

Agenda item 4 Public Question Time – Statements made on Agenda item 5: A358 Update - M5 to Southfields Improvement Response to non-statutory consultation

Mike Baddeley - Statement to Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee Meeting 13th June 2017.

Firstly, may I compliment Mike O Dowd Jones on his summarising of most of the main points arising from the Highways England Ltd proposals for the A358 upgrading.

Contrary to the response document, we believe that the route of the proposed new A358 is the main issue. The main objective, locally, is to have a Henlade by pass and this indeed had been the basis of proposals over the last 15 years.

The current proposal does not achieve that. In fact it will probably exacerbate the situation through Henlade. All it does achieve is a total by pass of Taunton destroying valuable food producing farming land in the process.

Having been briefed by SCC Highways staff last Wednesday at a meeting for Ruishton and Stoke St.Mary Parish Councils on the Junction 25 proposals, I have come to the conclusion, as have many others, that both projects in their current form, will not achieve their stated objectives.

If you study the information in the Highways England Ltd Technical Appraisal Report, the HE preferred route is the least cost effective, more costly accident and noise wise. The alternate route 2A/2B is the most cost effective and will provide a Henlade By Pass, a fact alluded to in the response document.

Please will Somerset County Council get to grips with this situation and jointly design the A358 upgrade and the Junction 25 improvements in conjunction with Highways England.. If part of the proposed Nexus business park has to be sacrificed, so be it, at least we might have a much better long term solution.

I would also ask that SCC Cabinet Members actively consult with local Parish Councils, who will be affected by these proposals. Having been denied this to date I believe that it is SCC's duty to understand local concerns and not just sweep it under the carpet saying it is nothing to do with SCC. Neither Stoke St.Mary or West Hatch Parishes have had the benefit of a Highways England presentation. The two most affected parishes have not been consulted by anyone. That, Councillors, is not democracy.

Written individual response please.

Mike Baddeley.
Chair, Stoke St.Mary Parish Council.

Michael Farrell - Statement to Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee Somerset County Council 13 June 2017

Thank you for giving me the opportunity of addressing you.

Highways England have acted with casual arrogance throughout their dealings with the affected parishes. They have not conducted any parish meetings and have not made sufficient efforts to contact the "hard to reach" members of the public in out lying areas.

On 16 May your colleagues at T.D.B.C. heard representations from myself and other affected parties and agreed that the Highways England consultation was flawed and should be halted and re-commenced with all route options contained within their Technical Appraisal Report (T.A.R.) available for a meaningful consultation. Additionally Highways England should supply a T.A.R. containing specific details.

On 9 June Somerset County Council's Highways Department issued the most comprehensive breakdown of the Highways England proposals. Their conclusions are a detailed and reasoned criticism of the current consultation.

In summary the current A3 5 8 consultation conducted by Highways England achieves none of the proposed aims of their own road construction requirements:

- * No evidence of real economic benefit to Somerset and in particular Taunton.
- * No significant reduction in air pollution but an increase in noise and light pollution.
- * No relief for the long suffering residents of Henlade.
- * No connection to the S.C.C. £20 million improvement scheme at Junction 25.
- * No local access at the proposed new motorway junction, 25 A
- * No evidence of significantly reduced traffic movements at Junction 25.
- * An increase in the cost of Road Traffic Accidents.
- * Potential ecological damage including loss of ancient woodland, countryside and valuable, productive arable land,

Taunton needs to realise that the largest upheaval in road infrastructure since the construction of the M5 will not bring the area any fiscal benefit. Currently we are being asked to take traffic from London and the South East, divert it away from Taunton into Devon and Cornwall effectively creating a Taunton by-pass.

I would ask that you consider what I have submitted and ask that you also support the cancellation of the current Highways England consultation.

Thank you for your time.

Michael Farrell
Stoke St Mary

Question from Rob Hossell (Parish of Stoke St Mary)

A358 Taunton to Southfields Improvement

Firstly I would like to commend the authors on a very thorough examination of Highways England's (HE) Technical Appraisal Report (TAR) described within your Agenda documentation.

