

## A127 Corridor Engagement Group - Meeting Notes

<b>Project:</b>	A127 Economic Growth Corridor		
<b>Meeting title:</b>	A127 Engagement Group meeting		
<b>Date:</b>	11/09/24	<b>Location:</b>	Microsoft Teams virtual meeting
<b>Attendees</b>	Cllr Andrew Sheldon (ECC) - Chair	<b>ASh</b>	
	Cllr Malcolm Buckley (ECC)	<b>MB</b>	
	Cllr Laureen Shaw (ECC)	<b>LS</b>	
	Cllr Mike Steptoe (ECC)	<b>MS</b>	
	Cllr Tom Cunningham (ECC)	<b>TC</b>	
	Cllr Barry Aspinall (Brentwood Borough Council)	<b>BA</b>	
	Cllr Daniel Cowan (Southend City Council)	<b>DC</b>	
	Cllr James Newport (Rochford District Council)	<b>JN</b>	
	Cllr Michael Fuller (Castle Point borough Council)	<b>MFu</b>	
	Rebecca Harris MP	<b>RH</b>	
	Mark Francois MP	<b>MFr</b>	
	Bayo Alaba MP	<b>BAI</b>	
	David Burton-Sampson MP	<b>DBS</b>	
	Billy Parr (ECC)	<b>BP</b>	
	Mark Robinson (ECC)	<b>MR</b>	
	Anthony Buston (ECC)	<b>AB</b>	
	Alastair Southgate (ECC)	<b>ASo</b>	
	Alan Lindsay (ECC)	<b>AL</b>	
	Charles Walubita (ECC)	<b>CW</b>	
	Sean Perry (Essex Highways)	<b>SP</b>	
	Chris Shipway (Essex Highways)	<b>CS</b>	
	Gareth Burton (Essex Highways)	<b>GB</b>	
	Peter Franklin (Essex Highways)	<b>PF</b>	
	Neil Hoskins (Southend Council)	<b>NH</b>	
	Navtej Tung (Thurrock Council)	<b>NT</b>	

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Agenda item number	Item and notes
1.	<p><b>Welcome and introductions</b></p> <p><b>ASh</b> welcomed everyone to the meeting. He reiterated the importance of the A127 corridor and the various projects underway to make improvements to the corridor, which he said attendees would be updated on during the meeting.</p>
2.	<p><b>Agenda</b></p> <p><b>MR</b> introduced the agenda for the meeting.</p>
3.	<p><b>Overview</b></p> <p><b>SP</b> acknowledged there were a number of new members of the A127 Engagement Group and provided a recap on the background and history to the group, explaining it was established in 2018 as the A127 Task Force. He told attendees the group had been set up to develop a long-term vision for the A127 corridor and to help lobby for investment. He explained it consisted of South Essex MPs, Essex County Council members and leaders of the district, borough and unitary councils in South Essex.</p> <p><b>SP</b> said the focus of the Task Force had shifted in 2020 towards making the case for the A127 to be re-trunked, but that National Highways had advised in mid-2023 they favoured trunking the A13 instead.</p> <p><b>SP</b> set out the vision for the A127 corridor - 'A high-quality and reliable corridor which provides good access for all customers whether travelling along or across the A127 (including sustainable and active modes), connecting our communities, reducing severance and supporting our ambitious plans for innovation and sustainable low-carbon economic growth across South Essex.'</p> <p>He acknowledged it was slightly wordy, but said it encapsulated what was needed and provided a shared vision for the future of the corridor.</p> <p><b>SP</b> set out the agreed objectives for the A127 and five wider outcomes they would contribute towards, explaining these aligned with the emerging new Local Transport Plan for Essex. He presented a further slide, outlining the context and challenges in South Essex, the transport interventions needed and how these could help contribute to longer-term outcomes.</p> <p><b>SP</b> summarised the roles and membership of the various A127 groups. In addition to the A127 Engagement Group, he set that the thinking is that there would also be a new A127 Local Member Forum established (replacing a former member working group), which would include representatives from local parish and town councils, along with local members. He explained there was also a parallel A127 Officer Working Group and how the groups fed into each other. Finally, he explained how inputs from other external organisations, bodies and groups, such as Transport East, National Highways, South Essex Councils and Opportunity South Essex, fed into the A127 groups.</p>

