

Committee	COUNCIL MEETING
Date	14th January 2019
Agenda Item	13

Highways Meeting

Concerns were raised at the 11th June Council meeting about the “pinch point” in Head Street and the consequential effect upon residents and pavement users in the area. It was suggested that a review and possible change to the Strategic Lorry Route could help alleviate some of the problem.

Following communication of the issues to ECC, the Mayor and Deputy Mayor received an invitation from the Leader of Essex County Council to a meeting with himself and Andrew Cook, Director of Highways and Transportation, to discuss the matter.

This meeting took place on Wednesday 19th December at 9.00am at County Hall, Chelmsford.

At this meeting we presented and discussed a briefing note (see Appendix below) that articulated the issues related to the pinch point in the main part of Head Street and also the issues relating to the junctions in Head Street around St Andrews Church.

It was explained by ECC that there is not much that can be done technically around these points due to the physical constraints of the buildings and churchyard in this area. The principle solution lies in reducing the amount of Heavy Duty traffic passing through Halstead.

Essex County Council was sympathetic to the issues and agreed to undertake a review of potential ideas including reviewing the Strategic Lorry Route and signage, vehicle weight/size restrictions, and a possible single carriageway through the pinch point in Head Street. Upon conclusion of this review they will feedback to Halstead Town Council whether any of these solutions could help relieve the problem.

The potential solution of a bypass around Halstead was briefly discussed. It was stated by ECC that this could only be considered as a long-term project and was subject to the availability of funding from central government. Any proposal would need to be justified by the economic benefits that the investment would bring but would also need to satisfy central government criteria. There are currently many demands upon funding in Essex and a bypass around Halstead is not currently considered a high enough project at this stage.

The current route for a bypass was created around 30 years ago and may be out of date bearing in mind the range of new developments in and around the town. Although ECC would not be prepared to fund a new study at this stage they do welcome any local knowledge or comments from HTC about the suitability or not of the current route.

Recommendation: that HTC notes this report

Cllr. Andy Munday
Cllr. Mick Radley

Appendix – Briefing Note prepared by Cllr. Andy Munday and Cllr. Mick Radley to support their meeting with Essex County Council.

**Highways Issues in Halstead, Essex
Briefing Note**

Cllr. Andrew Munday – Mayor and Chairman of Halstead Town Council
Cllr. Michael Radley – Deputy Mayor and Vice Chairman of Halstead Town Council

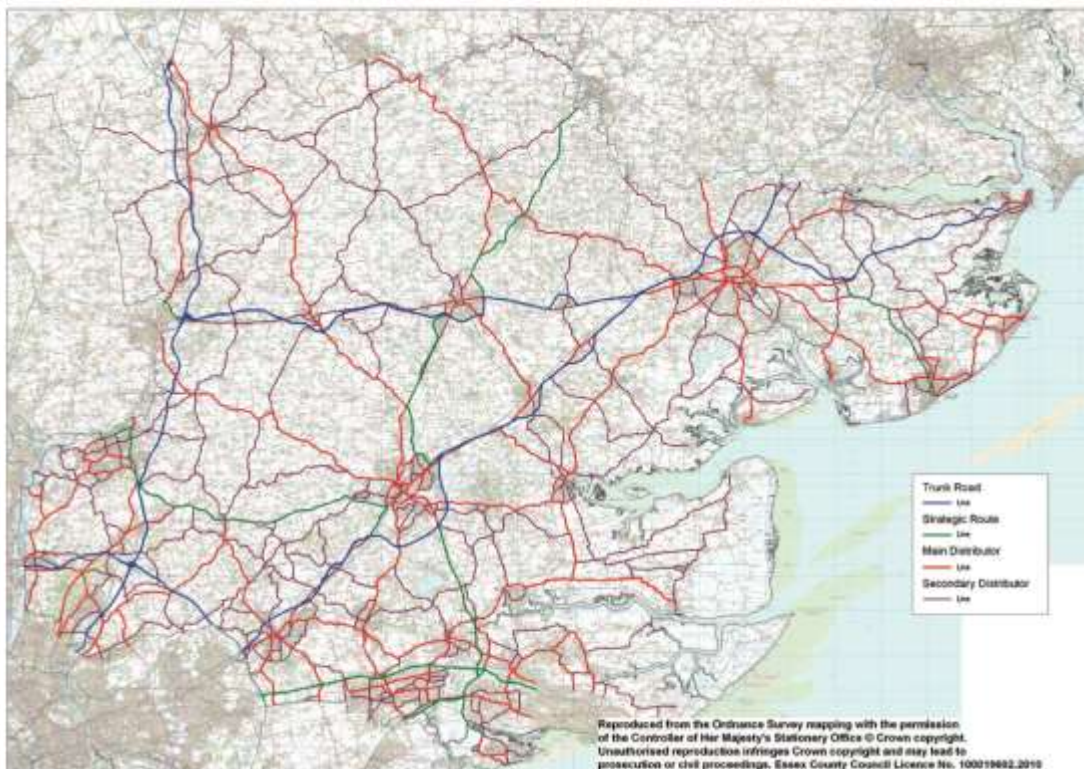
Meeting 19th December 2018 with,
Cllr. David Finch – Leader of Essex County Council
Andrew Cook – Director of Highways and Transportation, Essex County Council

Introduction

Halstead is situated on the A131 strategic route from Chelmsford to Sudbury. It is the only town between Chelmsford and Sudbury without a bypass.

