
ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
9th July 1998

Agenda Item
Public Session

18

SUBJECT: WILLOW LANE INDUSTRIAL ESTATE: NORTHERN ACCESS

Report of the Director of Environmental Services.

PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report advises Members of options to improve highway access to Willow Lane Industrial Estate (north) and seeks approval to pursue a funding bid for the preferred option through the Transport Policy and Programme (TPP) London Wandle Valley Package Bid submission for 1999/2000 to the Government Office for London.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The background to, and the current position of the Council's consideration of the options for improving highway access to Willow Lane Industrial Estate (north) and funding issues, are set out in this report. An assessment of the options is summarised. This covers transport, economic, environmental and financial implications. It is recommended that Option A is not taken forward in view of its unacceptably high cost and environmental/ecological impact. Options B and C are similar in nature. A comparison is made and the arguments between the options are finely balanced. The Committee is invited to express a preference.

CONTRIBUTORS

DENVS, CE, DCS, DELL

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Committee considers the options for improving access to the Willow Lane Industrial Estate and agrees that Option B plus a spur to the south of the access road as originally proposed (ie to the rear of property in Drake Road) is the preferred option and that it be further developed.
3. That, subject to the decision on 1 above, the Director of Environmental Services includes provision for funding a highway improvement scheme as part of a package of measures to improve the accessibility of Willow Lane

Industrial Estate (north) included within this year's TPP Package Bid 1999/2000 for the London Wandle Valley Corridor.

Appendices

The following appendices form part of this report.

1. Willow Lane Industrial Estate Location Plan
2. Summary of Options A, B and C
3. Option A - Willow Lane Improvement
4. Option B - access adjacent to Aspen Gardens.
5. Option C - access via Drake Road
6. Summary of public opinion.

1. REPORT

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The retention and generation of employment in the Borough is a key objective for this authority. Regeneration initiatives and support for industrial estates forms an important part of the strategy for achieving this. The Willow Lane Industrial Estate has benefited from investment secured via the Single Regeneration Budget. Further progress is dependant, in part, on improving the accessibility of the estate by all modes of transport. This report focuses on the options for improving access by road, for vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians, from the north. Other initiatives are being pursued separately to improve access by public transport.
- 1.2 The highway access deficiencies to Willow Lane Industrial Estate (WLIE), especially from the north, have been recognised by the Council, its consultants and business interests on the estate as representing an important factor in the estate's under - performance. Sir Alexander Gibb and Partners' "Baseline" Study Report (1995) confirmed this under performance and the part highway access deficiencies play. At present there are about 3000 jobs on the estate, which even at national average occupation rates could provide between 3500 and 4000 jobs.
- 1.3 The Council's engineering consultants Scott Wilson Kirkpatrick (SWK) confirmed, in their report "Willow Lane Access Improvements" (April 1995), the substandard nature of the industrial northern access to the estate represented by Willow Lane, which is a one-way (south) single carriageway road with a weight restriction over two railway bridges. Traffic movements through the Willow Lane/Carshalton Road/Cranmer Roads junction are slow and dangerous due in large part to its unconventional layout, ambiguous road markings and inadequate highway capacity, especially for HGV traffic. In addition, accident rates at all of the estate's road junctions, especially at

Willow Lane/Carshalton Road/ Cranmer Road are well above national averages.

- 1.4 A report to Single Regeneration Budget Executive Board, Community Partnerships Sub-Committee, Planning Services Committee in early 1996 indicated that the estate did not provide businesses with first class distribution facilities, for both in and outward bound traffic, which are necessary for the efficient operation of modern businesses which work on short lead times. The estate's prospects of attracting high quality businesses were prejudiced by the inadequate highway access arrangements which contributed to its poor image.

Unitary Development Plan Policies

- 1.5 Since 1992 local businesses interests have lobbied in favour of introducing a new road link between Carshalton Road and the estate. An outcome of the Inquiry into objections to the current Unitary Development Plan (UDP) was that Proposal 20M be modified to commit the Council to carrying out urgent detailed investigations with landowners and residents in order to find a satisfactory alternative improved access to the northern part of the estate" (Inspector's Report November 1994, para 7.525). The Council accepted the UDP Inspector's recommendation to carry out further investigations into improved access to the north of the estate, which has now been reflected in proposal 20M of Merton's UDP (April 1996). Proposal 20M now states, among other things that "...improved access to the industrial estate is to be assessed at the northern end of Willow Lane".
- 1.6 The Council's initiative in promoting highway improvements to Willow Lane Industrial Estate and the consequent highway improvement proposals advanced by SWK reflect the Council's local roads, freight and movement policies (Unitary Development Plan 1996) in terms of providing access to industrial land at WLIE, some of which is currently land - locked and which can be developed for industrial purposes.

