1. **Purpose of Report**

1.1 To agree Cabinet Executive’s comments on the consultation exercise currently being undertaken by the Highways Agency (HA) concerning their proposals to widen the M1 motorway (Junction 21 to 30).

2. **Recommendation to Council**

That Cabinet Executive recommend to Council the responses to the Highways Agency’s M1 widening consultation as shown in *bold italics* in paragraphs 6.6.3 to 6.8.3 of this report.

3. **Reason for Decision Recommended**

It is acknowledged that the stretch of the M1 between Junction 21 and 30 within the District of Blaby currently carries a high volume of traffic. At certain times of the day severe congestion is experienced. This results in problems of air pollution, highway safety and unreliable journey times. As a consequence both residents and businesses in the District (and beyond) are adversely affected. Alternative proposals to M1 improvements, which would seek to encourage journeys by more sustainable forms of transport, are unlikely to achieve a significant shift in the immediate future. For these reasons the District Council, in principle, supports measures to improve conditions on the M1.

However the District Council is concerned about the following aspects of the proposal; noise, air quality, contamination, visual impact, impact on sites of ecological/historical significance, drainage and flood plain protection, and more localised issues. The proposals, as currently shown, do not contain sufficient information to enable the District Council to arrive at an informed decision. In addition the District Council considers that the HA should explore an alternative solution to the proposed overbridge shown to access the M69 from the M1 southbound. In particular the potential for a tunnel/underpass would have significantly less environmental impact than the scheme currently proposed.
4. **Forward Plan**

4.1 Forward Plan Reference Number: 05/06 (585)

5. **Key Decision**

5.1 Yes.

6. **Matter(s) for Consideration**

6.1 **Background information**

6.1.1 The current proposals regarding the widening of the M1 have developed over a number of years. In 1998, Central Government, as part of its 10 year transport plan, commissioned a number of transport studies across England, known as Multi Modal Studies (because they looked at various modes of transportation). The studies investigated current transport problems, proposals for future development, and the impacts of travel behaviour. The final outcome of the studies was a series of recommendations designed to be used by Regional Planning Authorities and Central Government.

6.1.2 The East Midlands Multi Modal Study commenced in 1998 and, among other things, surveyed north-south movements on the M1. The findings of the study were published in April 2002. One of the key recommendations of the Multi Modal Study was that highway capacity should be increased in order to reduce traffic congestion and minimise delays. More specifically, a targeted M1 widening scheme and a M1 – M69 link were proposed in order to facilitate increased capacity.

6.1.3 As a result of the recommendations of the East Midlands Multi Modal study, in December 2002 the Secretary of State for Transport announced plans to widen the M1 in the East Midlands. In April 2004 M1 widening entered the HA’s Targeted Programme of Improvements list (TPI) as a priority project. Following on from this, the HA appointed Arup consultants (specialising in engineering and environmental protection) to take the project forward in more detail by preparing engineering plans and carrying out environmental surveys.

6.1.4 **Thorpe Astley**

6.1.4 The revision to the Thorpe Astley Masterplan was approved in October 2005. This revision resulted in the release of additional land for housing on the Thorpe Astley Estate. Some of the proposed housing will be in close proximity to the M1 corridor. In order to minimise negative impacts on local amenity, a landscaped buffer zone (incorporating a noise bund) is required to be provided.

6.1.5 The HA had confirmed in writing in June 2004 that they had no objections to the revised Masterplan and that future built development at Thorpe Astley would not interfere with their proposed options for motorway widening. The revised Masterplan allocated the former safeguarded land for the provision of open space and a landscaped buffer zone and noise bund (to mitigate against noise and air pollution caused by traffic on the M1).
6.1.6 The revised Masterplan (October 2005) did however, recognise that two of the remaining options for the M1/M69 southbound link could involve limited landtake from the open space/ buffer zone areas. A small area was identified to the north of the Motorway Service Area (MSA), but the more significant amount (0.8ha/ 2 acres) was to the south of the MSA. However in granting planning permission it was concluded that even with the potential future shortfall in formal open space the revised Master plan should be supported particularly as the package of community benefits outweighed any possible reduction in open space.

6.1.7 The current HA consultation does not appear to involve either area of landtake, or any other land at Thorpe Astley.