We all agree strongly with these key areas of concern raised against the preferred option:

1. No economic benefit for Taunton, as there is no planned local access at J25A, and no connection to J25, where the Nexus employment park is planned for Taunton's future economic growth.
2. Increased noise impact as J25A is adjacent to Killams within the Taunton built up area.
3. The majority of traffic to Taunton and M5 North (73%) will still pass through J25 via the old A358, and hence congestion will not be relieved through Henlade.
4. Safety dis-benefit, when new roads should be safer.
5. Lowest Benefit to Cost ratio (1.54) – the only comprehensive numerical evaluation of the various options.

Why then does SCC support "HE's choice of route as a whole" yet also request a link to J25, and an optimum location for J25A, given there is no optimum location?

We already have a suitable option (i.e. 2A/2B) presented in the TAR that overcomes all these issues and objections.

Instead of being weak and wobbly, suggesting a totally new, expanded and un-costed option, be decisive in your statements. Keep it simple and realistic. Why can't you strongly urge that HE reconsider their existing options from the TAR that will deliver on both HE's and Taunton's objectives?

Ultimately we all need a vibrant Garden Town, not a deserted By-Pass Town.

WRITTEN INDIVIDUAL RESPONSE PLEASE

David Lodge

Could the Council please explain how, in their recent review of the Highways England Option 8 proposal for dualling of the A358, the Council appears to have overlooked and has not criticised the illogical location of the proposed Junction B with West Hatch Lane:-

- i. As the highways authority responsible, Somerset County Council must know that West Hatch Lane is very narrow and winding (including sharp right angle bends barely negotiable by large vehicles) with dwellings close to the road on both sides at some points, not to mention the stream that runs alongside and across the lane and which floods regularly. West Hatch Lane is totally unsuitable as an access point for the local communities.
- ii. The other small lanes around West Hatch are heavily used by NMUs, particularly bicycles and horses; any further increase in vehicular traffic would be disastrous.
- iii. The positioning of Junction B, away from the A358/A378 intersection, will encourage a 'rat-run' through the hamlet of Meare Green.
- iv. The proposed location of an illuminated, large and noisy Junction B will have deleterious effects on the ecology of Huish Woods and on the local Scout Camp and Progressive School.

Could the Council please address this important concern in their response to Highways England and suggest the re-location of Junction B.

ANSWER IN WRITING, PLEASE, CHAIR.

David Lodge
West Hatch Parish Council
David.Lodge@Bristol.ac.uk

I ask that committee members note the position of the Taunton Deane equivalent Scrutiny Committee from May 25th.

2.1a That Members of the Council and the Community Scrutiny Committee agreed that a letter setting out that Taunton Deane Borough Council request that Highways England not only pause the consultation but also widen the reach of the consultation and pro the technical information which has been used to formulate the Technical Appraisal Report and the selection of the option which is being consulted on;

2.1b The Community Scrutiny Committee agreed that the letter from Taunton Deane Borough Council to Highways England should express the very serious concerns of the Community Scrutiny Committee and the community regarding the nature of the current consultation, specifically:

- the inappropriate timing of the consultation in relation to the planned Somerset County Council elections in May 2017 which has been exacerbated by the forthcoming General Election;
- the very limited nature of the consultation which has made little or no attempt to engage with local Parish Councils or ‘hard to reach groups’; and
- the fact that only one option is being presented for consultation; and
- the detailed information – including traffic information - to support the selection of that option and the rejection of the other 3 options described in the Technical Appraisal Report, has not been made available to the Council or the community

I also ask committee members to consider the following issues and, if in overall agreement, to make them recommendations to the SCC Cabinet and Full Council:

a) This Council regrets the inappropriate timing of the Highways England Ltd (HE Ltd) consultation clashing with known County Council elections, which has unnecessarily increased anxieties in affected communities and impeded their democratic access to this Council.

b) This Council recommends that HE Ltd should supply more technical information in a revised Technical Appraisal Report (TAR) and that the basis for rejecting the three other viable options (with better cost/benefit ratios) is clearly explained.

c) This Council recommends that HE Ltd should commit to a fresh, genuine and meaningful consultation with more of the shortlisted options (from the TAR) included.

d) This Council believes it is imperative that the HE Ltd scheme and the Heart of the West LEP scheme (for the existing M5 J25 and Nexus Business Park) should be properly joined up and treated as complementary traffic management and economic development investment schemes.