2.0 OPTIONS

- 2.1 In Spring 1996 the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) Executive Board and Community Partnership Sub-Committee approved the Consultant's highway proposals for the southern junctions at Wates Way/Goat Road/Carshalton Road and requested that the consultants re-examine the northern access options, paying particular regard to the highway options and their operational (traffic) implications.
- 2.2 The consequent study identified three options (see below) and dealt with their traffic impact on the road network including an assessment of the Croydon Road gyratory's capacity, engineering feasibility, environmental impact (eg. noise, visual intrusion, ecology) and an economic assessment (the

costs/benefits) of the highway improvement options with particular reference to potential reduction in accidents, operating costs and travel time savings.

2.3 The options considered are illustrated in the attached plans and are:

Option A - Slight realignment and substantial upgrading of Willow Lane to a full standard 7.3 metre - wide carriageway, including the replacement and widening of two railway bridges and provision of a 2.0m wide footway on the northern side and 3.0m wide combined cycleway and footway to the south side. Additionally a roundabout would be constructed at the junction of Willow Lane with Cranmer Road/Carshalton Road.

Option B - Creation of a new, full standard highway with 7.3m carriageway and 2.0m footways widening to 3.0m shared footway/cycleway where practical via the rear of the industrial properties on Willow Lane adjacent to Aspen Gardens. This would join Willow Lane just north of the Wandle Way junction and connect with Carshalton Road in the form of a signal controlled junction. A new access to Aspen Gardens would be provided.

Option C - Similar in concept to Option B. Realignment of Drake Road and the provision of a new full standard access road via the rear of the industrial properties on Willow Lane. The new access road would turn sharply right to utilise the full length of the existing industrial access road.

2.4 Set out below is an assessment of these landtake/environmental impact options in terms of traffic management and access considerations, and economic and financial performance. The assessment of the Common Land (net) required to implement these options has been calculated on the basis of Common Land taken which is not presently crossed by roads. The options have been considered to include a pedestrian footway and cycletrack. Costs quote below are at 1996 prices adjusted for inflation at 3% pa.

3.0 ASSESSMENT

Traffic Management and Access

3.1 All three options perform satisfactorily in terms of their physical layout although the sharp right turn bend in Option C requires over-widening and would result in increased noise from HGVs. Option A links in with the existing road network at the Cranmer Road/Carshalton Road junction on the north east of the estate and relies on the existing estate roads to distribute traffic. Options B and C improved access by introduced a new point of entry on the east side of the estate and upgrade the existing tramway path to varying degrees and hence also have the potential effect of improving internal access and circulation especially for properties on the south east of the estate.

- 3.2 Each option was assessed for the morning peak period with forecast traffic levels to the year 2010. It was assumed in all cases that improvements identified for the south of the estate at Wates Way/Goat Road and Goat Road/Carshalton Road have taken place.
- 3.3 In terms of vehicle delays and queue lengths all the options shown an improvement over the "do nothing" scenario with significant improvements to Carshalton Road. However, forecasts to 2010 indicate that by this time there would be queue levels on Carshalton Road and Commonsides West that would necessitate some significant improvements. The costs of carrying out improvements at this junction have not been included in this exercise. Further feasibility and design work would be required to identify a suitable scheme. A bid for local transport capital funding could be made at the appropriate time.
- 3.4 The accident savings and traffic benefits for each option have been quantified and are set out in the Appendix.
- 3.5 All the options would require land take from Mitcham Common and have an impact on the ecology of the Common, its visual appearance and views both of the Common and to/from property in the area. Implementation of any of the options would conflict with policies for open space including its value in terms of recreation, conservation, wildlife and amenity. There would also be significant disruption caused during construction including increased noise and deterioration in air quality as a result of the dirt and dust generated and in the case of Option A from the need to import a substantial volume of fill material. These factors need to be considered in the balance with the employment access and operational improvements which would be derived from the scheme options. Construction periods are estimated at 30 weeks for Option A, 15 weeks Option B and 18 weeks Option C.
- 3.6 The land surrounding Willow Lane Industrial Estate falls within an Archaeological Priority Zone. However, no archaeological impacts are expected on the basis of the spatial distribution of existing finds and the fact that for Option A construction work has already taken place to create Willow Lane.
- 3.7 In Option A there would be a land take from the Common of 4450 sq m to enable the widening of the road (including footways and cycle lanes) of this 1100 sq m to the north of the current road would be taken from the Mitcham Garden Village Conservation area land which is also designated as a Site of Importance for nature Conservation (SINC) and 3350 sq m from the southern edge which is also designated as SINC. The construction of a roundabout at the junction of Willow Lane with Cranmer Road and Carshalton Road would take 2950 sq m from the Common the majority of which is designated SINC. Land would also be affected by the construction process and storage of materials. The majority of land affected by this option currently supports a variety of mature trees and other vegetation although it is not believed to

contain any particularly rare species. The effects would be the loss of vegetation, an adverse effect on the visual amenity of Willow lane and visual intrusion from traffic using the route. Such action would not enhance or protect the character of appearance of the Conservation Area. 800 sq m of industrial land would be occupied by the access road.

