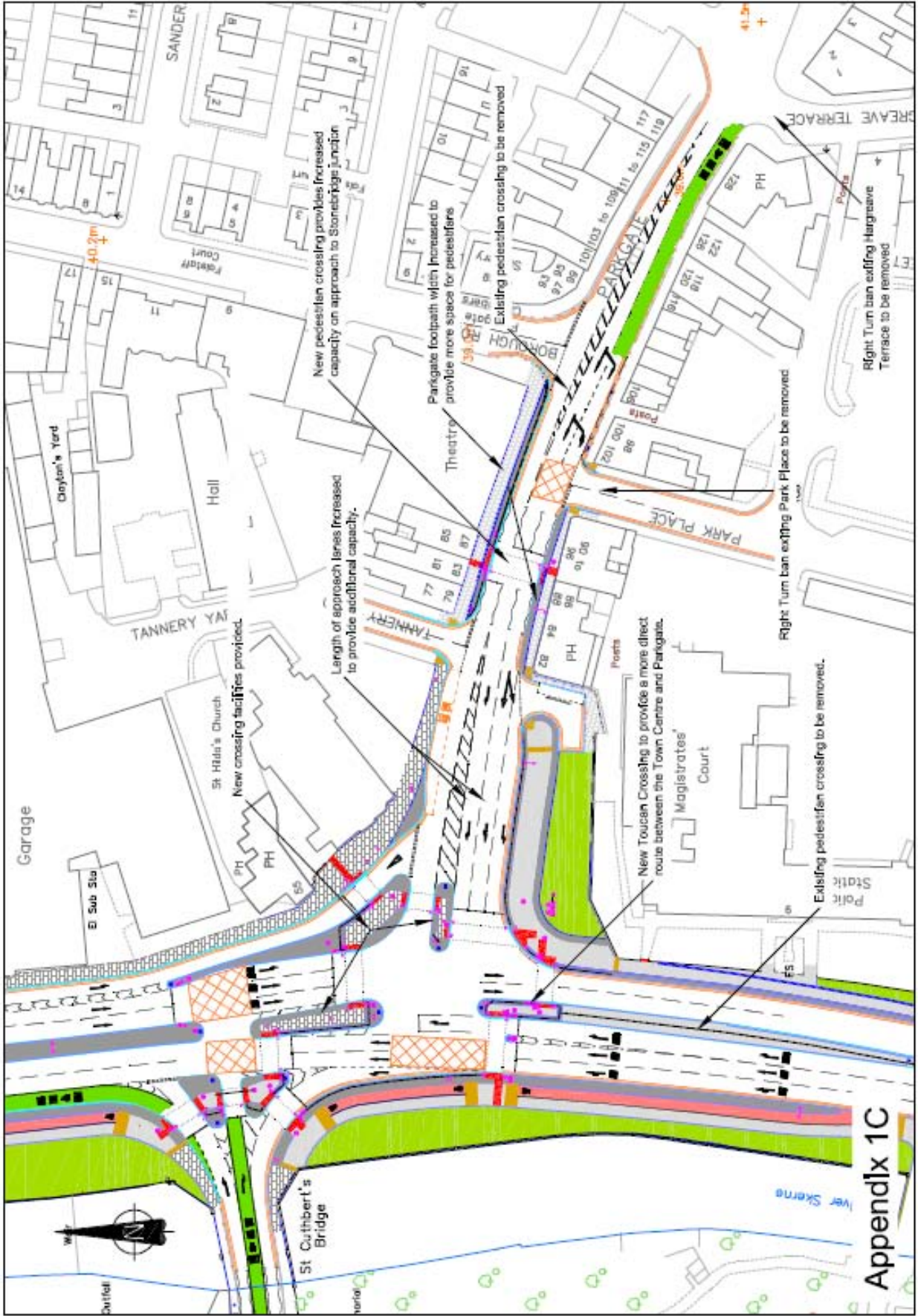


Appendix 1B



Appendix 1C

Stonebridge Junction and Inner Ring Road Project

Frequently Asked Questions

Why is the council considering changing the layout of this junction?

Stonebridge roundabout was built as part of the inner ring road in the 1970s and since then traffic levels have increased significantly. At times, it is obvious that the roundabout is unable to cope with traffic levels causing congestion and leading to lengthy traffic delays on all of the approaches. In recent years there have been modifications made to improve the capacity of the roundabout, but the engineering scope for increasing capacity as a roundabout have been exhausted.

