

SCRUTINY FOR POLICIES AND PLACE COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee held in the Luttrell Room - County Hall, Taunton, on Tuesday 30 January 2018 at 10.00 am

Present: Cllr T Lock (Chairman), Cllr M Lewis (Vice-Chair), Cllr P Ham, Cllr T Napper, Cllr A Wedderkopp, Cllr B Filmer, Cllr John Hunt, Cllr J Thorne and Cllr G Noel

Other Members present: Cllr C Aparicio Paul, Cllr S Coles, Cllr H Davies, Cllr D Hall, Cllr L Leyshon, Cllr T Munt, Cllr M Rigby, Cllr L Vijeh, Cllr R Williams and Cllr J Woodman

Apologies for absence:

58 **Declarations of Interest** - Agenda Item 2

There were no declarations of interest.

59 **Minutes from the previous meeting held on 05 December 2017** - Agenda Item 3

The minutes of the meeting on 05 December 2017 were accepted as being accurate by the Committee.

60 **Public Question Time** - Agenda Item 4

There were 14 Public Questions in relation to Item 5, 7 Public Questions in relation to Item 6 and 1 Public Question in relation to Item 7. All questions will receive a written response.

Details of all Public questions can be found in the appendix to these minutes.

61 **Taunton Transport Strategy Consultation** - Agenda Item 5

The Strategic Commissioning Manager, Highways and Transport began by thanking members of the public for their questions. He confirmed that all questions would receive a written response. He clarified that questions about specific development sites or planning applications should be directed to the appropriate body or authority as it is not the role of the Scrutiny Committee or Somerset County Council to comment on this. He also asked the public to respond formally to the consultation with any comments or concerns.

The Committee received a report from the Strategic Commissioning Manager, Highways and Transport on the draft Taunton Transport Strategy 'Connecting our Garden Town'. The document was commissioned by Taunton Dean Borough Council (TDBC) in partnership with Somerset County Council (SCC) and prepared by consultants WSP. The Committee was asked to consider and comment on the document prior to a period of public consultation and subsequent consideration by the Executive Portfolio Holders at TDBC and SCC.

The document outlined a series of proposals and policies grouped into six strategic topics as well as the key objectives and key outcomes. The Committee was informed that the document has been prepared using a wide range of existing evidence and data and that no new studies have been undertaken at this stage. A number of consultation exercises took place to inform the creation of the document. It is intended to undertake a web-based public consultation of the document in February 2018. In addition, a public exhibition will be held to enable face to face engagement.

The Chair stated that the Committee was pleased to hear that wider, face to face consultation will now take place in addition to on-line consultation. He urged all present to respond formally to the consultation with any concerns or comments. He also reminded the meeting that any questions regarding existing or planned development applications should be directed to the respective Planning Authority and not to SCC or this Committee.

The Strategic Manager clarified that any new connection from Junction 25 to create a link road to the south of the town would require substantial highways infrastructure. This is not currently planned or in any proposal at present. This is a matter for TDBC to consider in their planning.

With regard to a new spine road, traffic modelling has taken place and has concluded that there is little demand for this.

The Strategic Manager confirmed that, when describing travel destinations, simplified statistics were used to communicate with the public but reassured those present that a wide range of complex traffic modelling has been undertaken and considered. More technical work and modelling will be undertaken. He confirmed that traffic studies carried out were sound and have been audited.

It was confirmed that TDBC commissioned the plan but that TDBC and SCC will be adopting it as a joint strategy.

The Committee discussed the need for more engagement early in the process particularly with Parish Councils and questioned how Parish Council's would be engaged with. It was confirmed that face-to-face consultation would take place and Parish Council representatives would be invited. Parish Councils are also formally respond to the consultation. Members questioned whether alternative proposals around missing strategic links could be discussed. This was affirmed but any new strategic links would need to be tested.

Members raised challenges and a disconnect in the sequence between housing development and road planning. Whilst different authorities have different responsibilities, this must be addressed as there is a need for authorities to work in partnership when addressing their different yet linked responsibilities. Members also expressed that there is a need to make links between the Transport Strategy and the A358 consultation. Members raised that the planning process is flawed as local planning authorities must take account of comments by Highways, which is an SCC function. If Highways do not raise an objection then it is difficult for planning authorities to object from a

highways perspective. The Strategic Manager confirmed that SCC and TDBC work very well together as a joined up set of authorities.

Some Members criticised elements of the plan, for example, building in green areas and unrealistically planning that less people will be using cars in Taunton town centre in future.

