

Eaton Phase 2 Works – Do we really need these?

It is interesting looking back through the papers for the Eaton and Cringleford works as you can see the project really was poorly planned and doomed to be problematical from the start. Officers from Transport for Norwich (TfN) attended the EVRA AGM in October 2016 where residents and local businesses voiced their concerns about the proposed scheme and, in particular, their dislike for shared cycle paths through the centre of Eaton. The submission to the November 2016 Norwich Agency Highways Committee (NHAC) lists the many objections from residents and businesses which have led to subsequent postponements yet these were brushed aside by TfN officers and ignored by NHAC. Despite these concerns much public money, our money, has been wasted on redesigning and re-planning the works with subsequent further postponement due to poor planning and lack of proper scrutiny.

The original NHAC approved scheme for Cringleford and Eaton was budgeted at £700,000 and covered a considerable amount of work along Newmarket Road, Cringleford and into Eaton Street and up the slip road. This also included repositioning and landscaping of the Eaton Village sign.

The first postponement

That scheme fell apart in March 2017 when TfN found that the costs of traffic management considerably exceeded the NHAC approved budget of £700,000. The project was then split into two with the Cringleford scheme (budget £300,000) proceeding and the Eaton element revisited. The Eaton scheme was revised with most of the cycle path works removed leaving just the widening of the existing 200m of cycle path from the Cellar House to the top of the slip road and changes to the traffic light phasing and road markings on Bluebell Road and Eaton Street. The budget for the revised Eaton scheme is £600,000 for what is probably no more than 30% of the original works!

The NHAC meeting in July 2017 approved the revised Eaton Phase 2 scheme with no questioning or scrutiny of the costs or plans evident in the minutes of that meeting, surprising given the failure by TfN previously to get the planning and costings right! Interesting how a scheme enthusiastically approved by NHAC in November 2016 as being very important to improve cycling routes in the area, despite all the comments, can be quickly reduced at a subsequent NHAC.

The combined approved budget for the Cringleford (£300,000) and revised Eaton (£600,000) scheme is now £900,000. So clearly the project on which NHAC originally gave its approval in November 2016 was underestimated by at least £200,000. Taking into account the considerably reduced amount of work for the revised Eaton scheme then it was probably underestimated by £400,000 or more!

The second postponement

A Traffic Order Notice for the Eaton Phase 2 works was issued on 28th September 2017 setting out the alternative routes and proposed road closures during the works expected to be for 40 days with work starting in October 2017.

On 10th October 2017 TfN postponed the works yet again as set out in an email from Billy Fox:

“After careful consideration by the wider project delivery team, the decision was made to postpone the works until next year. We reviewed the programme recently prepared by our

Contractor and felt there were minor margins to accommodate any slippage on-site as a result of any unforeseen delays, such as adverse weather conditions. We therefore collectively felt this was the correct decision to avoid running the risk of works extending beyond the Christmas shut down period and consequently into the new year. This postponement will allow us to look at options for reducing the time the slip road is closed and put in place temporary, alternative public transport provision to maintain the service in Eaton and Cringleford while work takes place. At the current time I cannot confirm exactly when the works will be delayed until, as we need to look closely at the programme to see where they can be accommodated. However we remain committed to delivering the scheme, so this is by no means a cancellation.”

It was clear that, as well as not realising that winter was approaching, no alternative provision for bus services had been put in place during the 40 days of slip road closure. The closure would affect all bus services for Eaton Village, Cringleford and Bluebell Road/ Eaton Park as well as First Group busses via Eaton Village to the hospital and research park.

The third attempt

Between October 2017 and February 2018 EVRA emailed TfN several times seeking an update on the Eaton Phase 2 project and dates for this. Eventually a Public Information Notice issued by TfN in early February 2018 gave a revised start date of 2nd July 2018 and an overall duration of nine weeks but no indication of the closure period for the slip road. In response to an email on 13th February 2018 TfN gave an indicative timescale of four weeks for the closure which in an email on 4 May 2018 was revised to five weeks!