Ambition and opportunities for growth in Darlington are strong and are coming to fruition with the development of the Leisure and Cinema complex and Department for Education offices imminent. Traffic levels are predicted to increase and this will compound the issues already being experienced on the inner ring road. Further growth and development at Central Park and around Darlington is excellent news but will also impact on traffic levels on the inner ring road.

It is an important moment in the development of Darlington and a time to consider the infrastructure to support and manage this growth. If Darlington is to thrive in the current difficult climate and provide economic stimulus and jobs we must encourage and promote growth. With this comes the need to tackle issues and consider the changes necessary to support the right conditions for growth.

The proposals form part of the longer term vision for delivery of the Town Centre Fringe Regeneration including improving pedestrian connections across the ring road and the aspiration to create a pleasant riverside walk along the banks of the Skerne as it passes through the town and help create opportunities for improved flood defences.

As part of the project improvements are proposed to improve the connection between the Town Centre and Parkgate ensuring that the desire line from Stonebridge to Parkgate is clear and more direct than it currently is. This also has the advantage of connecting the Civic Theatre to the Town Centre, along with the shops and businesses of Parkgate whilst also improving a key point of arrival to the town from Bank Top Station.

Through the recent Town Centre Regeneration work this important link was also recognised, and the proposed re-alignment of the road to allow more greenspace by the river seeks to meet the aspirations of the public for an improved riverside environment for the enjoyment of all and to improve the image of both the River Skerne and the town. The beginnings of this linear park are shown in the plans for the junction.

Whilst the issues of congestion at Stonebridge are currently sporadic this is predicted to become more frequent making our town centre a less attractive place to visit or do business, which is detrimental to ambition, growth and creating more opportunities.

The proposal needs to be considered now if we are to manage the increased traffic levels. With a significant amount of development happening by 2015 it is appropriate that we consider a project that can manage the growth in a controlled way and ensure its delivery is considered alongside the development to ensure access into the town centre does not hinder growth.

The roundabout currently acts as a barrier to the expansion of the town centre because it is difficult for pedestrians to cross on a direct line. This junction improvement will make it easier for pedestrians to cross the ring road; this will start to make the theatre area feel much more like a part of the town centre. The changes will also allow the council to open up the riverside area, creating a new place within the town centre for people to enjoy. The more attractive a place we make our town centre, the more shops, cafes, restaurants and businesses will want to invest in being in the town centre.

How can I see more detail and comment on the proposals?

Consultation will commence during the week commencing 16 September 2013 and close on Friday 11 October 2013 after which all the points will be analysed and considered.

The plans can be viewed on the Council website using the following link:

www.darlington.gov.uk/stonebridge The website will be live on Thursday 19 September 2013.

Comments can be left using the e-forms link on the website or by e-mail to trafficmanagement@darlington.gov.uk.

A press notice will be released on Thursday 19 September 2013 inviting the public to attend a drop in session at the reception area of the Dolphin Centre on Wednesday 25 September 2013 between 1.30pm and 6.30pm, where officers will be present to explain the proposals.

How has the Council decided that this solution is the best one to implement?

The Council has used the same approach to developing a solution that it used to on the North Road Junction improvements that have been delivered and are demonstrating big improvements.

Many different options have been considered using sophisticated computer programmes that can model the predicted traffic on the proposed layouts. The options investigated range from do-nothing, which showed more frequent and unacceptable congestion and delays, to signalised roundabouts, full time and part-time, to a range of traffic signal junctions.

The results from these tests have helped to develop an option that we are proposing that works best in terms of providing reliable journey times for all traffic, while also delivering improvements for public transport and pedestrians.