Members raised that there are funding gaps and major issues with receiving Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds. No CIL funds have been received by SCC over the last four years. It was confirmed that a funding gap does exist. SCC has submitted a bid for the Housing Infrastructure Fund and is in on-going dialogue with TDBC about CIL funds.

The Committee agreed a recommendation to endorse the Strategy providing that face to face consultation took place with representatives of both TDBC and SCC present.

62 **SCC Response to A358 Consultation - Agenda Item 6**

The Committee received a presentation from the Strategic Commissioning Manager, Highways and Transport regarding the 2nd non-statutory consultation by Highways England (HE) on the A358 Taunton to Southfields Dualling Scheme.

It was confirmed that Highways England are responsible for design, delivery and operation of the route as a new link in the national road network and that Somerset County Council (SCC) are only a consultee. A Non-Key Decision will be made by the Cabinet Member on 19th February to agree SCC's response to the HE consultation. All present at the meeting were asked to respond formally to the HE consultation to express any concerns or comments.

The presentation outlined: the background to the consultation; the possible timescales; the role of the SCC; a map of three proposed routes with an assessment of their strengths and weaknesses; environmental and social impacts and highlighted key issues and the SCC process going forward.

Those present were reminded that there will be a formal statutory consultation still to come in 2019.

It was clarified that SCC did not reject the orange route in the previous consultation. SCC gave a neutral response neither accepting nor rejecting and asked for further information to make an informed decision.

The Committee discussed concern about capacity at Junction 25. Concern was expressed that confusion over whether it was HE's role to resolve this at the HE launch event indicated a lack of joined up thinking and dialogue.

A Member questioned who is able to respond to the consultation and how this may affect the outcome. Concern was raised that Freedom of Information requests revealed that previous HE consultations had been skewed by responses from people living outside of the local area and the county. This

question would need to be directed to HE but it is SCC's understanding that this is an open consultation and that anyone is able to respond as this is a national scheme about a national road network. It was confirmed that HE have a Board to consider consultation responses.

Members raised the need for a southern relief road and that the lack of this would be a missed opportunity. This would need to be considered through the TDBC local planning process and SCC is not able to request this of HE.

Members raised the need for further consultation if a hybrid option is chosen. It was clarified that HE would test any hybrid options and then consult during the statutory consultation process.

Concern and disappointment was expressed at the lack of summer traffic modelling given the extensive summer traffic that comes to the south west through our area. It is standard practice to model neutral periods, however SCC agree it would be beneficial to understand how the schemes perform under seasonal traffic pressures. HE have confirmed they are preparing a summer weekend model to enable them to consider seasonal traffic pressures at the next stage.

Concern was raised that the decision will be non-key and taken by one Cabinet Member only instead of by Full Council. The Cabinet Member responded that he recognised that there was still work to do but that he was delighted that HE had agreed to a second consultation. He stated that he will take account of all of the views expressed today and over the next two weeks to inform the decision on 19th February regarding the preferred route.

The Committee agreed a recommendation that the Cabinet Member consider the views of the public and Committee Members regarding the consultation. There are still some queries regarding the detail but as a Committee we implore that everybody with a view feeds into the Highways England consultation.

63 **Draft Medium Term Financial Plan - Agenda Item 7**

The Committee received a report from the Director of Finance, Legal and Governance regarding the Medium Term Financial Plan, the 2018/19 Capital Investment Programme and an overview of the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement. The final settlement announcement is scheduled for the 5th February 2018 and will therefore not be known before Cabinet papers are issued.

The Director highlighted three key announcements from the settlement:

- An "aim" to localise 75% of business rates from 2020-21 and implementation of the new needs assessment;
- Confirmation of the continuation of the Adult Social Care precept including the additional flexibility to raise the precept to 3% this year but by no more than 6% over the 17-18 to 19-20 period;

- Increased council tax referendum principle from 1.99% to 2.99% for 2018-19 and 2019-20.

The Committee were informed that SCC was not successful in its bid to be one of the pilots for 100% business rates retention. However, SCC will be part of a pool with the 5 Somerset District Councils and this should generate over half a million pounds towards our revenue gap.

The Committee were also informed about the current forecast position. The MTFP gap increases and decreases constantly as various factors affect our budgetary position. On the positive side, the increased levels of funding received via the Improved Better Care Fund along with a stabilisation of costs in Adult Social Care and Learning Disabilities have helped to reduce forecasted pressures in these services.

In terms of our funding, estimates have been received from District Councils for Taxbase numbers and collection fund surplus and these are sufficiently buoyant to include in our base as additional income, £0.550m regarding the taxbase and £1m in terms of the collection fund.