6.2 Policy Background

6.2.1 The M1 widening scheme is referred to in the policy documents listed below;

- Regional Spatial Strategy for the East Midlands (RSS8) (March 2005): RSS8 incorporates the Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) and identifies M1 improvement (Junction 21- 30) as a Regional Transport Investment Priority. Policy 53 states that Local Transport Authorities together with Local Planning Authorities and national and regional bodies should work to progress the investment priorities. M1 widening is also referred to as a major transport issue in the East Midlands. Policy 43- T6 refers to reducing congestion and improving safety along the M1 corridor.

- Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Structure Plan (LLRSP) (1996- 2006): There are references to M1 widening in the explanatory text but no specific policies.

6.3 Current stage- consultation exercise

6.3.1 Following on from the work carried out by Arup consultants, outline plans for the widening scheme have been prepared by the HA and are currently the subject of public consultation which commenced on 30 March 2006 and will end on 28 June 2006.

6.3.2 As part of the consultation process several public exhibitions have been carried out; two of these were in the District of Blaby; on 7th April 2006 in Kirby Muxloe and in Leicester Forest East on 22nd May 2006.

6.3.3 This report details Blaby District Council’s recommended comments on the consultation which are shown in bold italics. The recommendations are the subject of a report to the M1 Widening Scrutiny Panel on 15 June and to Council on 4 July. The comments of the M1 Widening Scrutiny Panel will be reported at your meeting. Following agreement by Council, Blaby District Council's comments will be sent to the HA (who have agreed to an extension of their closing date of 28th June for this Council’s final comments).

6.3.4 Once the consultation period ends all of the responses will be collated and summarised in a consultation report produced by the HA. The Secretary of State for Transport will consider the consultation report before
announcing the preferred route for the widening scheme. The full timetable for the proposed scheme is outlined in section 6.4.5 of this report.

6.4 The proposed M1 widening scheme- Contract 2 Junction 21 to 30

6.4.1 The proposal is to widen the M1 between Junctions 21 to 30. The aim of the scheme is to reduce congestion and improve journey times, reliability, and safety. The HA state that when the M1 was built in the 1960’s it had a carrying capacity of 67,000 vehicles per day, whereas now it is used by between 103,000 and 153,000 vehicles per day. Furthermore the HA say that either with or without M1 widening, significant traffic growth is expected to occur.

6.4.2 The works to the M1 are proposed in two different contracts. Contract 1 involves widening within the existing motorway boundaries but only affects the section between Junctions 25 to 28 and therefore has little impact on the District of Blaby. Contract 2 involves Junction 21 to 30. It should be noted that at this stage only outline plans have been produced for Contract 2 and are therefore at an early stage in their design. This is because the HA would like to receive comments from the consultation prior to drawing up detailed plans.

6.4.3 The key elements of Contract 2 are as follows; widening of the M1 from Junction 21 to 30 and major improvements to junctions. In order to implement the Contract 2 widening scheme there will be a need to acquire land outside the HA’s existing boundary. The HA state that they propose to acquire the minimum amount of land needed to achieve widening.

6.4.4 The motorway is proposed to be widened by symmetrical, asymmetrical, and parallel widening;
- Symmetrical widening involves retaining the existing centre line of the motorway and widening by an equal amount on each side. This is the preferred method of widening as it will minimise land take required. Symmetrical widening will be used unless specific constraints require asymmetrical or parallel widening to be used.
- Asymmetrical widening involves retaining one existing side boundary and widening on just one side of the motorway. The centre line of the motorway will then move over.
- Parallel widening involves constructing an entirely new carriageway which the traffic will then be switched to; the existing motorway will then be converted to a four lane layout (although this will not be applicable between Junctions 21 to 21a as it is already a four lane stretch).
- The motorway will be widened by either widening the existing embankment (on sections of motorway above surrounding ground level), or widening the cutting slopes (on sections of motorway below surrounding ground level).

6.4.5 The programme for Contract 2 is as follows;
- Preferred route is announced - 2006/2007
- Publish Draft Orders- 2007/2008
- Environmental Statement produced- 2007/2008 (subject to change)
- Public Inquiry (if required) – 2008
- Secretary of State Decision - 2009
- Construction starts – 2010
- Works complete – 2015
6.5 Proposed motorway widening in the District of Blaby

6.5.1 As previously mentioned the proposed widening scheme runs between Junction 21 and 30 of the M1. This report however concentrates on the proposals within the District of Blaby, i.e. between Junction 21 and land to the north of Junction 21A to the boundary of Blaby District.

