



# **A12 Widening Scheme**

## **Witham Town Council Representations Report**

**Interested Party Ref. No. 20033063**

**Unique Reference A12C-AFP364**

**Date 9<sup>th</sup> February 2023**

**Contact: Nikki Smith (Town Clerk)**



GK/9.2.2023

The Town Council, as owner of the River Walk and Whetmead Nature Reserve, has been in conversation with National Highways regarding the impact of the A12 widening scheme on its property and, in the wider context, the town as a whole.

The Town Council registered as an interested party in 2022 under reference 20033063 and made the following comments –

- Loss of land at Whetmead Nature Reserve
- Proposed replacement land is inadequate as a Nature Reserve
- Understanding that agricultural traffic will not be permitted on the A12 and the implications this will have on Witham town centre traffic
- Overall traffic issues for Witham during the course of construction
- Problems with noise
- Loss of mature trees and shrubs
- Loss of access to nature reserve during construction
- Whetmead was used as a translocation zone.

### **Whetmead Nature Reserve**

This 11.4 hectare site was formerly the town tip and on decommissioning Essex County Council returned the site in 1976 to Braintree District Council as open space and in 1981 it was formally designated as a Local Nature Reserve. It was transferred to Witham Town Council's ownership in 2005.

The Nature Reserve lies within the Blackwater Valley is situated at the confluence of the River Blackwater and River Brain and is accessed from Blackwater Lane under the existing A12. During periods of heavy rain the large quantity of water flowing into the River Brain causes the underpass to flood. The Nature Reserve is subject to an Essex Ecology Services Limited Management Plan 2015 - 2024. Within the Nature Reserve there is a large lagoon within the ownership of Anglian Water which is remnant of a former water treatment works. This lagoon holds shallow water in the winter months but tends to dry out during the summer. Although next to the A12 the noise and pollution is buffered by shrub land and trees. It is a quiet and remote area of open space where wildlife can be observed and supports the Living Landscapes initiative of embracing characteristic landscapes and the wildlife they support. Whetmead is used mainly by dog walkers.

To allow for widening of the A12, a strip of the Whetmead Nature Reserve, approximately 4,344 square metres of grassland, unnamed track, trees and shrubbery will be lost. Reference 8/47a in the Book of Reference and land parcel 9/11a refers.

Whetmead benefits from this wooded area which cuts back noise and pollution from the A12, with the removal of this buffer the peace and quiet of the reserve would be lost. The boundary treatment is a great concern to the Town Council. There is a need to ensure that there is no loss of amenity with the removal of mature trees and shrubbery. The Town Council has a green/climate change agenda and is disappointed that this vegetation would be lost.

National Highways has proposed replacement land in two parcels, one adjacent to Whetmead, the other a distance from it reference 9/1a and 9/1h.

Town Council representatives, in conjunction with National Highways, made a site visit to both parcels of land.

The first parcel of land adjacent to Whetmead Nature Reserve is a wooded area with open glades which would be suitable for picnic benches, bug hotels and for educational use. There is no vehicular access on the site at present and the Town Council would wish this to remain. The land is very open to the A12 and adequate fencing and screening would be required.

The second small piece of land is a distance from the nature reserve and isolated from it. Foot access is via Coleman's Fishery and up a steep incline. Vehicular access to this area would need to be via Whetmead and the Town Council would not want to encourage motorised vehicles onto the site and as explained earlier in the report has decided that access to the first

piece of land would be only on foot. This second parcel of land is heavily wooded and would be a drain on the public purse to maintain. The Town Council has therefore resolved not to accept as replacement land as it is not open space and will therefore consider seeking financial compensation.

A scheme has been mooted to create a route along the side of the A12 from Whetmead to Little Braxted Lane, part of a longer walk/cyclepath from Gershwin Boulevard to the Industrial Estates. The value of the proposal has been questioned unless this route can be linked to existing networks along the River Walk or Blackwater Rail Trail. There would be a need to ensure that the route is adequately fenced and screened from the A12 and that the road surface would be such as to lessen traffic noise.

The Town Council has therefore asked that both north and south bound carriageways of the A12 be surfaced so as to minimise traffic noise. This would be particularly important near Market Lane which is close to the existing A12.

During construction of the A12 public amenity of the nature reserve will be lost whilst embankments are constructed by the entrance to Whetmead although access by Town Council staff for maintenance purposes would be possible.

Whetmead has been used in the past as a translocation zone for reptiles and other wild life. Care must be taken to ensure that the wildlife or habitat is not endangered.

In addition, another area owned by the Town Council will be affected by the A12 widening. Land to the west of the River Brain, north of the A12 will be lost and likewise land to the south referenced 8/11o and q. It is understood that the National Highways propose to erect a temporary bridge over the River Brain in this area.

A site adjacent to Whetmead is going to be used as an ecological mitigation area and during construction prior to work starting on the A12 access will be required over Town Council land. Representations have been made to ensure that access to Whetmead is maintained at all times and that mud/debris on the access is removed as necessary.

### **Witham's River Walk**

By Maldon Road, part of the River Walk by the River Brain will be temporarily required for relocation of the gas main. This land is incorrectly shown as being owned by Braintree District Council numbered 8/11h and i.

### **Agricultural Vehicles**

The National Highways have stated that agricultural vehicles will no longer be able to use the A12. At certain times of the year there are a number of large agricultural vehicles which already use the town centre, once the widened A12 has been constructed this number will increase. The town centre is a conservation area with narrow pavements and 14<sup>th</sup> century medieval houses with overhangs, which would be in danger. A site visit has proven that there

is no alternative route round the town. It would be hoped that agreement could be reached with farmers to ensure that movement of these large vehicles would not be during peak times.

**Traffic Issues during construction**

The Town Council is concerned how the traffic in Witham will be affected during the construction period. When traffic is slow on the A12 motorists will use the B1389 through the town centre causing severe congestion. It is hoped that the National Highways will ensure that A12 closures will be kept to a minimum so that delays and congestion in the town centre, and beyond, do not occur.

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