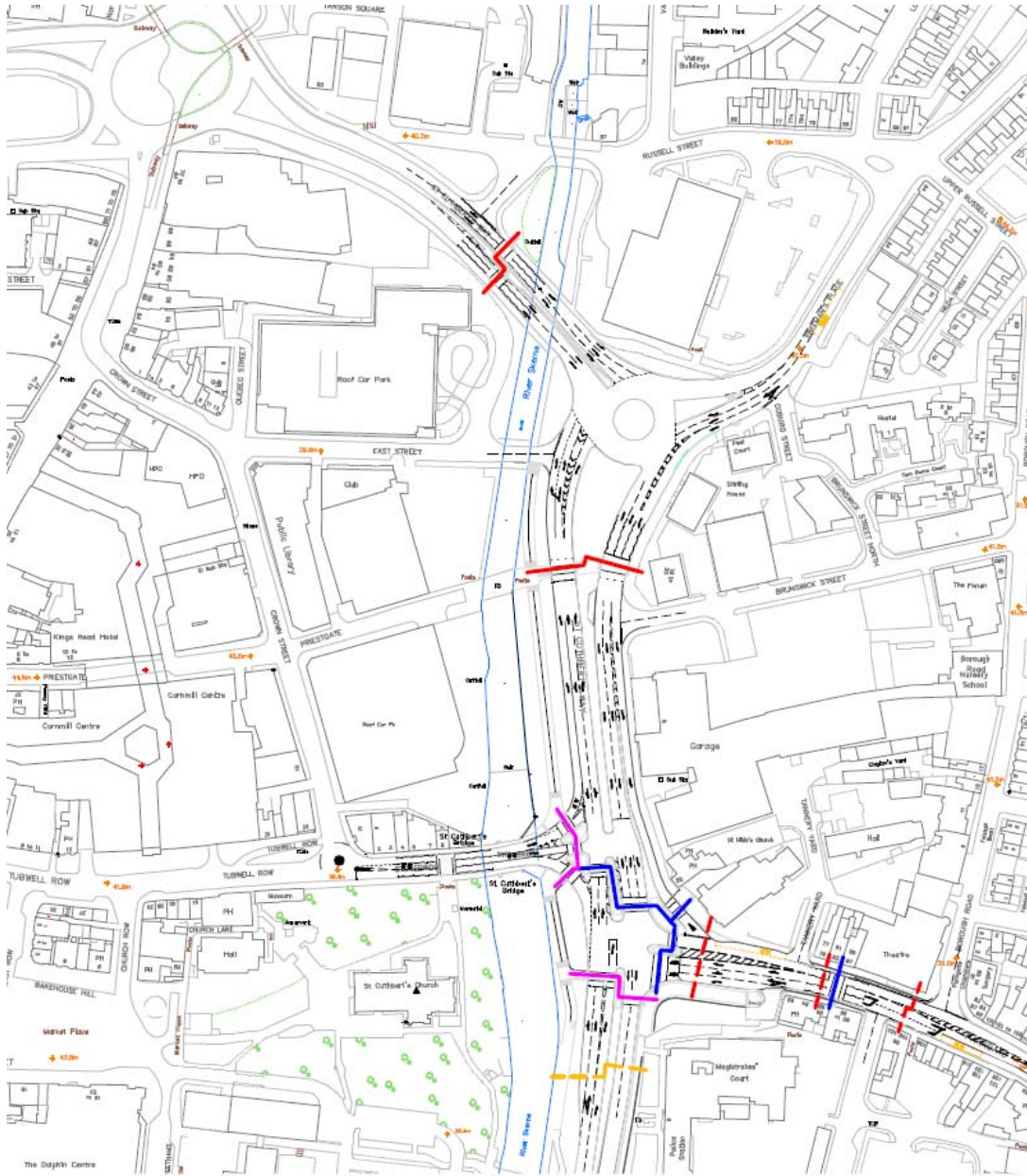
Have other options been considered, including just leaving it as it is now?

Whilst the issues of congestion at Stonebridge are currently sporadic this is predicted to become more frequent making our town centre a less attractive place to visit or do business. The proposal needs to be considered now if we are to manage the existing issues and increased traffic levels. With a significant amount of development happening by 2015 it is appropriate that we consider a project that can manage the growth in a controlled way and ensure its delivery is considered alongside the development in Darlington to ensure access into the town centre does not deter business growth and visitors.

What are the key features of the scheme?

- Improving the reliability of journey times for cars and buses using the inner ring road by managing the balance of flows by traffic lights.
- Improving public transport access into and out of the town centre with improved punctuality and reliability for buses and taxis.