6.5.2 The motorway between Junction 21 and 21A currently comprises 4 lanes in each direction; the proposal is to widen the motorway to six lanes (from north of the Leicester Forest East Motorway Service Area (MSA) to Junction 21A) in order to accommodate expected traffic growth in the area and to facilitate free flow links to the M69. From Junction 21A to Junction 23A the proposal is to widen the motorway from 3 lanes to 4 lanes on both carriageways using the preferred symmetrical widening method (centre line of motorway is retained and it is widened by an equal amount on each side).

6.5.3 Direct free flow links are proposed between the M69 to the M1 to allow the traffic to run in both directions without interruption. The M1 would remain at four lanes between Junction 21 and the new M69 links as the link roads are expected to provide traffic relief for this section of the motorway. The existing M69 slip road to the M1 north at Junction 21 is proposed to be closed to all traffic other than emergency vehicles.

6.5.4 The Leicester Forest East MSA southbound area would remain unaffected. However the northbound MSA would be affected as the proposed M69 link roads would join the M1 on land that is currently occupied by the service area. The proposal is to relocate part of the northbound MSA on land to the south of the existing site. Motorway access to and from the northbound MSA would also be relocated to the south as a result.

6.5.5 Various changes are also proposed to bridges along the stretch of motorway as well as improvements to Junction 21.

6.5.6 An outline plan of the proposals is available to view at the Blaby District Council Offices in the Planning reception area and a copy will also be available to view in the Brooks Room prior to your meeting. It may also be viewed on the HA website at www.highways.gov.uk

6.6 Issues arising from the proposed scheme

6.6.1 It should be noted that no mitigation proposals have been developed at this stage in the scheme. The HA state that these will be developed at the next stage, following consideration of comments received.

6.6.2 The following recommendations on noise, air quality, and contamination issues are based on the comments of Blaby District Council’s Environmental Protection Manager.
6.6.3 **Noise**

It is recognised that some households in close proximity to the M1 corridor are already subject to noise from passing traffic. Proposed widening of the M1 will result in the M1 corridor being in closer proximity to a larger number of dwellings than at present. This is likely to result in more households being exposed to increased noise levels. Construction noise is also likely to be an issue.

The southbound link to the M69 is also likely to create substantial problems as the overbridge would be raised above the existing motorway. The height of the overbridge would make noise mitigation extremely difficult and traditional measures, such as barriers, would exacerbate the detrimental visual impact of the physical structure of the overbridge, which alone would have a significant visual impact.

**Recommended response:** Prior to the scheme being finalised a full noise assessment should be undertaken to ascertain the impacts on local residents both during the construction phase and when works are complete. Mitigation measures must be implemented to safeguard local residents. Alternative options to the proposed southbound overbridge to the M69 need to be explored and an opportunity given for consultation on other options (as detailed in Section 6.8).

6.6.4 **Air Quality**

There are five designated Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA’s) in the District of Blaby. These areas were designated as they failed to meet Government objectives regarding Nitrogen Dioxide (NO\(_2\)) levels. In all five areas the source of the NO\(_2\) particles is road traffic, and the majority of the AQMAs are in close proximity to the M1 corridor. The aim is to monitor levels of NO\(_2\) in the AQMAs in order to reduce levels to meet Government objectives. Blaby District Council has also produced an Air Quality Action Plan to deal with the requirements of the AQMAs; the Plan identified objectives to reduce NO\(_2\) levels in these areas.

The proposed widening would result in the M1 corridor being in close proximity to a larger number of dwellings than at present and therefore is likely to result in more households being exposed to elevated NO\(_2\) levels. However it is generally agreed that less vehicle emissions are produced when cars are travelling at a faster speed and that emissions are worse in slow moving traffic. Therefore the proposals which aim to reduce congestion (and therefore increase the flow of traffic) may assist in implementing the Council’s Air Quality Action Plan by reducing NO\(_2\) levels along the M1 corridor. However, during the construction phase there is likely to be additional congestion on the approaches to the stretches proposed to be widened so the situation may worsen during this time.