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- e) This Council recommends that HE Ltd ensure that the final route option chosen will sustainably relieve Henlade of the bulk of through traffic.
- f) This Council recommends that HE Ltd ensure that the final route option chosen for the new A358 scheme will design a new M5 Junction 25A that is NOT located within the existing conurbation of Taunton and, with properly planned spur roads, can allow for viable and sustainable local links to the M5 (as a 2nd junction to the existing J25).
- g) This Council recommends that the final route option chosen for the A358 scheme should NOT divert the bulk of holiday traffic past Taunton as a “bypass town” without any discernible economic benefit to Taunton; this is in direct contradiction to the Garden Town status recently awarded to Taunton.
- h) The HE Ltd statement that there will be "major development opportunities to the South of Taunton" is ambiguous and could mean that the M5 is no longer the longstanding boundary to prevent Taunton sprawling into the countryside to the South of the M5. This needs detailed clarification in the consultation otherwise the plan could be viewed by affected communities as a “developers’ charter”.
- i) HE Ltd has worked backwards from a desired March 2020 construction start date and made all the project phases fit within that virtual timetable. This is damaging affected communities confidence that HE Ltd is conducting a genuine and meaningful consultation. This Council should recommend that the planned construction start date by HE Ltd should fully support pre-construction consultation and sustainable planning phases [including joining up the A358 project with the M25 existing J25 and Nexus Business Park project].

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Nigel Power

Re A303- 30/ A358 road proposal – Highways England Ltd.

Restating my fundamental position

Highways England current flawed 'consultation' submission is incompatible with its two stated objectives of to:

1. Provide an additional route for traffic travelling South East to South West.
2. Relieve traffic congestion and pollution through Henlade.

Neither of these objectives is achieved as stated previously for reasons of not reducing local Henlade traffic, adding time to journeys, adding to pollution (light, air, noise) adding congestion to the M5 motorway. Furthermore, it does not give local traffic access and as a consequence the claim of economic development is difficult to see. How can a by-pass expressway with no local access help the local community of Taunton?

Somerset County Council is the strongest body we as residents have representing us to ensure Taunton is not exploited, by having a poorly thought out road solution that ruins our countryside for no apparent reason. It may be the lowest monetary cost option. Other than that, it has no merit.

If Taunton is spending around £20 -£25 million locally in upgrading J 25, surely some joined up thinking is essential.

As I see it, HE Ltd. May be the sponsor of the flawed project but if not challenged by SCC, we as a community will have vandalism inflicted upon the area for no tangible benefit. SCC as representatives and custodians of this region has a duty to robustly challenge this single solution and achieve a result that more closely represents previous representations submitted. My own preference is to encourage HE Ltd to concentrate its resources totally on an A303 upgrade where there seems positive support in Devon but in any event, a no access junction at Killams makes absolutely no sense. We should not simply let unelected bodies impose their will on our community.

I request a written response please

Nigel Power

Email: nigelpower@btinternet.com

Mrs Patricia Power

Re A303-30/A358 road proposal-Highways England Ltd.

I request that Somerset County Council as statutory consultee rejects this flawed one option consultation from Highways England.

That SCC rejects this proposed new junction at Killams Lane, with its 12 lanes of traffic, roundabouts and relevant infrastructure for which there are no detailed plans.

Residents in Killams are deeply distressed about this major road proposal which will seriously affect their day to day lives. Noise, light and significant air pollution within a designated urban boundary.

This proposed junction is incompatible with Taunton's Green Town status and brings no economic benefit at all.

I urge SCC as the more senior and the strongest body that can represent our community to continue working with TDBC in rejecting the location of the proposed junction 25a. To do this in a clear and transparent way so our community can have trust in our elected County Councillors.

Thank you chair.

Written response please.

Mrs Patricia Power