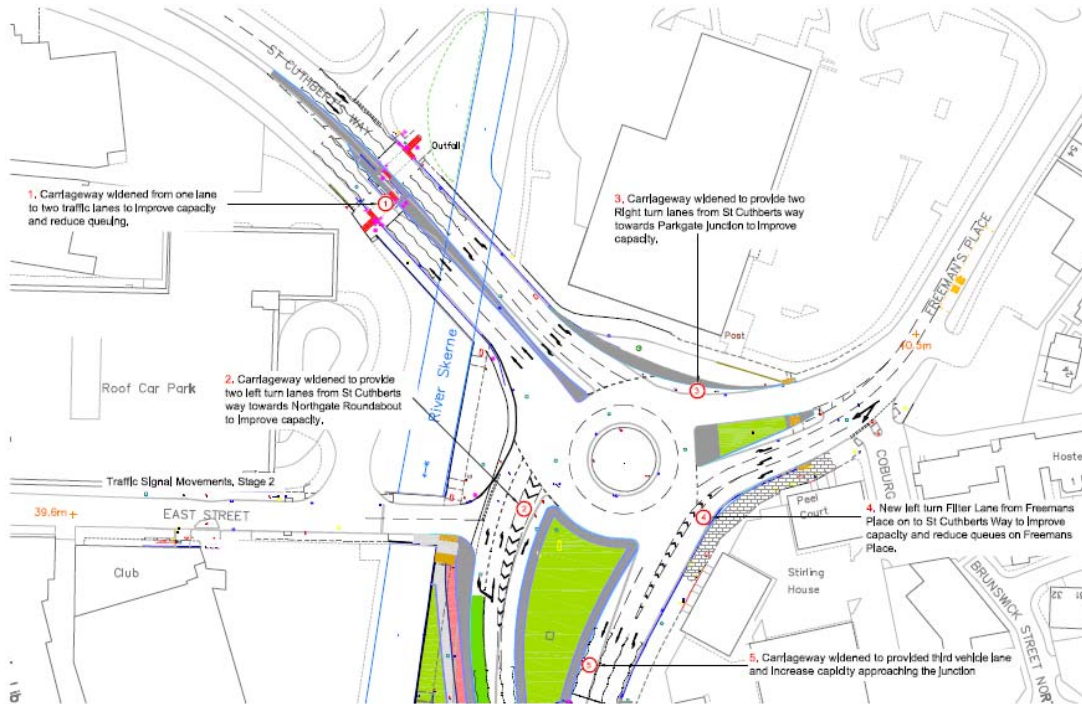
- Improved Pedestrian crossing facilities to improve the connection between the Town Centre and Parkgate.



KEY

- Existing Ped Crossing to be Removed - - - - -
- Existing Toucan Crossing to remain —————
- Existing Toucan Crossing to be Removed - - - - -
- New Ped Crossing —————
- New Toucan Crossing —————

- Increased lanes on approach and exits to junctions at Stonebridge and Freemans Place.



- To ensure congestion is managed and the traffic signals work efficiently there are some necessary features that will mean drivers have to change their routes in and out of town.
- Essential maintenance work is required on Stonebridge and this will be considered as part of the project.

Won't traffic lights slow traffic down even further?

Roundabouts only work well when the traffic flows approaching them from different directions are broadly balanced; unfortunately at times the traffic flows approaching Stonebridge are very unbalanced. This means at certain times of the day, the roundabout 'seizes up' creating tailbacks and congestions on the roads approaching the roundabout. With the predicted growth over the next few years this will become more frequent and unacceptable.

The introduction of traffic lights will result in vehicles having to stop and queue when the lights are on red. However, the traffic lights will allow the traffic flows to be controlled and balanced more effectively giving more certainty to road users. The introduction of traffic lights is predicted to be better than simply allowing the increased traffic levels to try and negotiate a roundabout. The current issues that are present are likely to become worse and more frequent to the detriment of the town centre.

Could Traffic lights be introduced part –time?