- 3.8 On balance there would be a slight improvement in air quality because of forecast reduction in congestion achieved at the junctions with Carshalton Road. The area and properties in the immediate vicinity of the road would experience increased noise levels although those to the south of Willow Lane in Drake Road and Aspen Gardens would have a slight reduction.
- 3.9 The replacement of the existing hum back key stone bridge will affect the aesthetic value of Willow Lane unless financial resources were available to enable sensitive design.
- 3.10 For Option B the access road would occupy approximately 3400 sq m of Common Land and Metropolitan SINC at least some of which is designated a Site of Metropolitan Importance (SMI) and 2400 sq m of industrial land. In addition to the issues of principle raised by this, the removal of vegetation would reduce the visual screen currently enjoyed by properties in Aspen Gardens and 2-9 Carshalton Road. The construction and use of the access road would result in disturbance and removal of wildlife habitat well beyond the actual area of Common Land occupied and would cause severance of the SMI area restricting the distribution of species throughout it. Woodland adjacent to the new road would suffer from continual disturbance arising from increased levels of traffic.
- 3.11 Air quality is forecast to improve slightly but still to be heavily polluted. Noise levels experienced would increase on the Common in the area of the proposed road, Carshalton Road north of Drake Road and Aspen Gardens where the impact would be substantial although this could be perceptibly reduced through noise barriers. There would be reduced noise levels around Willow Lane.
- 3.12 For Option C the most significant land take would result from the upgrading and realignment of Drake Road. There would be a loss of 1750 sq m of Mitcham Common land which is also classified as Metropolitan SINC and some of which is classified as SMI. Many of the effects arising for Option B would also occur. The geometric improvements of the junction of Drake Road and Carshalton Road would result in the loss of a strip of land which, while judged to have vegetation of little ecological value, is of local interest and provides a screen for properties in Carshalton Road. The demolition of two properties north of Drake Road would have a significant short term effect on the landscape character. 3200 sq m of industrial land would be required.

- 3.13 Air quality would deteriorate slightly in the vicinity of the new road especially at the bends in the alignment. Residents in Drake Road and Aspen Gardens would be adversely affected by increased noise levels. As with Option B improvements in noise and air quality would be experienced around Willow Lane.

Economic and Financial Assessment

- 3.14 The estimated costs of the options are:

Option A	£4.14m
Option B	£0.85m
Option C	£1.38m

These are based on the costs estimated at the time of the feasibility study in 1996 updated by inflation. They do not reflect detailed design.

- 3.15 An economic assessment has been carried out which takes into account changes in travel times and operating costs and benefits from accident reduction in comparison with the "do nothing" scenario. Option A represents the best value in terms of total benefits. Benefits arising from Options B and C are similar with those for Option C marginally better. Time and operating costs account for about 70% of all benefits in all options.
- 3.16 For all options the savings in time and accidents are significant when compared to the costs of implementations and hence all are judged to represent value for money and be worth implementing. The significantly lower costs associated with Option B mean that this scheme has the best net value.
- 3.17 Both Options B and C would improve access to the WLIE and have the potential to enable businesses already located there to be more operationally efficient. Currently the estate has a very low vacancy level (4.3%) and hence the most likely effect of improved access over and above removing current operational frictions would be intensification of use in some areas of the estate. It is difficult to precisely quantify the effects in terms of land values, rental levels or jobs created, since this will depend on the investment plans of land owners on the estate. Comparing Options B & C the latter has slightly greater potential for generating economic benefits of this type due to the fact that the proposed access road is longer and adjacent to a greater frontage of industrial premises. There is the potential for a spur to be considered for Option B which would lead to the south of the access road as proposed to the rear of property in Drake Road. It is suggested that this amendment would bring the economic benefits from Option B broadly into line with those which could be achieved through Option C.

4.0 CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Consultation over the options with local residents' groups, local employees and those who work and live in the study area revealed that in all cases a clear preference for Option A was expressed (see attachment 4, "Summary of Public Consultation"). Overall, Option A was the clear preference for 50% of consultees with Option B at 21% the next most preferred option. Option C was preferred by 17% of all consultees. The total number of respondents was 91.
- 4.2 The Mitcham Common Conservators oppose the options on the basis of their perception of the environmental damage that is likely to be incurred and the possibility that any improved access to the estate is likely to generate additional pressures on the other parts of the local highway network, which may require further improvements and land take from the common. They are concerned that some Common Land would need to be taken regardless of which option was preferred by the Council. They have also expressed concern that there did not appear to exist yet sufficient quantities of exchange land and that land which did exist was of poor quality and in the wrong location.
- 4.3 It is clear from the Consultant's assessment of the options that each option impacts differently on the environment, adjacent residential areas, traffic conditions in the area and on the prospects for redeveloping (part) of Willow lane Industrial Estate. The options produce different benefits to different interests represented on the estate and in the adjacent residential rears. It is notable that none of the options has gained the unqualified support from all the interests concerned and all are opposed by the Conservators.
- 4.4 However, from the public consultation exercise Option A emerged as the overall preference and would provide significant access benefits to Willow lane Industrial Estate. However, because it is the most costly and in view of the extent of Common Land taken and its environmental and ecological impact, the working party set up to consider these issues and options decided to recommend that Option A is rejected.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 Option A, although offering the greatest level of operational benefits and commanding the highest level of local support, requires substantial capital investment and hence is unlikely to be affordable. In addition its construction would require 7400 sq m of common land and have large scale adverse environmental impact. It is recommended that this option is not progressed.
- 5.2 Options B and C are similar in concept. Both enable Willow Lane to be downgraded as an industrial access route with beneficial effects at the junction with Cranmer Road/Carshalton Road.