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	<p><b>ASh</b> reiterated the vital importance of the A127 corridor, acknowledging that the asks of government would be significant, but would not be successful unless there was unity. He explained that the reason for having the A127 Engagement Group and associated groups was to ensure everyone was aware of what was happening, the schemes in development, and latest progress, and, ultimately, so there was unity.</p> <p><b>ASh</b> acknowledged there were a number of new members of the group following the local and general elections and invited any questions.</p> <p><b>MFr</b> questioned whether <b>TC</b> was on the call. <b>TC</b> confirmed he was and apologised for joining late. He confirmed he had asked <b>ASh</b> to be chair of the group.</p> <p><b>BA</b>s said he agreed the overall aims for the group were worthy, but questioned the logic of the proposed widening of the A127 between the Halfway House and Dunton junctions (part of the Major Road Network-funded A127 Transport Improvements scheme), suggesting it should be widened from the junction with the M25.</p> <p><b>ASh</b> acknowledged the question but suggested the scheme would be covered later in the agenda so the question could be covered then.</p> <p><b>SP</b> explained there was a desire to seek business representation on the A127 Engagement Group and outlined suggested groups which could be invited to join the group, as well as other potential options if there was a desire for broader or more localised representation. He said the more the group could get businesses behind the corridor objectives and the proposed schemes, the more credence they would likely be given by government. He emphasised the importance of speaking with 'one voice' to ensure there was a clear, consistent and powerful message to government.</p>
<b>4.</b>	<p><b>Policy context</b></p> <p><b>ASo</b> explained that the county council was developing its Local Transport Plan (LTP) 4, which was currently out to initial public consultation. He explained the LTP was the overarching transport strategy for Essex and acknowledged Southend City Council's LTP would also be of importance in considering the future of the A127 corridor.</p> <p><b>ASo</b> said the emerging new LTP for Essex was focused on delivering wider outcomes and not just solving specific transport issues. He outlined how three key themes had been developed – Supporting people, health, wellbeing and independence, Creating sustainable places and communities, and Connecting people, places and businesses. He explained how the three themes aligned with the county council's corporate plan, Everyone's Essex, and, until recently, the Department for Transport's (DfT) priorities, acknowledging these were changing as a result of the change in government and would need to be reviewed again to ensure they still aligned.</p> <p><b>ASo</b> explained the council was taking a much more outcome-led approach to identifying the transport investment needed in Essex. He said three key</p>

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	<p>outcomes the council wanted to achieve had been identified under each of the three key themes, and he detailed each outcome.</p> <p><b>MR</b> explained that a South Essex Future Transport Study had been carried out alongside the development of the LTP. He said the study was an evidence base which would sit beneath the LTP and had incorporated previous work from the A127 Engagement Group, as well as the Association of South Essex Local Authorities (now South Essex Councils) and earlier work from the A127 Transport Improvements (MRN) scheme. He said the study would inform an Implementation Plan for South Essex as part of the LTP, as well as future Local Plans.</p>
5.	<p><b>A127 Transport Improvements (Halfway House to Fortune of War)</b></p> <p><b>MR</b> explained the A127 Transport Improvements scheme was a package of proposed improvements between the Halfway House and Fortune of War junctions on the A127 and was being funded through the DfT's Major Road Network (MRN) programme.</p> <p><b>ASh</b> asked for clarity about what parts of the network National Highways was responsible for maintaining, compared with the county council. <b>MR</b> clarified that National Highways were responsible for the M25 and parts of the A13, while the A130 was maintained by CountyRoute having been built under a Private Finance Initiative (PFI), while the county council and Southend City Council (from near the Progress Road junction) were responsible for the A127.</p> <p><b>MR</b> explained the council had first submitted a pre-Strategic Outline Case for MRN funding in late 2019 and this had been approved to proceed to the next stage in 2020. He explained the project team had now got to the stage of submitting a Strategic Outline Case (SOC), which happened in June. He said that if the SOC was successful then the scheme would move forward to public consultation and the next stage in the business case process (Outline Business Case).</p> <p><b>MR</b> provided an overview of the scheme area and summarised the proposed improvements, including widening of the eastbound carriageway of the A127 between the Halfway House and Dunton junctions, improvements at the Fortune of War junction and a series of active travel and bus improvements in the area.</p> <p>Responding to the previous comment by <b>BA</b>s, <b>MR</b> explained a number of potential measures were originally considered but they did not all provide the calculated benefits needed to be taken forward. He added that the proposed scheme was influenced by the funding available and the criteria set. <b>MR</b> also emphasised that the location of the proposed widening was one of the busiest stretches of the A127.</p> <p><b>BA</b>s responded by saying that things had significantly moved on since the A127 Task Force was first formed. He said that, as the county council would be aware, there had been meetings of South Essex Councils looking at housing supply and the area between Halfway House and the M25 was an area of</p>