**Recommended response:** Prior to the proposals being finalised an Environmental Impact Assessment should be carried out for both the construction and completion stages. Mitigation measures must be carried out if required.
6.6.5 Contamination

Part of the northbound Motorway Service Area is proposed to be demolished and relocated. This may cause a problem as petrochemicals may have leached into the ground because of the petrol station on the site.

*Recommended response:* Any contamination issues that arise from the redevelopment of the existing MSA would need to be addressed appropriately.

6.6.6 Visual Impact

The M69 link roads form a major part of the proposals and would have a significant visual impact on this part of the District of Blaby. The outline plan shows the proposed location of the overland link roads. The northbound link road is expected to join to the M1 on land currently occupied by the MSA. The proposal indicates that the southbound link road would cross over the M1 on a raised overbridge which would be a very prominent physical structure. The presence of the overbridge is likely to have a significant detrimental visual impact on residents, particularly in Leicester Forest East, who live in close proximity to the motorway corridor. Additional lighting would be required to be provided along the new link roads which is also likely to have a detrimental impact on local amenity in terms of light pollution.

*Recommended response:* The Highways Agency should explore all possible alternative solutions in connecting the M69 to the M1 as it is anticipated that the current proposals would have a significant and detrimental visual impact on local residents, particularly those in Leicester Forest East. Possible alternative solutions are outlined in Section 6.8.

As mentioned, the northbound MSA would need to be relocated because of the proposed M69 link road and as a result the entrance and exit roads to the MSA would also be moved. This would result in the creation of another prominent physical structure, as grade separation appears to be required.

*Recommended response:* The visual impact of the new access roads to the MSA is a concern; the Highways Agency must demonstrate how any negative visual impacts would be minimised.

6.6.7 Sites of ecological/historical significance

The M69 link road is proposed to be constructed in very close proximity to a Scheduled Ancient Monument. The deserted medieval village of Lubbesthorpe and adjacent field system protect nationally important archeological remains. There are also additional areas of ecological/historical significance which may be affected by the proposals.

*Recommended response:* The potential impact of the proposals on the deserted medieval village of Lubbesthorpe and all other sites of ecological and historical significance should be fully assessed prior to the commencement of the scheme.
6.6.8 **Economy**

Junction 21 is a major transport hub because of its access to both the M1 and the M69. There are a number of significant employment and retail sites located in close proximity to Junction 21 such as Grove Park, Meridian Business Park, Fosse Park and Grove Farm Triangle, all of which depend on good linkages to the motorways. At present, access to Junction 21 and the stretch of motorway between Juncions 21 and 21A suffers from traffic congestion and severe delays, especially during peak times. The proposals aim to improve Junction 21 and reduce congestion and delays by increasing capacity on the M1.

*Recommended response:* The proposals would benefit businesses in the area that rely upon good access to the motorway system but suffer at present because of delays and congestion. Furthermore improving the current situation in terms of traffic congestion may encourage additional inward investment in the District of Blaby.

6.6.9 **Drainage and floodplain protection**

The magnitude of the proposed scheme means that there are likely to be implications for drainage and floodplains in the area. Lubbesthorpe Brook and Rothley Brook are in close proximity to the M1 corridor.

*Recommended response:* The impact of the proposals on drainage and floodplains must be fully assessed in an Environmental Impact Assessment and any potential impacts must be mitigated.

6.6.10 **Public rights of way**

There are a number of footpaths and bridle ways in the District of Blaby which would potentially be affected by the proposed widening scheme.

*Recommended response:* The impact of the proposals on public rights of way should be assessed prior to the commencement of works. Should any rights of way be affected these should be reinstated or a satisfactory alternative route provided.

6.7 **Local Issues**

As well as the more general issues detailed above, there are several site-specific issues which must also be considered as listed below;

6.7.1 **Vicarage Close, Kirby Muxloe**

The current plan proposes symmetrical widening in this area which is likely to have a detrimental impact on properties in Vicarage Close by bringing the motorway closer. However the impacts could be reduced by asymmetrical widening on the ‘other side’ of the motorway boundary instead.

*Recommended response:* Asymmetrical widening, instead of symmetrical widening, should be carried out on the section of the M1 adjacent to Kirby
Muxloe. This would minimise the environmental impact on properties at Vicarage Close, Kirby Muxloe.

