

**Statement of Common Ground between Highways England,
Lancashire County Council and Wyre Borough Council
regarding creation of a new M6 motorway junction in the vicinity
of Garstang**

The Parties:

- Highways England is the highway authority for the Strategic Road Network (SRN) in England. The SRN comprises most motorways and the most important 'A' class roads. Highways England operates under a licence from the Secretary of State for Transport, which sets out the statutory directions and guidance that Highways England must follow in discharging its duties.
- Lancashire County Council (LCC) is the Local Highway Authority with responsibility for the local road network within Wyre Borough.
- Wyre Borough Council (WBC) is the Local Planning Authority covering the Wyre Borough area.

Background:

Growth in Wyre Borough is constrained by the capacity of the road network. In the west of the borough the A585 corridor, part of the SRN, provides access to and from the urban peninsula, and between the M55 and Fleetwood. In the east of the borough, the market town of Garstang and a number of villages are clustered along the A6 corridor. Over the past few years the capacity of the road network has become a constraint on the sustainable growth of the borough's main towns and villages in both of these corridors.

It is agreed that road access is particularly important for the eastern side of the borough due to limited public transport provision in this area. Whilst there is a good bus service along the A6 there is no rail provision in this corridor. The borough's only train station is located in the West in Poulton-le-Fylde on the Preston to Blackpool North line.

Currently the local road network in the East has limited capacity to accommodate further growth in the area and this is reflected in the highways evidence produced by LCC to support the Local Plan.

The rationale behind exploring the potential for a new motorway junction on the M6 between Junctions 32 and 33 is to facilitate housing delivery in the borough within the Plan period. The Strategic Housing Market Area Assessment shows that there is a need for 479 dwellings per year (between 2011 and 2031). Due to a number of

constraints (flooding, environmental designations and highways capacity) it is unlikely that these needs will be met in full and therefore Wyre is required to explore all opportunities to maximise delivery.

The nearest connections to the SRN in the east of the borough are at M6 Junction 33, approximately 9km north of Garstang, and M55 Junction 1, approximately 13km south of Garstang. M55 Junction 1 has very limited residual peak time capacity, and capacity issues on the A6 through Galgate have an impact on M6 Junction 33.

WBC, LCC and Highways England met on a number of occasions to discuss highways within Wyre. At these meetings the feasibility of a new junction on the M6 between Junctions 32 and 33 was considered and in particular, if this would be an achievable prospect within the Plan period (2011-2031). The primary issues discussed were feasibility, funding and timescales.

Feasibility:

The Highways England licence and DfT Policy Circular 02/2013 state that there is a presumption against new motorway connections, except where they can be provided safely, there is a demonstrable benefit to the economy and where it has been established that such new infrastructure is essential to the delivery of strategic planned growth. The salient issue therefore is whether the need for additional housing and employment development within the borough of Wyre is of a type and magnitude that constitutes 'strategic planned growth' and would make a demonstrable benefit to the sub national or national economy.

The rationale for exploring the possibility of a motorway junction for Garstang is to facilitate the delivery of housing to meet local needs. Scale is therefore important to consider in interpreting what is meant by 'strategic planned growth', which the DfT Policy Circular 02/2013 refers to. By nature, the Strategic Road Network (SRN) that Highways England operates functions as a strategic transport asset of national significance, and is therefore of a national scale. The SRN exists to connect the country together, and includes most of the motorways and most important inter-urban roads in England. Almost no journeys will start or end on the SRN; but almost all national-level journeys will make use of part of it at some stage. In this way, the SRN fulfils its primary requirements of linking major centres of population, facilities of national importance and, finally, regions of the country to one another. By definition therefore, in the context of the Circular, 'strategic' is at national and sub-national level; not strategic to a local area (i.e. strategic within the Borough of Wyre). Consequently, we do not consider that a local need for housing development within Wyre conforms to the ethos of Policy Circular 02/2013.

Garstang is currently largely sustained by a high degree of outward commuting, something which automatically creates a greater potential demand for the provision

of new transport infrastructure (both road and rail) and public transport services. Any new housing provision should therefore be supported by a commensurate increase in employment provision, greater than the current ratio, to effect a change in this trend.

Without rail access, Garstang would become a car based 'new town'. Therefore to ensure the sustainability of a growth hub in the Garstang area a new rail link would be required. Unfortunately though and , following discussions with Network Rail a new station has been ruled out on the basis of funding and limited capacity on the West Coast Main Line.