As such the centre of the town is subjected to the full flow of commercial traffic through its narrow streets causing congestion, safety issues for residents and pollution. With the rapid growth in housing in Halstead and the surrounding areas, as well as the commercial growth in Essex, these issues will become even greater.

The Essex County Council “Highways/Transport Planning” report dated March 2017 identifies the junctions near to Head Street/St Andrews church to be at capacity (in 2015) and were forecast to be overcapacity as a result of growth. However, no mitigation actions were identified to relieve the situation other than a longer-term proposal for a bypass.



In addition to the bottleneck at the Head Street/St Andrews church junction there is a serious constraint within Head Street itself. There was no mention of this in the Essex County Council report.

Head Street Constraint

Head Street is on the A131 route through Halstead leading from the town centre towards Sudbury. This street has many old buildings on both sides of the road that are close to the highway. The pavements are narrow and a significant section of the road is also narrow. Starting at Chipping Hill at a width of 7.25m the road progressively narrows to 4.97m before widening back to 7.33m near the entrance to Mill Chase.

It can be seen from the bygone photo below that the buildings, most of which are still in place today, create a narrow street primarily designed at that time for horse and cart traffic. Today the width of the street has not changed and it is now used as part of the busy strategic A131 route which carries many heavy-duty commercial vehicles as well as passenger transportation. This route is clearly not fit for purpose.



It is not possible for two lorries coming from different directions to pass each other through this section and indeed very difficult for a large lorry and a car to safely pass each other. The consequences of this are that lorries frequently mount the narrow pavement causing damage and safety concerns to pedestrians and residents.

Residents of Head Street have expressed serious concerns for their safety and their property as well as the health effects from the pollution of vehicles passing so close.

Residents walking along the pavements of Head Street have frequently reported incidents of vehicles un-expectantly brushing close to them or even touching them.

Below are some of the reported photographs providing evidence,





Outlook

It is clear that the current capacity constraint at the Head Street junctions near St Andrews church will become even greater with increased congestion. As well as the overall capacity constraint large vehicles have great difficulty navigating their way through the two mini roundabouts, particularly two vehicles coming from opposite directions.

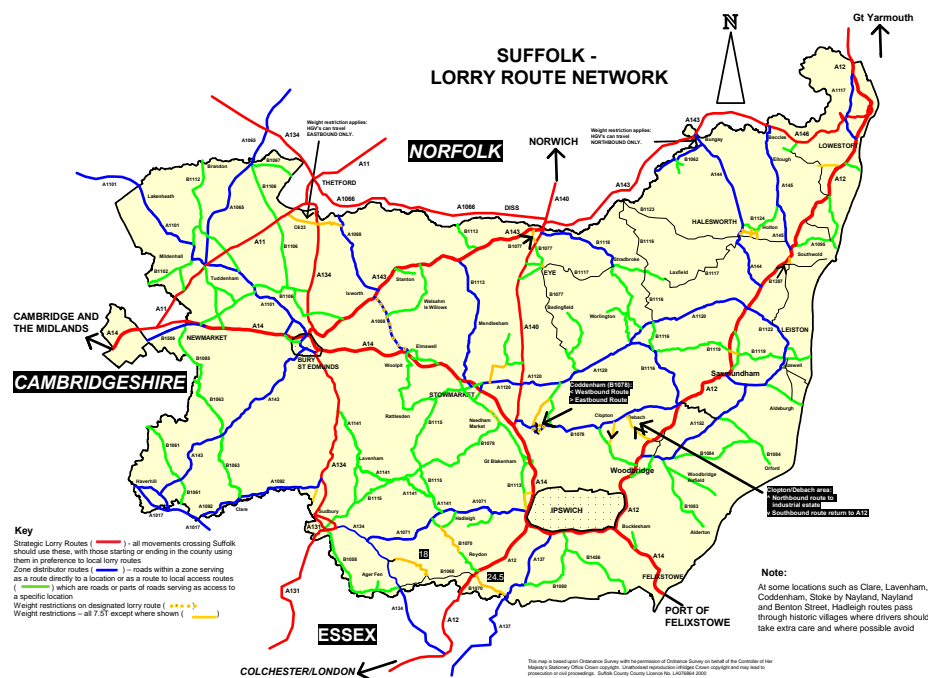
The current BDC housing trajectory for Halstead shows a further 680 dwellings in the next five years and this number is growing with more and more planning applications being approved. This coupled with other housing developments along the A131 route and the increased commercial growth in the area will put increasing strain on the junctions and the narrow road along Head Street.

The residents in this locality and more general in the town require mitigation actions from Essex County Council to resolve these problems.

Potential Mitigation Actions

The most obvious solution is to accelerate the implementation of a bypass to relieve Halstead of the traffic passing through the town. Serious consideration should be given to bringing forward planning and funding to enable this to become a reality.

A more immediate action could be to change the Strategic Lorry Route, which runs along the A131 between the A12 junction at Chelmsford into Suffolk. The current signage along the A12 at Chelmsford directs traffic to Sudbury along the A131. This could be changed to direct traffic further along the A12 before turning off to Sudbury and beyond. It may also be necessary to change signage in other areas.



We ask that Essex County Council seriously considers these mitigation actions and also use their vast experience of highways planning to put forward other suggestions that might result in short term improvements, particularly along the narrow Head Street.

Thank you for meeting with us, we hope that you will support us in improving our town and making it a healthy and safe place for our residents.

Cllr. Andrew Munday
Cllr. Michael Radley

Halstead Town Council