

GNLP0520 - 'soundness' issues paper regarding the Norwich Road from the Hingham Road Safety Campaign under Regulation 19

Introduction

The Hingham Road Safety Campaign's (HRSC) report on its 2 year study of the B1108 was published at the end of November last year. It's authors had imagined at that stage that planners would not persist with their preferred site (GNLP0520) in view of the expressed strong local objections. Consequently the report did not focus on the development's potential impact, and we were, of course, unaware of the now available mitigations being put forward in the Key Local Service Area booklet.

Part 5 of our report is concerned specifically with the **Norwich Road**, described as being "a problem road, unfit for the 21st century": a precis of the issues raised is attached for reference in the Appendix. The following highlight the historic on-going issues that exist today together with the specific problems that GNLP0520, as proposed, would bring with it. These question and deny the soundness of this stated site preference.

Planning

Development of the 'The Hops' phase 1 showed poor forward planning appreciation by Planners and Highways as regards the Norwich Road (B1108) and it's longstanding neglected infrastructure issues. Allowing the development up to the line of oak trees has sandwiched the narrow (6m) road between the new development and the existing housing with its narrow single footpath. Inadequate today, before any new development, much needed safety improvements are nigh on impossible, and permanently compromised.

As planned, GNLP0520 will also be developed up to the line of oak trees, with its footpath fronting the housing, and with pedestrians still faced with crossing the B1108 to access school and surgery, and several times each way for all other town amenities – all with NO pedestrian priority point to cross anywhere.

To repeat the failure of this short term thinking, despite its apparent convenient "deliverability", GNLP0520, cannot be allowed. It would permanently wreck any ability to redevelop at any future point part of or the whole 700 metres of the Norwich Road. Yet this road is the major arterial link between Norwich and Watton, today still in its original 100+ year old "unimproved" state, a narrow, poorly maintained, poorly drained country road.

The further comments below highlight some of the enduring problems which appear to have been minimised. But our firm view is that GNLP0520 cannot be pursued as proposed, whatever "mitigation" is planned.

Access

The long straight of the Norwich Road which fronts GNLP0520 exhibits the worst driver speeding in Hingham. As part of our Road Safety Campaign police monitored traffic over

three different week-long periods in 2020. For this road the siting of the equipment was in the centre of the straight, very close to any likely site access.

During one period data showed **46%** of drivers exceeding **35 mph**, the speed at which police would normally issue summonses to offenders. (Compliance with the **30 mph limit** is described euphemistically by Highways in the Key Service Centre booklet as “not particularly good”.)

Drivers can be observed daily overtaking slower traffic in the Norwich direction and exceeding the 30mph limit.

Enforcement is at best occasional and therefore no deterrent. One accident has occurred already this year when a vehicle crashed into a house ('Royal Oak') in the 20 zone on the bend in Norwich Street - which Norwich Road leads directly into.

On the matter of egress from the site, with this volume and level of speeding, it appears unlikely that visibility displays will be able to provide adequate safe passage for drivers given the presence of the oak trees. Further east the presence of the bend and HGV accessing the Ironside Way industrial site would add to the risk.

It is also proposed that some frontages should include “access(es)/private drives towards the eastern side of the site, incorporating visibility splays as required to the satisfaction of the highway authority”. These “visible clues” would appear not only to be highly dangerous for the residents emerging from their driveways but also to be a distraction to drivers as they round the blind bend. As mentioned, there are very slow, heavy vehicle movements in the vicinity.

Finally, It is worth stating that a dozen driveways onto Norwich Road already exist, evidentially having no effect on driver speeding.

Traffic calming

The narrowness (6m) of the fast straight inhibits use of the more usual traffic calming devices. (The HRSC report highlights this impediment to its planned holistic calming scheme for the B1108.)

Highways has projected a pedestrian crossing refuge in the vicinity of Ironside Way as a solution (presumably for estate pedestrians accessing the industrial estate - it would have little use or value for primary school children). However, experience of the refuge provided at The Hops is that it has had no effect on traffic speeds. Drivers are also known to pass on both sides of the refuge when “in a hurry”- one accident and many near misses have been recorded there.

Pedestrians

The HRSC report focuses on the need to re-balance the rights of residents to enjoy walking and cycling safely in their town over those of currently enjoyed unrestrained by drivers. The road literally bi-sects the town yet has not one crossing point with pedestrian rights of way, footpaths that are woefully unsafe and frequently inadequate, especially for those disabled or just passing. This is not the time or place to add further complications.

There is an oblique suggestion that residents (how many?) walking to town amenities would use the (unsafe) pedestrian refuge at The Hops to cross the Norwich Road. This would entail walking through the existing estate on Granary Way, a residential road which has no footpath and vehicles parked on it. This cannot be desirable, deemed safe or thought satisfactory as a long term planning solution?

The extra distance from town amenities of the proposed site suggests that a majority of residents will incline towards using a car rather than face an unpleasant walk with multiple road crossings. This would add to parking issues at the school, surgery and in the town's conservation area.

In conclusion

It has therefore to be said that, from our very detailed knowledge of the road and what we have read of the proposal, the issues to be 'mitigated' are understated, with little detail or evidence on how these would be achieved. There appears to be a relaxed acceptance of the case for the development which, as we explain, will only add to the issues that Hingham endures. In contrast, a resident and Town Council favoured alternative, with fewer issues to be addressed, appears to have been dismissed rather too easily).

We conclude that there is a clear lack of any appreciation of the longstanding unresolved issues facing Hingham resulting from decades of under-investment in infrastructure, to which GNLP0520 can only add.

The final straw now would be to approve this development and thereby permanently block necessary improvement to what is already a very troubled principal town access road.

Geoff Bedford

Lead, Hingham Road Safety Campaign
8 March, 2021

Appendix

GNLP0520 - This appendix is a precis of the existing shortcomings of the Norwich Road, as published in our November 2020 Campaign Report. It explains why this proposed development would further exacerbate the situation and is objected to on grounds of soundness

- **Apart from the two blind corners, Norwich Road is the narrowest stretch along the B1108 through Hingham. It is in fact quite simply a continuation of the original unimproved country road from Hackford, (and for example has never had a structured rainwater drainage scheme installed, contributing to the flooding in the Seamere Road area.)**

- Just 6m (20 feet) wide, 2 passing HGV will fill the carriageway, with wing mirrors passing above the narrow footpath, risking head injury to pedestrians
- Every day cars, delivery vans, and lorries park on the single narrow footpath
- The needs of the disabled, mobility scooters, mothers and children are ignored or reluctantly denied as being impossible to remedy today
- Speeding drivers put a metaphorical two fingers up to residents, the police and our Hingham Community SpeedWatch volunteers: seven accidents, one serious, were reported in 2019. Up to the end of February this year we know of two accidents already
- Every day, drivers 'in a hurry' overtake those keeping to the posted limits
- Closeness of large vehicles, tractors and trailers, often speeding, bring intimidating noise, fumes and the splashing of pedestrians from road rainwater
- Traffic calming is difficult to achieve due to the lack of road width
- Users of public transport can have no bus shelter protection because of the narrow footpath
- Social distancing without walking in the road is generally impossible
- Close encounters by cars etc with HGV turning into Ironside Way is reported regularly
- Edge Field Lodge has no footpath access whatsoever
- Street lighting is said by residents to be poor and patchy
- No pedestrian controlled crossing points exist
- Walking to the Town centre therefore has little attraction for residents, compounded by having to cross the road to access central amenities three or more times each way
- Cycling for leisure cannot be recommended: last year two serious accidents involving cyclists were reported

End