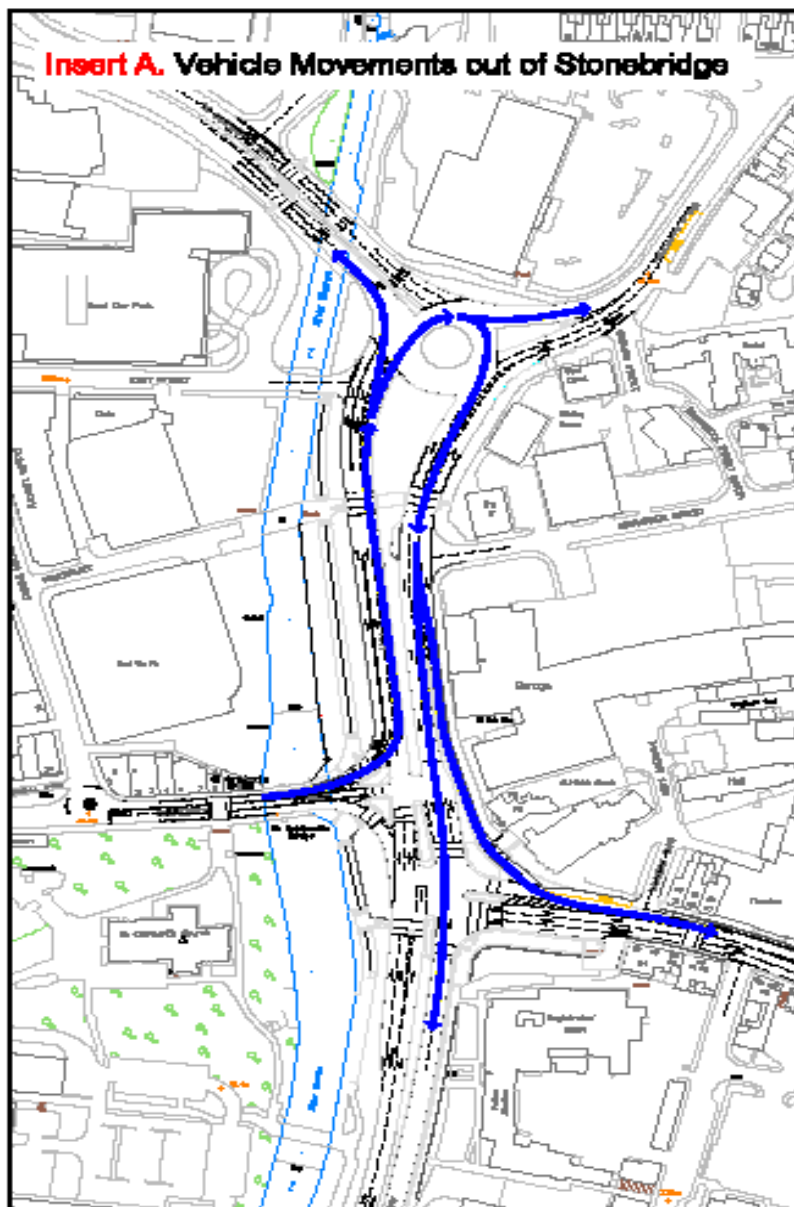
We recognise the introduction of traffic lights is a major change to the inner ring road and part time signals were considered as one of the roundabout options but it was found that a signalised roundabout does not work as well as a cross roads type junction.

We are looking at a cross road type arrangement and it is not possible to have part-time signals on this type of junction with the traffic movements that will exist. Therefore, the traffic signals will have to operate permanently both to manage traffic movements and help pedestrians cross the road.

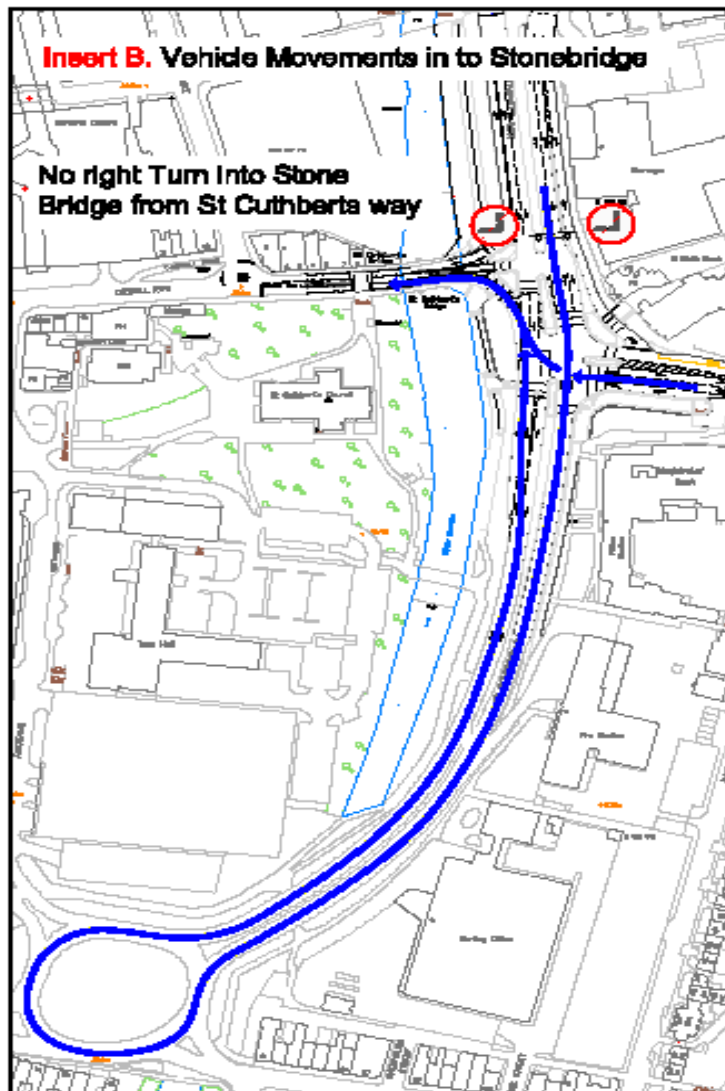
Why are you restricting certain movements?