- 5.3 Option C is the more expensive option, requires the demolition of two houses and results in land take of 1750 sq m common land and 3200 sq m of industrial land. Operational benefits are marginally greater than for Option B and Option C has the potential for improved access over a greater area within the WLIE with potential for increased employment and enhanced land and rental values.
- 5.4 Option B is the least expensive option and in its current form offers substantial, but less, potential for improved internal access and associated benefits for WLIE than Option C. Consideration could however be given to a southern spur to access premises on the south east of the estate. Construction of Option B would require 3400m² of common land and 2400m² of industrial land and enable improve access for the residential properties in Aspen Gardens.
- 5.5 The availability of suitable exchange land is a key requirement which will determine whether or not either Option B or C could be implemented in practice. The Council currently has a land holding of 340m² which could contribute to a land bank for the purpose of exchange, subject to resolving a restricting covenant that affects the land, and negotiations are in hand to purchase a further 1756m² of land for exchange purposes. Assuming the latter is successful there is the potential for exchange to achieve Option C but a shortfall for Option B. There are two other sites in Council ownership that could contribute. Neither have been fully investigated at this time. The additional land required could be satisfied if these areas of land proved to be available/suitable for exchange. Given that time is required for detailed design, administrative procedures to gain the necessary approvals for any scheme and to secure the necessary funding it is considered that this shortfall should not lead to Option B being discounted at this stage.
- 5.6 On the basis of the above information it is recommended that Option B should be progressed as the preferred alternative and that further work should be undertaken to develop the detailed designs and secure the necessary approvals and funding.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Common Land is designed as Metropolitan Open Land. In order to acquire the Common Land (eg at Mitcham Common) to implement the highway proposals contained within this report, the Council will need to make and approve an Acquisition Order under Section 229 of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990.
- 6.2 The Acquisition Order will have to be confirmed by the Secretary of State after statutory consultation has taken place. The Secretary of State is required to

arrange a Public Inquiry where objections have been received and he considers it appropriate to do so.

- 6.3 If a Public Inquiry is required it may take between 1 to 2 years for the matter to be resolved. The procedure will be governed by the Acquisition of Land Act 1981.
- 6.4 In confirming the Acquisition Order, the Secretary of State will have to be satisfied that the special provisions contained in Section 229 can be met; chief among them is the requirement to provide suitable exchange land and that the land is required for public highway improvements.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 In the January 1996 cycle of Committee meetings it was decided that no capital expenditure for the implementation phase of the Willow Lane Industrial Estate Access Improvements could be provided directly from the Council's SRB budget.
- 7.2 Accordingly, funding for the northern highway access proposals, as part of a package of measures to improve Willow Lane Industrial Estate's accessibility, will need to be sought through the Transport Policies and Programmes (TPP) package bid process. It is recommended that the scheme should be clearly flagged up in the 1999/2000 London Wandle Valley Corridor TPP bid with funding for further design and land costs specifically sought for 1999/2000 and cost profiles for construction over the period to 2003.

8. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 None for the purpose of this report.

9. TIMETABLE

Implementation programme

- 9.1 It is likely that the implementation programme for either Option B or C, including the detailed design/agreements/approvals and funding that would be necessary, could take up to five years to complete given that CPO/Special Parliamentary Procedure may be required to secure Common Land for development purposes and the creation of a land bank of exchange land.
- 9.2 To enable implementation of a chosen option the Council would need to identify the route in the Reviewed UDP and safeguard the land required. The timetable for the UDP Review proposes a Reviewed Plan being placed on Deposit in Spring 1999.

- 9.3 Accordingly and subject to funding being secured it is possible that implementation of the northern highway access improvement proposals to Willow lane Industrial Estate could commence in 2003.

10. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 These issues are considered in the body of the report.