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	<p>potential growth, so he felt not allowing for that future growth by including a further section of widening would be a mistake.</p> <p><b>ASh</b> acknowledged that growth in South Essex would be a movable feast and said that he did not think the current proposals would prejudice or restrict potential further widening in the future.</p> <p><b>BAs</b> said he was willing to accept that if potential additional future widening to the M25 was not being totally discounted.</p> <p><b>ASh</b> agreed and said he did not want anything discounted.</p> <p><b>MR</b> confirmed nothing in the current scheme would prevent further future widening.</p> <p><b>SP</b> provided reassurance that there was a focus on the whole A127 corridor, but that the meeting today included updates on projects looking at specific sections or junctions. He said there was nothing to discount other additional projects potentially being developed in the future and that the county council wanted to continue to develop the narrative behind the corridor and growth in South Essex. He said the A127 Transport Improvements (Halfway House to Fortune of War) was very much the start of the journey and that having strong growth story was vitally important to securing the investment needed.</p> <p><b>ASh</b> emphasised that further and said these meetings were all about engagement and that the county council looked forward to further schemes coming forward in the future.</p> <p><b>MB</b> said his primary concern was to see traffic flow freely along the A127 to improve efficiency and air quality. He said there were a number of important business areas along the A127 corridor, particularly around Basildon and Southend, and questioned how South Essex would attract and retain businesses if the transport infrastructure and links were inadequate.</p> <p><b>MB</b> also expressed concerns about proposed signalisation of the A127 at Halfway House, however, <b>MR</b> clarified it was partial signalisation of the roundabout at the Halfway House junction and not on the A127 itself. He explained it was a separate developer proposal being developed as part of the section 106 process.</p> <p><b>Action: ASh asked that the Halfway House developer proposals were shared with Basildon and Brentwood members once available.</b></p> <p><b>MFr</b> expressed frustration with the time taken to get to this point with the project and that, given the latest comments from the Chancellor, it would likely be very difficult to get the funding needed for this scheme alone. Therefore, he questioned the likelihood of getting funding for additional improvements, such as further widening towards the M25. He said if it was not included in the scheme now, then he did not think it would happen.</p> <p><b>MFr</b> questioned what the county council wanted MPs to do following this meeting and whether it was looking for them to lobby government.</p>
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	<p><b>ASh</b> acknowledged his concerns and said the ask of MPs would be confirmed once the remainder of the presentation was quickly completed, acknowledging MPs needed to leave early because of their commitments in parliament.</p> <p><b>PF</b> shared the objectives for the scheme and summarised the various individual measures proposed as part of the package of improvements. He explained that the section of the A127 between Halfway House and Dunton was a known capacity hotspot due to a lack of road space and the number of vehicles coming on and off the A127 in those areas. He said widening of that section on the eastbound carriageway would be achievable within the funding available and without major impacts on buried stats and utilities. He added that the larger improvements which had been suggested would be unaffordable through the MRN programme.</p> <p><b>PF</b> explained the Fortune of War proposals, including proposed active travel and passenger transport improvements. He then gave an overview of the indicative scheme programme, highlighting that, if approved, construction was expected to start in 2027 and there would be an estimated two-year construction programme.</p>
6.	<p><b>A127/A130 Fairglen Interchange</b></p> <p><b>AB</b> summarised the improvements proposed as part of the A127/A130 Fairglen Interchange scheme. He said the project team were currently reviewing tender submissions and going through governance processes, with a contract expected to be awarded at the end of the year and construction to start in early 2025, subject to confirmation of funding from the DfT.</p>
7.	<p><b>Discussions</b></p> <p>Responding to the earlier comments and questions from <b>MFr</b>, <b>BP</b> said the purpose of the meeting was to provide an update on the A127-related projects, particularly given the number of new members of the group. He said there was no specific ask of MPs as such but, now the SOC for the MRN scheme had been submitted, if MPs and members wanted to lobby government for funding for that scheme then that may be helpful. He added that the county council would be happy to help coordinate the lobbying by MPs.</p> <p><b>Action: ASh asked that a summary of the SOC and a list of the scheme benefits was shared with MPs.</b></p> <p><b>ASh</b> said the MPs engaging with ministers would help ensure the scheme stayed on the DfT's radar.</p> <p><b>MFr</b> suggested a joint letter be sent by MPs. <b>BAI</b> welcomed the idea of a joint letter.</p> <p><b>RH</b> said her main concerns in relation to the A127 were ensuring there was potential future access to/from the North West Thundersley site which was being considered for development as part of Castle Point's Local Plan. <b>ASh</b> said he shared her concerns and would make sure the point was made on her behalf.</p>