It is also highly likely that the local road network in the immediate vicinity of the M6 near Garstang could not adequately cater for the increased traffic volumes that a new motorway junction would create. Consequently, any new junction would need to be designed and constructed in conjunction with a new link to and junction with the A6. As the M6 runs parallel to the West Coast Main Line, the River Wyre and the Lancaster Canal, this link would require substantial new infrastructure to cross these barriers adding significantly to the overall cost of a new junction, which is likely to be in excess of £50million.

In addition, commensurate with any plan to create a new motorway junction at Garstang would be a requirement for the local road network in the area both within and around the town to be significantly improved. Whilst the creation of a new motorway junction would, in isolation, act as a catalyst for significant levels of development growth around the town, it is unlikely that such growth could be entirely serviced by the new junction. The presence of a new motorway junction is likely to lead to a significant increase in traffic on the A586 through St Michaels on Wyre (the main route between Garstang and areas to the west) that would most likely require a bypass; including a new bridge over the River Wyre as the existing bridge has the constraints of a narrow width and listed structure status.

Furthermore, there are a number of environmental considerations that may impact on the feasibility and cost of the new junction and supporting network improvements, such as the proximity of the AONB and flood plain areas around St Michaels on Wyre.

Returning to the SRN, there is likely to be a need to create significant additional capacity at other SRN junctions (particularly at M55 Junction 1), which should also be considered. For example, given the existing physical constraints of M55 Junction 1, the creation of meaningful levels of additional capacity to cater for the levels of development traffic expected plus background traffic growth would most probably involve a major reworking of the junction that would cost a significant amount in comparison with the new junction. Also, the impacts on junctions further away (such as Junction 31) are not known and would need to be understood. This serves to illustrate our belief that any agreed future strategy to concentrate housing

development in the Garstang area could only be achieved through significant levels of coordinated, publically-funded infrastructure investment contribution. The cost of this is ultimately not likely to be economically viable when weighed against any 'demonstrable benefit' to the sub-national or national economy that the additional housing stock may bring.

Funding:

Currently there is no funding identified to support delivery of a new motorway junction. The potential options for funding a new junction include a combination of; central government funding, LCC funding, and developer contributions. Use of the Community Infrastructure Levy would overcome pooling restrictions. Given the scale and scope of this project and the wider impacts of significant development in the Garstang area, there would need to be a substantial and comprehensive evidence base.

Our preliminary technical discussions have indicated that the project is not feasible or deliverable in the context of a Local Plan. Therefore we concluded that further technical work to develop the proposal would not be value for money as the scale of intervention required is not affordable.

The level of intervention required could not be realised through the Local Plan process due to the complexity of the intervention and the scale of funding requirements. The scale of funding would require cross governmental buy-in to establishing Garstang as a strategic growth hub in a wider Lancashire or a sub-national context. Taking into account all of the above constraints, including any associated social infrastructure, it is estimated that to deliver a growth hub at this location would cost in excess of £100m for the necessary highways works alone.

Timescales:

Existing constraints would require the completion of a new junction prior to the delivery of any housing. Notwithstanding the time required to establish political support / approval, due to the level of preparatory work involved (i.e. to inform a business case for the funding of a new junction and the associated infrastructure as described above) the process of being able to deliver a solution would be beyond the operational timeframe of the Local Plan.

Conclusions:

For the reasons outlined above the parties agree that the construction of a new motorway junction in the vicinity of Garstang is not feasible or achievable to assist

with delivering Wyre's housing needs within the Plan period. As a result this intervention is unlikely to result in the Council being able to deliver a larger proportion of the unmet housing need within the Plan period.

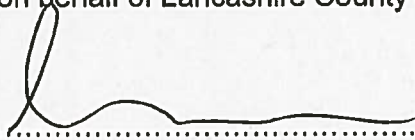
Signed on behalf of Highways England

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Position: *ASSET DEVELOPMENT MANAGER*

Date: *27/3/17*

Signed on behalf of Lancashire County Council

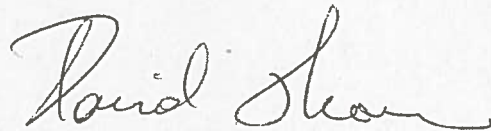
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Position: *PLANNING MANAGER LANCASHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL*

Date: *22.3.17*

Signed on behalf of Wyre Borough Council

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