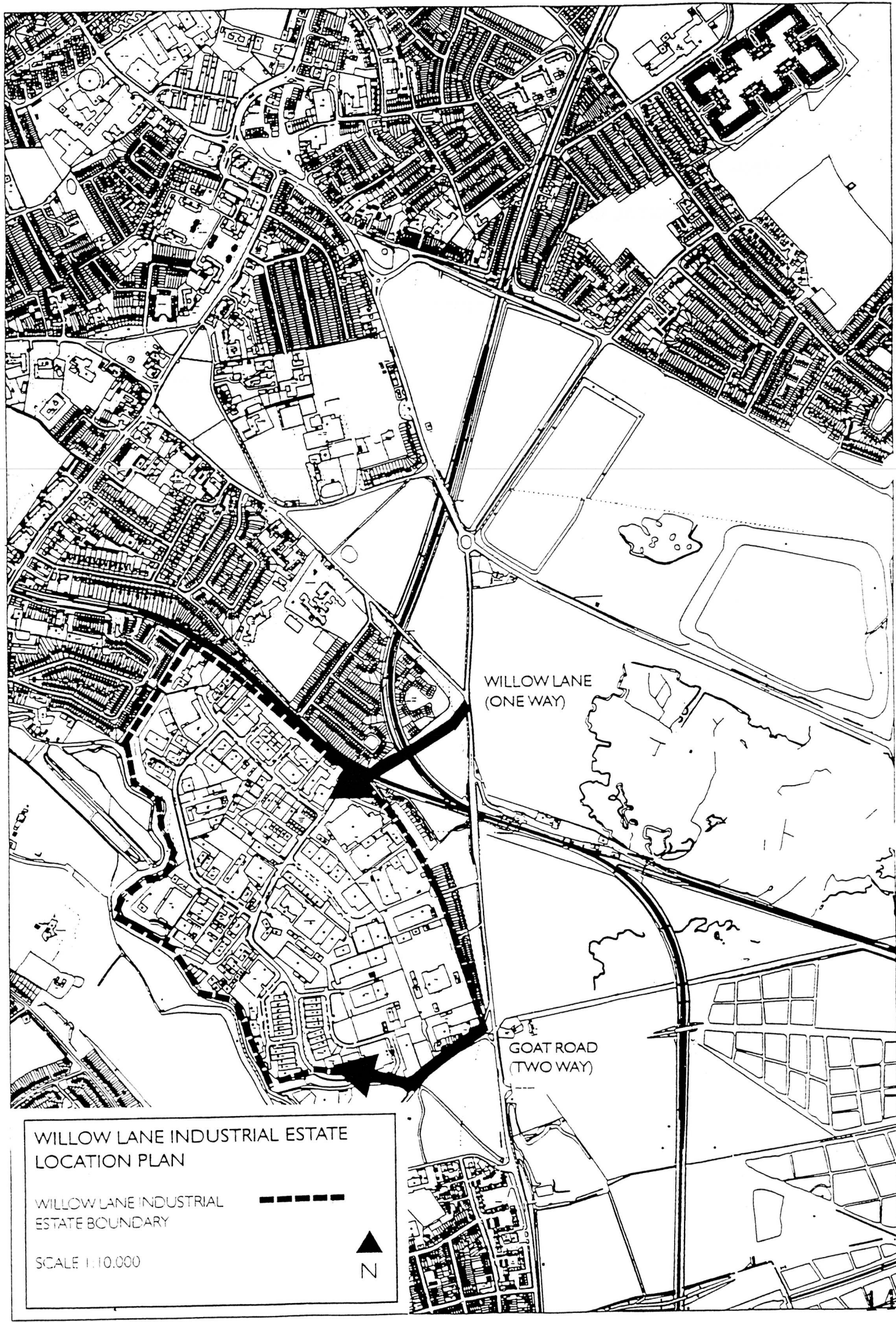
11. HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The provision of an all-purpose highway (designed and built to carry HGV traffic) providing access to the northern part of the industrial estate, will provide a safer access route for the public and will open up the possibility of employees using Willow Lane (free of traffic) to get to/from work on foot and by bicycle.

BACKGROUND PAPERS - Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

- "Willow Lane Industrial Estate Access Improvements", SWK, April 1996.
- Report to the 22 January meeting of the Community Partnership Sub-Committee on "Willow Lane Access Improvements" and Min. No. 1335/1/96.