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	<p><b>MFr</b> emphasised that there were still two more business case stages for the A127 Transport Improvements (Halfway House to Fortune of War) scheme before any works would commence.</p> <p><b>Action: MFr suggested that an initial draft letter be provided by the county council which MPs could then review, agree among themselves and sign.</b></p> <p><b>MFr</b> said getting hold of the minister and ensuring they were aware of the scheme and understood the importance of it would be vital.</p> <p>MPs left the meeting.</p>
8.	<p><b>Further information on A127 schemes</b></p> <p><b>PF</b> revisited earlier slides regarding the benefits and potential uncertainties around the A127 Transport Improvements (Halfway House to Fortune of War) scheme, which he had previously covered very quickly before MPs had to leave. He set out how the benefits of the scheme had been calculated as part of the SOC and presented them under three broad categories: supporting growth, Safer, Greener, Healthier (active travel benefits) and improved journeys (reduced congestion and improved journey times).</p> <p><b>PF</b> explained one of the main uncertainties regarding the scheme was a challenging programme, which included three stages of DfT reviews, a planning application and uncertainties around funding. He also said there would be some funding the county council would need to secure and contribute and that the project team would also need to be wary of emerging development proposals.</p> <p><b>ABu</b> reiterated the proposals and programme for the Fairglens scheme.</p> <p><b>MS</b> raised an ongoing query regarding the cycling provision included within the Fairglens scheme and said he felt he had not yet received a satisfactory answer. He acknowledged he had received an email inviting him to a meeting to discuss the matter further.</p> <p><b>ABu</b> said there had also been previous email correspondence about the matter and explained that while the council would always like to be able to do more to improve provision for walking and cycling, there was a limit on what could be included as part of the scheme. He suggested the improvements Cllr Steptoe had suggested could potentially be pursued through other schemes and sources of funding, and would need to complement the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs). He said there had been an LCWIP consultation last year and a report on the findings was due to be published shortly.</p> <p><b>Action: MS said he would welcome the opportunity of a meeting to discuss the matter further and asked that ASH was also invited.</b></p> <p><b>ASH</b> asked what the construction timetable was for the Fairglens scheme and <b>ABu</b> said there was an estimated two year construction period but that more information would be available in January once the construction programme</p>

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	<p>was known. He reiterated that most of the works would be offline and that the council would work with the contractor to minimise disruption.</p> <p><b>ASh</b> explained that Castle Point Borough Council was going through its Local Plan consultation and that development of the Blinking Owl site, which is located south east of the Fairglens junction, was being considered. He said between 1,500 and 2,5000 were potentially being considered which would require future access. He asked for confirmation that none of the proposed schemes would prejudice potential future access to the site from the A127.</p> <p><b>Action: ASh also asked whether the council's Local Plan response could be provided by email to him, RH and MFu.</b></p> <p><b>ABu</b> said the Fairglens scheme would not prejudice potential future access to the site. This was reiterated by MR, who added that access would be challenging at the moment and would still be challenging with the scheme in place in the future, but would not be made worse.</p>
<b>9.</b>	<p><b>Next steps</b></p> <p><b>MR</b> provided a summary of next steps for the A127-related projects, noting that the LTP4 would continue to be developed and a part two consultation on the full draft LTP was expected early next year. He added that, subject to approval of the SOC by the DfT, an Outline Business Case would be developed for the A127 Transport Improvements (Halfway House to Fortune of War) scheme, including a public consultation. Finally, he said that a Final Business Case would also be submitted for the Fairglens scheme ahead of construction starting.</p>
<b>10.</b>	<p><b>AOB and close</b></p> <p><b>ASh</b> thanked officers for their hard work and members of the group for attending the meeting.</p> <p><b>Action: ASh said members would receive a copy of the presentation slides.</b></p> <p><b>ASh</b> added that any further questions or comments would be welcomed and could be sent to him or via officers. He also advised invites for future meetings of the group would follow.</p> <p>The meeting was closed.</p>