There are some proposals to the way the junction works that will mean drivers will have to change their route into and out of town, but these are necessary to make the junction work as effectively as possible. We looked to keeping all movements available to all traffic, but it significantly impacted on the predicted traffic signal times. The proposed banned movements, whilst causing additional journey time for certain drivers does ensure the proposed junction can manage the increased traffic levels for the majority of traffic.

We are proposing that drivers will not be able to go straight ahead or right from Stonebridge (except buses, taxis, cycles). The distance between Stonebridge and Parkgate means that there is little capacity for queuing vehicles. Whilst there is sufficient space for a limited number of buses, opening this movement up to all traffic would cause vehicles to queue through the junction creating significant delays. All drivers will need to turn left and then use the route shown below:-



We are also proposing that drivers will not be able to turn right into Stonebridge from the Ring Road. The provision of a right turn phase into Stonebridge would have led to significant delays to all traffic as it would require an additional phase to traffic signals. Drivers will have to use the route shown below:-.



We are advertising the legal orders required to notify people of our proposals to ensure we understand all of the implications that this proposal.

How will the Traffic Lights work?

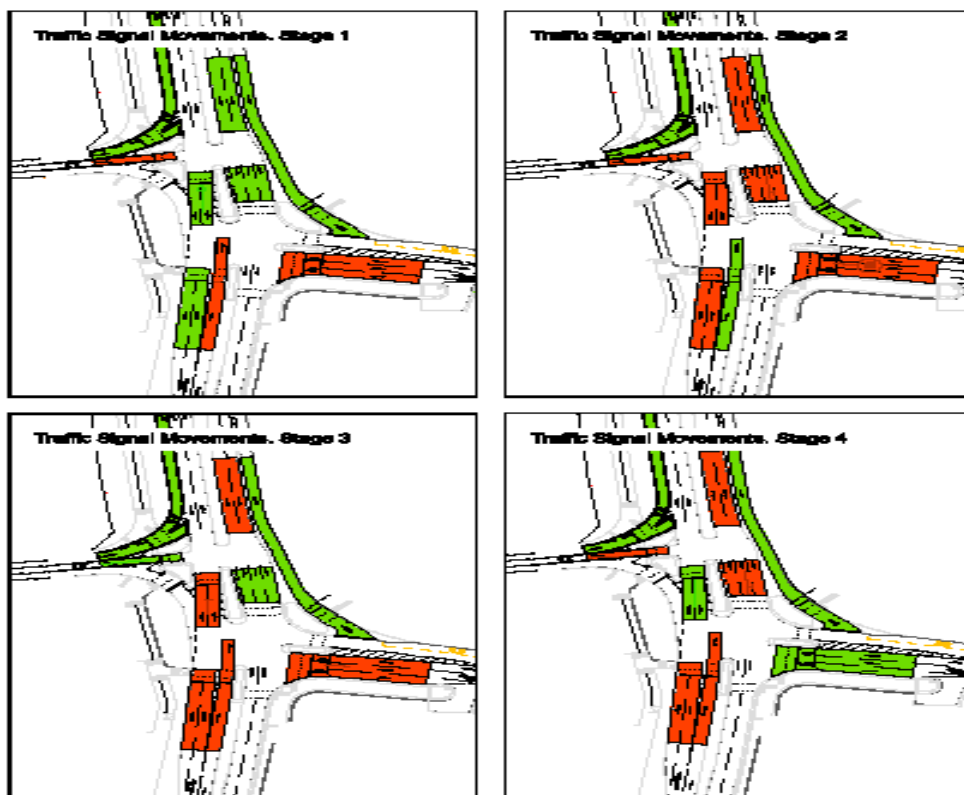
It is envisaged that the lights will operate in the following sequence:-

Phase 1 – The Inner Ring Road will be GREEN in both directions.