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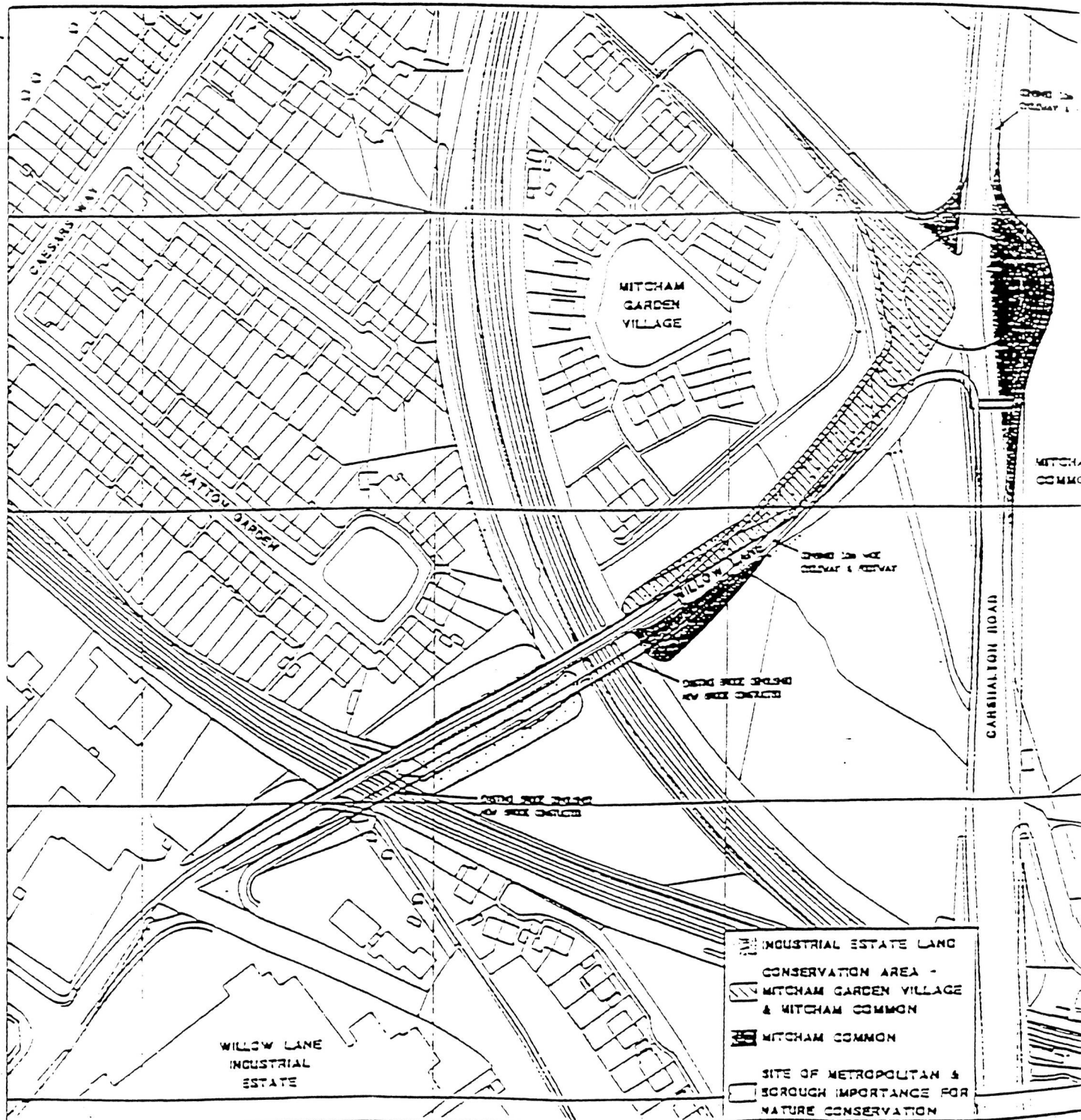


APPENDIX **SUMMARY OF OPTIONS A, B, & C**

OPTION	COST M	COMMON LANDTAKE sq. m.	RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY TAKE	ENVIRONMENTAL & ECOLOGICAL IMPACT	TRAFFIC & ACCIDENT BENEFITS £'000s	NPV £'000s	VALUE FOR MONEY	INDUSTRIAL LAND RELEASED sq. m.	JOBS CREATED	CONSULTATION PREFERENCE
OPTION A	3.9	7242	0	HIGH	22044	18412	4.70	0	0	50%
OPTION B	0.8	2863	0	HIGH	20252	19450	24.20	22765	189	21%
OPTION C	1.3	1532	2	MEDIUM	20457	19249	14.70	35793	238	17%

