views.

With best wishes

Anne TT

Anne Tansley Thomas
Consultation & Community Relations Officer

Norfolk County Council
Tel: (01603) 222844 Fax: (01603) 222602
Email: anne.tansleythomas@norfolk.gov.uk

Visit us online at www.norfolk.gov.uk

-----Original Message-----

From: *****
Sent: 16 September 2008 17:25
To: Tansley Thomas, Anne
Subject: GRAPES HILL PLANS

Dear Anne

I registered with the Consultation Finder to put my views about the idea of widening Grapes Hill – which was published in today's Evening News. Unfortunately, although the article in the Evening News told us to come to your Consultation Finder website, this major scheme is not on there!

This causes me great concern – I am just glad I do not live in the expensive flats recently erected near Grapes Hill roundabout!

Grapes Hill is already a nightmare to cross when walking – we do not want any more lanes! I know there is a footbridge at the top of the hill but it will make traffic worse at the bottom of the hill. We already have to wait ages for traffic lights to change in our favour, whether as a pedestrian or driver,

Surely, if there is concern about the queues on Grapes Hill, public transport should be improved so less people have to drive to where they want to go into the city. Dereham Road has a reasonable bus service into the city (albeit expensive for any adult under 60 regardless of income) but, if people wish to go either beyond the city or to another radial road, they have to either change buses (very time consuming and expensive), walk (if you are able and have the time) or use their own transport. I often visit friends just off Unthank Road and always have to walk, which I am able to do, but I wouldn't be able to if I had a disability in walking.

** Livingstone Street
Norwich NR2 4HE

Officer comment

There is already a left turn lane at the junction with Dereham Road and the scheme proposes an extension of this lane to benefit public transport users and other vehicles. Grapes Hill will be widened towards the bottom of the hill but no additional lanes will be added at the junction with Dereham Road.

The scheme is one of the public transport improvements that form part of the Joint Investment Plan (JIP) with the City and County Councils and First Group. The aim of the JIP is to improve the punctuality and overall quality of bus services to encourage increased use.

3) Comments from Living Streets (Norwich)

Response from Living Streets (Norwich)

From: Livingstreetsnch@aol.com [mailto:Livingstreetsnch@aol.com]

Sent: 19 September 2008 10:34

To: Auger, Mike

Cc: *****

Subject: Grapes Hill Public Transport Improvement.

Dear Sir,

Living Streets (Norwich) a branch of the national pedestrian charity Living Streets, (formerly known as the Pedestrians Association), having not been included in the formal consultation process, wish to express some views on the above scheme.

We broadly welcome the County Council's concerns and aims in wishing to improve the reliability and efficiency of local public transport and contribute the following comments:

1) We have long recognised that outward bound public transport (of which there are currently 18 scheduled bus services per hour) have suffered serious delays in accessing Dereham Road, through getting caught up with "straight ahead" traffic occupying the other two lanes on Grapes Hill, largely because of the very short and narrow left hand lane. This has had and is continuing to have a serious impact on bus service reliability and we agree that measures need to be put in place to give higher priority to buses over other traffic at this point.

2) We believe that if the County Council has genuine concerns about the efficiency and reliability of local public transport, then it will designate the left hand lane as a bus / cycle lane and exclude all other traffic.

This could be achieved by realigning the road markings and re-designating the centre lane as a joint left turn / straight ahead lane (avoiding any impingement with the new bus / cycle lane). Living Streets does not support mixing other traffic with buses in any re-designed left hand lane.

3) The pedestrian crossing point on the tight left hand turn at the junction of Dereham Road has long been a hazard for pedestrians. When the pedestrian lights turn to red, pedestrians waiting to cross are having to frequently step back to avoid coming into conflict with large turning vehicles which because of the narrowness and tightness of the lane, often mount the kerb and come into very close proximity with the pedestrian guard rails, and we fully support measures to improve safety for pedestrians at this point.

yours sincerely

John Peacock
County Representative
Living Streets (Norwich)
74, Peckover Road
Norwich
NR4 7BS

Officer comment

The provision of a dedicated bus lane at this location would introduce some additional delays to general traffic or require further road widening at the signals as previously discussed.

If the scheme is approved the concerns raised about the existing crossing point will be investigated to see if any improvement can be made within the limits of the existing highway.

4) Comments from a resident of Helena Road, Norwich

Response from resident

From: *****

Sent: 19 September 2008 17:20

To: mike.auger@norfolk.gov.uk

Subject: Grapes Hill Widening

To: Mike Auger, Highway Engineer, Norfolk County Council.

From: ***** Helena Road, Norwich, NR2 3BZ.

Dear Mr. Auger,

I understand that Norfolk County Council wishes to widen Grapes Hill in Norwich and that the council are happy to hear views up to the end of this week (Eastern Evening News, 16 September 2008).

I am opposed to the road widening on the following grounds:

- The plans have been kept secret and there has not been adequate consultation. I only discovered the plans because of the EEN article.
- Widening the road is likely to make it more difficult and time-consuming for pedestrians to cross the road than at present. The Inner Ring Road already provides a barrier to pedestrians trying to reach the city centre and widening the road is likely to make matters worse. This will affect me and the many other people who cross this road on their way to and from the city centre.
- Widening will make it more dangerous for cyclists to use Grapes Hill, due to the faster flow of traffic.
- Removal of much of the central reservation will result in the removal of the crocuses that currently grow on the central reservation. Grapes Hill is an unattractive road but the trees and bulbs planted beside it soften its visual impact.
- I do not wish my Council Tax to be wasted on this road widening when cash (both mine and the council's) is in short supply.

Please can you ensure that my views are taken into account and let me know the outcome.

Yours sincerely,

*****.

Officer comment

Objections noted. These comments are similar to other received that have been discussed within the committee report or in the officer comments above.

5) Comments from Norfolk Police

From: Page, Colin [mailto:PageC@norfolk.pnn.police.uk]

Sent: 26 August 2008 09:28

To: Auger, Mike

Subject: Grapes Hill improvement scheme - Yr. Ref. PM/GP/PA1005/MA

Dear Mr. Auger,

I refer to your letter dated 15th August 2008, regarding improvements to Grapes Hill and have to inform you that the Police fully support the proposals.

Regards.

Colin Page

Colin Page,
Traffic Management Officer,
Norfolk Police,
Bethel Street,
Norwich,
NR2 1NN.
Tel.no. 01603 276662
Fax.no. 01603 276704

Final
23/09/08