TfN confirmed on 1st May 2018 that they had agreed with providers that all bus services would operate during the slip road closure with some changes to inbound routes to accommodate this. This means buses travelling to Eaton Village via South Park Avenue and Bluebell Road with a consequent impact on timetable since other traffic will also be using the same diversion route.

Is it worth it?

In their submission to NHAC TfN extol the virtues of the new scheme saying that the junction changes will make things easier for cyclists heading along Eaton Street to join the cycle path on the slip road but ignore the risky transition they have to make across traffic coming down the slip road to join the new proposed wider cycle path. Having negotiated this they will then join a shared cycle path on Newmarket Road. So it is questionable that the widening of the cycle path represents good value for money given its short length (less than 200m) and feeding onto a shared cycle path.

On top of all that TfN have consistently refused to include in the scheme changes to traffic light phases to enable vehicles turning right from Eaton Street into Church Lane to do so without any oncoming vehicles. Residents know that oncoming vehicles often prevent them completing the turn until the red light shows and that very few vehicles can get through on a phase. TfN says their modelling indicates that this would impact on the “capacity and efficiency of the junction” – in other words the computer says no! Where is the human element in that decision? Clearly TfN has no appreciation of or willingness to accept the experience of residents in using the junction.

None of the documentation seen from TfN includes anything about the cost impact on residents and businesses during the closure of the slip road. All vehicles from the City direction will have a two mile diversion to reach Eaton Village during the closure of the slip

road. Businesses will suffer during the nine week period of the works (and even more so when the slip road is closed) because Eaton will be difficult to access and many customers may decide to go elsewhere. We do not get any sense that TfN cares about the impact of their projects on the community!

The track record of TfN delivering to timetable is not good with delays of at least two weeks on both the Bluebell Road and Newmarket Road (Christchurch Road to Hanover Road) schemes as well as elsewhere around Norwich. TfN say that doing the Eaton works during school holidays will lessen the impact but that ignores the fact people still have to get around their community during this time and not everyone will be on holiday!

On the face of it the Eaton Phase 2 scheme seems largely pointless. It won't really benefit residents, pedestrians or cyclists but will cost a lot. There are elements that could proceed such as moving back the stop line on Bluebell Road and resurfacing of the junction which are desperately needed, but otherwise we will hardly notice the changes made and certainly not be able to clearly see what we got for OUR £600,000.

Petition

A petition to the NHAC Meeting on 7th June 2018 has been set up by our Councillors and is hosted on the Liberal Democrats site at the following link: <https://SignMe.org.uk/1471>

The wording of the petition is:

Eaton Village Residents' Association (EVRA), local councillors, businesses and residents have significant concerns about the proposed transport changes coming to road works in Eaton Village and feel that councillors and officers at Norwich City Council and Norfolk County Council are failing to take on-board these views. EVRA therefore agreed with our Councillors to set up a petition to request that NHAC reconsiders undertaking these works.

We the undersigned, therefore, urge you to consider the following:

- It is wholly inappropriate to spend such a large sum of money (£600,000) on changing the short section of cycle track near The Cellar House pub in Eaton. We do not believe that the outcome will benefit either cyclists or the general public and we ask you to reconsider undertaking this work.
- If the work has to go ahead, then we ask you to look again at the necessity of closing the slip road - especially for so long - with its adverse effect on both residents and businesses.

Please support our campaign and sign the petition to let City and County Halls know that we are not happy with their proposal to close off the Eaton Street slip road for such a long period.

You can make a printed copy of the petition by following the link at the foot of the petition page and ask your friends and neighbours to sign this. Any paper copies should be delivered to Vic Flute at 11 Brentwood, Eaton by Tuesday 5 June 2018.

Chris Stebbing – Chairman EVRA

26 May 2018