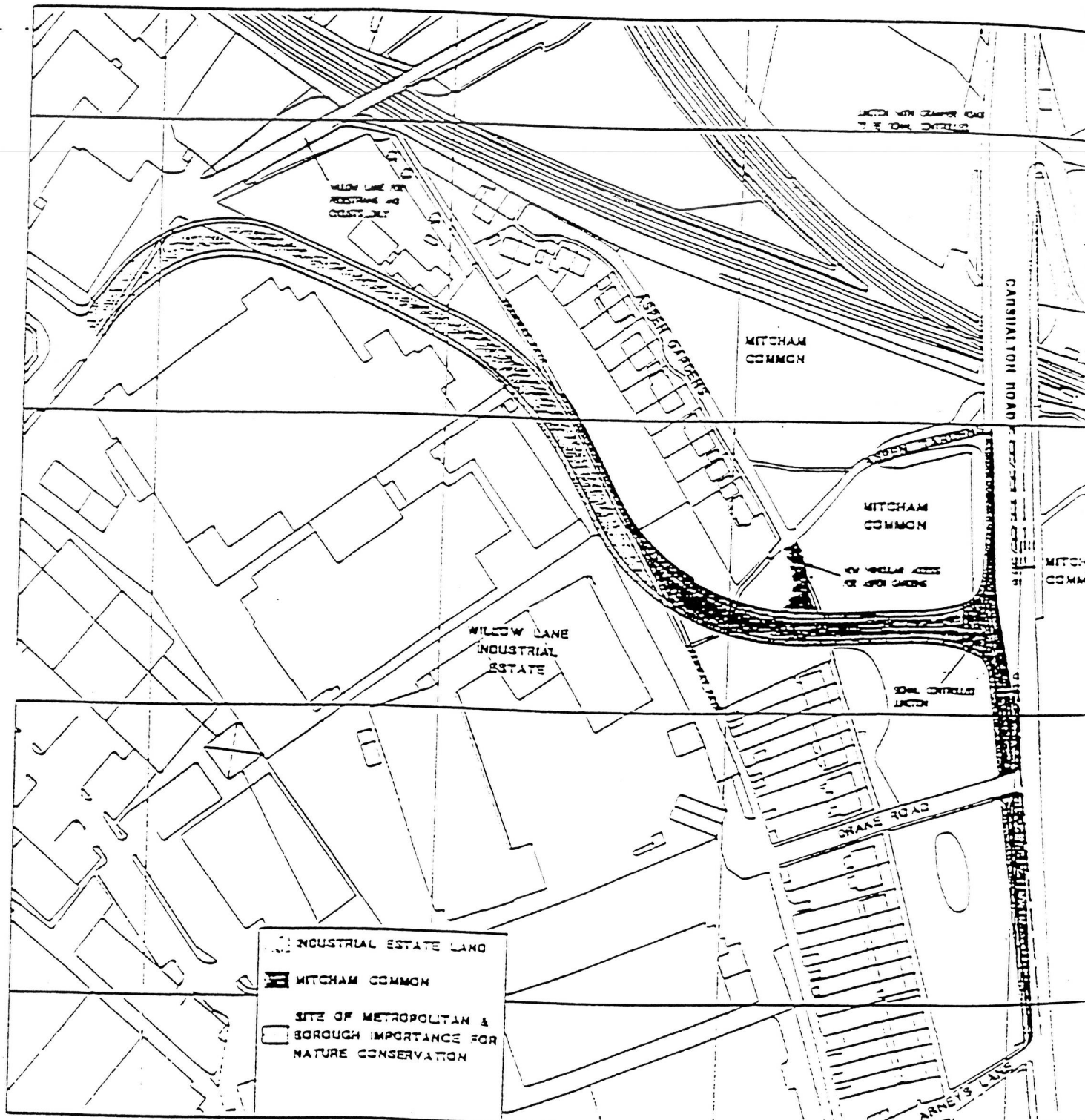
OPTION A WILLOW LANE IMPROVEMENT - Attachment 1

- ❖ Willow Lane widened to two way suitable for all vehicles
- ❖ Railway bridges rebuilt
- ❖ Roundabout at Carshalton Road / Cranmer Road
- ❖ Loss of 7242 sq.m. of Metropolitan Site of Importance for Nature Conservation
- ❖ Loss of 7242 sq.m. of Mitcham Common