6.7.2 All properties in Leicester Forest East close to the motorway boundary

The stretch of the M1 that runs through Leicester Forest East (LFE) is proposed to be widened from four to six lanes in each direction. This would have a significant impact on all properties in LFE that are in close proximity to the motorway. At the moment the land take required in this area has not been confirmed by the HA and until more detailed plans are available the impacts on local amenity are as yet unknown.

The proposal also involves demolishing the A47 bridge over the M1 and replacing it to the north of the current site. This is likely to affect LFE residents who live in close proximity to the current and proposed bridges, although detailed plans are not yet available. It is likely that the A47 bridge would be kept in use whilst the new bridge is being constructed which is welcomed as it would minimise disruption to traffic on the A47.

**Recommended response:** The HA should take all necessary steps to minimise land take and the impact on residential amenity in Leicester Forest East. The HA should also make known its plans for dealing with traffic on the A47 Hinckley Road during construction of any replacement bridge.

6.7.3 South of Junction 21

The proposals are also likely to have implications for households located south of Junction 21 in the M1 corridor. The villages of Enderby, Narborough and Cosby currently suffer from M1-generated problems such as noise and air pollution. The Motorway Action Group for Enderby and Narborough (MAG) has campaigned for some time about the impact of noise and air pollution on residential amenity. These problems are likely to be exacerbated during the construction period as a result of traffic disruption and roadworks to the north of Junction 21.

**Recommended response:** The impacts of the proposals (during construction and when complete) on households south of Junction 21 should be assessed, in particular in those areas which are already known to suffer from noise and air pollution. Where necessary the HA should confirm that appropriate mitigation methods would be incorporated.

6.8 Alternatives to the M69 overbridge

6.8.1 As mentioned several times in this report the southbound overbridge link to the M69 is of significant concern in terms of its likely adverse effects in terms of noise pollution, light pollution, and visual impact. The HA should explore all possible alternative solutions to the flyover.

6.8.2 One possible alternative is the construction of a tunnel to provide southbound access from the M1 to the M69. A tunnel would have substantially less detrimental impact on local amenity in terms of noise pollution, light pollution, visual impact and air pollution.
6.8.3 A second alternative would be to give further consideration to the demolition of the MSAs which would allow for the relocation of the M69 link roads further south. This would move the links further away from households in Leicester Forest East, therefore reducing the detrimental impact on residential properties in close proximity.

**Recommended response: Alternative solutions to the M69 – M1 overbridge should be explored because of the significant detrimental impact this is likely to have on residents in Leicester Forest East. Possible alternatives that should be assessed include a tunnel or the demolition of the MSAs in order to relocate the link roads further away from residential properties.**

7. **Other Options Considered**

7.1 That the proposals are supported- This option was rejected because of the numerous concerns regarding the impact of the proposals on local amenity.

7.2 That the proposals are opposed- This option was rejected because of the need for improvements to the M1 to improve the congestion and severe delays currently experienced.

8. **Appropriate Consultations**

8.1 All Blaby District Council members- The one response received is attached in Appendix A

Blaby District Council Environmental Protection Manager

9. **Financial and Asset Implications**

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* There may be costs associated with legal and consultancy representation at any Public Inquiry into the proposals during 2008/2009.

10. **List of Background Papers**

Highways Agency: Public Exhibition and Consultation M1 Widening Junction 21 to 30 (March- June 2006)

Blaby District Council; Report of Natural and Built Environment Scrutiny Panel Air Quality and Noise Pollution Draft Final Report (16 May 2006)

Blaby District Council; Report of Natural and Built Environment Scrutiny Panel Air Quality and Noise Pollution Motorway Action Group Report (16 May 2006)

Blaby District Council Planning Application Reference: 02/0831/1/VX: Revisions to the Thorpe Astley Masterplan

Highways Agency: M1 Improvements Junctions 21 to 30: Information Leaflet
(January 2006)

Regional Spatial Strategy for the East Midlands (RSS8) (March 2005)

Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Structure Plan (LLRSP) (1996- 2006)

The following Officer(s)/Member(s) have been consulted (identified by ✓):
   Head of Paid Service ✓
   S. 151 Officer ✓
   Monitoring Officer ✓
   Portfolio Holder (Cabinet Executive/Council reports only) ✓