Phase 2 The traffic on the inner ring road will then be stopped to allow traffic to turn right into Parkgate. During this phase traffic from Parkgate and Stonebridge will be stopped on RED.

Phase 3 - The Inner ring will be stopped on RED and traffic from Parkgate will be on GREEN. Traffic from Stonebridge will remain on RED.

Phase 4 – The Inner Ring Road and Parkgate will be stopped on RED, while Stonebridge is GREEN



On all of the phases of the traffic signals any traffic on the inner ring road wanting to turn left into Parkgate can by-pass the traffic signals and join Parkgate by a traditional give-way arrangement.

Similarly, on all phases any traffic on Stonebridge wanting to turn left onto the Inner Ring road can by-pass the traffic signals and join Parkgate by a traditional give-way arrangement.

The Pedestrian and Cycle crossing points will be GREEN automatically when traffic is stopped and it is safe to allow people to cross. Some points will require the person to press the button and call the safe crossing stage.

How much will changing this junction cost and where is the money coming from?

The proposals would be funded from part of the £57 million Department for Transport Tees Valley Bus Network Improvement Project. Darlington Council has secured a budget of £3.7million to fund this project. This money has been granted to the Tees Valley Authorities by the Department for Transport specifically to improve the efficiency of bus services. The proposed scheme also has benefits for pedestrians, cyclists and for general traffic.

Shouldn't the Council be spending this money on other services that are being cut?

The money cannot be spent on other services or projects; if we do not spend it on improving the highway then it will be returned to the Tees Valley Authorities or the Department for Transport.

The Department for Transport funding gives Darlington a unique opportunity to address the issues on the inner ring road, if we do not deliver the improvements now, the opportunity will be lost.

When will work on the new junction start?

We are looking to commence works in the early part of 2014.

How will changing the roundabout to a light controlled junction help buses to run on time?

Like all traffic, buses suffer delays when there is congestion. This junction improvement will make journey times for all traffic more reliable making it much easier for the bus company to plan its timetables and ensure buses run on time.

This junction forms part of a much wider project – the Tees Valley Bus Network Improvement project that is rolling out a whole range of improvements to the bus network, such as better information and more bus shelters. The bus companies are also investing, for example in newer vehicles, such as the new gas fuelled buses that have recently gone into service in Darlington.

As part of the plans to improve the way buses travel through the town centre, the council is also working with the local bus company to more effectively manage the busy bus stops in the town centre, with initial changes planned in October to the way they manage their buses.

Why are buses being given special priority at this junction?

The council and government believe that making buses run on time will make them more attractive to use. Public transport is sometimes the only transport option available for people and we want to encourage more people to use buses so that traffic congestion and pollution from cars is reduced and those people who need to use their cars can do so more effectively.

The money to carry out these improvements was granted to the council so that it could make changes that will help buses to run on time by tackling points on the highway network that cause delays. We are using the funding to help improve conditions for everyone, including public transport.

Will any other traffic such as taxis be able to use the 'bus only' parts of the new junction?

Consideration is being given to allowing taxis to use the new bus priority facilities.

The new junction seems to have a lot of pedestrian crossings; won't it take longer for pedestrians to get across to the Theatre area than it does now?

There are a number of islands for pedestrians to use to cross the road. However, these are on a much more direct route and along the desire lines currently used by some pedestrians. As part of the detailed design many of these islands will be synchronised with the traffic lights to allow pedestrians to cross without being stopped on every island. There will be some points where pedestrians have to wait and press the button to call a safe crossing.

How will the Council make sure that this doesn't end up costing a lot more than the budget?

The Council has good project management expertise and delivers a large programme of projects every year to time and budget. The scheme to improve the junction at North Road/Whessoe Road was part of the Tees Valley Bus Improvement Project and was delivered on time and within budget. This project is part of a £10m investment programme in Darlington that is on programme and budget.

How much disruption will these roadwork's cause and what is the council going to do to try and minimise this?

It is inevitable that there will be some disruption to traffic and bus services during the construction period. The council will make every effort to ensure this disruption is minimised as far as possible and will ensure regular communications and advance notice is given as the works progress.