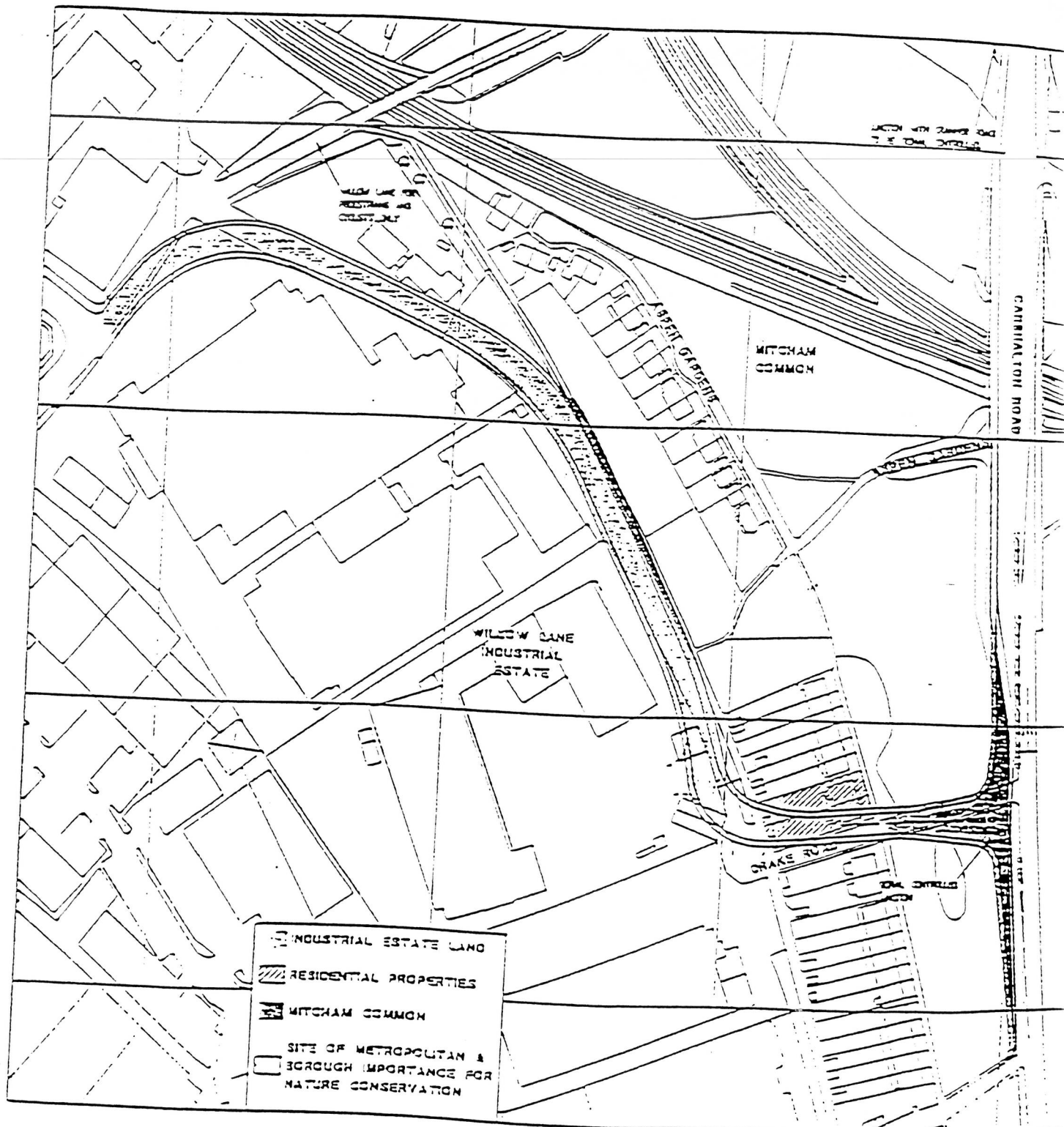
OPTION B
ACCESS ADJACENT TO ASPEN GARDENS - Attachment 2

- ❖ Two way suitable for all vehicles
- ❖ Signal controlled junction to Carshalton Road
- ❖ Fragmentation of Common Land and Nature Conservation Area
- ❖ Loss of 2863 sq.m. of Metropolitan Site of Importance for Nature Conservation
- ❖ Loss of 2863 sq.m. of Mitcham Common

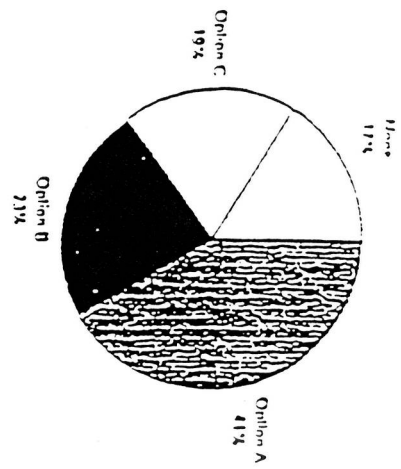


OPTION C ACCESS VIA DRAKE ROAD - Attachment 3

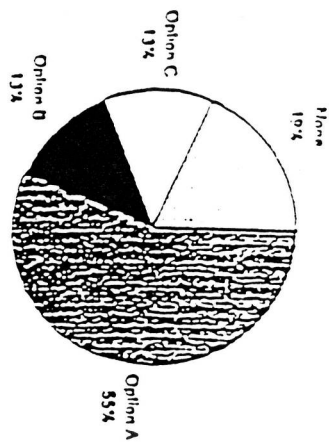
- ❖ Two way suitable for all vehicles
- ❖ Signal controlled junction to Carshalton Road
- ❖ Requires demolition of two houses
- ❖ Loss of 3200 sq.m. of Industrial Land
- ❖ Loss of 1523 sq.m. of Common Land also classified as a Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation



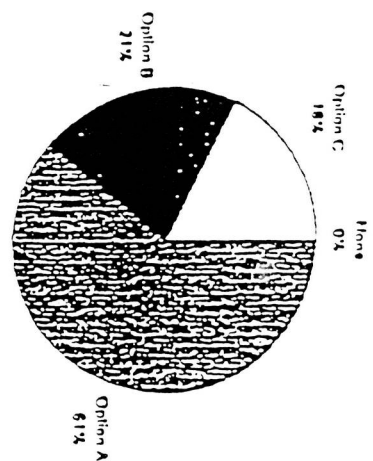
Preferences of those who only reside in the study area



Preferences of those who reside and work in the study area



Preferences of those who only work in the area



Overall Preferences

