

Stop the Wensum Link crib sheet for politicians

Written with Labour in mind, but you can tweak for other parties.

Proposed Norwich Western Link (NWL) – Briefing for Prospective Labour MPs Stop Wensum Link Campaign Group (SWL)

June 2024

Call to Action : The Stop Wensum Link Campaign Group (SWL) urges a future Labour Government to refuse approval of the Norwich Western Link (NWL). We advocate for aligning road-building projects with environmental goals as recommended by the Climate Change Committee.

Overview:

Norfolk County Council (NCC) proposes a 3.9-mile dual carriageway connecting the A1270 Broadland Northway to the A47 west of Norwich. This £251 million project includes a 600-meter viaduct over the River Wensum, an area designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Proponents claim NWL will:

- Reduce travel time
- Promote economic growth
- Reduce village rat-running
- Decrease accidents
- Encourage bus use, walking, and cycling

Opponents argue NWL will:

- Destroy wildlife habitats
- Increase carbon emissions
- Induce traffic
- Lack sustainable transport measures

The Detail

The NWL aims to complete the link between the A1270 and the A47. Estimated costs range from £251 million to £350 million, with partial funding confirmed. The planning application is currently open for public consultation.

Background:

The NWL stems from NCC's plan for a third orbital ring road around Norwich. Environmental concerns led to the 'three-quarters' Northern Distributor Road (NDR), completed in 2018, without crossing the River Wensum. Proponents now push for the NWL to close the loop.

Local Plan Conflict:

NCC claims the project aligns with the Greater Norwich Local Plan. SWL and other opponents disagree:

- 1. Sustainable Development:** The NWL harms habitats, increases emissions, and disrupts ecosystems.
- 2. Economic Strategy:** It does not directly support targeted sectors and risks greenfield development.
- 3. Job Growth:** It offers short-term construction jobs without any known long-term job creation.
- 4. Environmental Impact:** It negatively affects green spaces and biodiversity.
- 5. Transport and Connectivity:** It encourages car use, contrary to sustainable transport goals.

Labour Manifesto Incompatibility

The Labour Party prioritizes rebuilding Britain, supporting small businesses, and promoting sustainable growth. The NWL contradicts these principles:

- **Green Belt Preservation:** The road may damage green spaces.
- **Sustainable Transport:** It encourages more traffic and pollution.
- **Fiscal Responsibility:** It offers a short-sighted traffic solution, ignoring sustainable alternatives.
- **Climate Action:** It increases CO2 emissions, clashing with Labour's climate goals.

Better Use of Funds

The funds allocated for the NWL could be better spent on addressing the appalling condition of Norfolk's existing roads. Investing in road maintenance and improvements would provide immediate benefits, enhancing safety and driving conditions for residents without the significant environmental impact of new road construction.

Summary of Responses to Claimed Objectives

Support Sustainable Economic Growth:

Existing infrastructure already connects major sites; NWL risks greenfield development and traffic increases.

Reduce Traffic Impacts:

Predicted traffic rise won't benefit key sites or hospital access.

Improve Ambulance Response Times:

Hospital journey time reductions are disputed; delays are due to handovers.

Enhance Road Safety for Pedestrians and Cyclists:

The NWL lacks segregated cycle tracks.

Promote Sustainable Transport Usage:

NWL doesn't support sustainable travel modes; proposed cycling measures aren't reliant on it.

Sustainable Alternatives

Opponents advocates for public transport enhancements, active travel options, and safety measures to reduce traffic. Past successes with park and ride networks and improved public transport show the effectiveness of non-road solutions.

Conclusion

The Norwich Western Link (NWL) may offer some short-term benefits, but its long-term drawbacks make it an ill-advised project. It conflicts with the Greater Norwich Local Plan, the Labour Party's manifesto, and broader environmental goals. Instead of investing millions in a project likely to harm the environment and offer limited economic benefits, these funds should be redirected to improve the existing road network in Norfolk, enhance sustainable transportation options, and protect our natural habitats. We urge Labour MPs to consider these points seriously and oppose the NWL in favour of more sustainable and fiscally responsible alternatives.