However, on the negative side, as part of the annual roll-over process of the MTFP, we have reviewed the existing and future delivery of savings agreed for the 2017/20 MTFP, and it is clear that some of those savings are no longer considered to be deliverable. In line with setting a robust budget we have taken these into account and had to re-adjust savings values required to balance the budget. In addition, the probable pay award pressure at 2% on average will add to SCC costs by approximately £2.2m and this has been included in our estimates at present. These factors have resulted in the overall gap in 2018/19 being £13m.

Recommendations to Cabinet to close the gap and to ease the budgetary pressure will include increasing the basic council tax by 2.99% and increasing the Adult Social Care precept by 3%. This will help reduce the pressure to make sufficient savings and provide much needed funding to Adult Social Care to meet service demand and increasing Learning Disabilities costs.

In summary, therefore, the estimated £13m gap will be closed by raising an additional 1% than previously assumed on the general council tax (£2.1m), some corporate revisions to non-service budgets (£2m) and £8.8m of service savings as per Appendix C. This gives a total savings value of £10.866m.

The Committee received further information on the revenue budget approach to identify savings across themes. The Council's officers have developed savings proposals required to close the gap of £13m. The focus for delivering savings will be primarily through a comprehensive review of all existing and planned contracts reducing our third party spend. The second area of focus will involve trying to identify a number of smaller projects that will manage demand or find efficiencies within services. This will entail looking at our staffing and particularly management levels throughout the organisation to see if we can use technology better to try and see where any further efficiencies can be made.

The Committee also received an update on the Capital Investment Programme (CIP). The 2018/19 CIP includes a significant investment in schools. The funding of this investment is subject to further announcements by government either in our final settlement or separately as the DfE and other government departments announce their capital allocations. SCC have also submitted a bid to the Housing Infrastructure Fund in conjunction with Taunton Deane and Sedgemoor councils that would fund around £80m of infrastructure projects supported by the three councils. If this bid is successful, the resources to support the capital investment programme for SCC could be increased by £15m.

At present, SCC have been advised of our highways grant at around £24m and some other smaller educational grants which gives a total known funding through grant of £29m. If we can secure further grant via the DfE for basic need and some specific projects and we are successful in our Housing Infrastructure Fund bid, we may have as much as £50m towards our investment needs. The shortage of capital funds is a known issue for all county councils and representations have been made to DCLG through the consultations on the Fairer Funding Review last summer that government has to recognise the pressures on councils to meet the growing need.

The national push to increase the number of houses built is being addressed in Somerset but the consequence is a need to match this with highways and schools' infrastructure. Of course, there is a lag between the investment required by councils and the additional council tax that ensues from the new housing. The increase in the taxbase eventually may be as much as £2m if the scale of development goes ahead as planned.

The Council is committed to building new schools and improving capacity and will need to borrow funds from the Public Works Loans Board to do so. This may be up to £120m for the programme ahead but we will of course only borrow what is needed when it is needed.

The Committee questioned how much of business rates would be received by SCC. This is difficult to predict. Currently around 50% comes to Somerset but not all of this comes to SCC as some goes to TDBC and the Fire Authority. We are anticipating that SCC may receive around £30m extra per year.

Members queried the likelihood of in-year savings being met. SCC accepts that these were not met previously and this is in-line with other authorities. SCC has reviewed why savings proposals have not been delivered and these have been put back into our base budget.

It was confirmed that SCC has a contingency fund of £7m which is fresh money every year. We are confident that this is sufficient to manage overspend in children's services which is the single biggest financial challenge faced by SCC. Members questioned whether the cost implications of making further improvements to children's services had been considered. This has been considered; however, as the service improves costs should also come down.

A Member questioned whether consideration of a unitary solution had taken place. No unitary costing has taken place since 2007. SCC has regularly tried efficiency drives with District Councils but not in a systematic way.

It was clarified that any borrowing to build new schools would not transfer to an Academy. SCC would in effect own the school but lease it to the Academy Trust.

The Committee noted the report.

64 **Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee Work Programme - Agenda Item 8**

The Committee considered and noted the Council's Forward Plan of proposed key decisions.

A suggestion was made to scrutinise recent changes to the Somerset Waste Partnership but this was rejected following clarification that this should be directed to the Joint Waste Scrutiny Panel.

It was raised that the timescale of the libraries consultation does not fit with the precepting and budget setting timescales of Parish and Town Councils and some concern was expressed about the format of the on-line consultation. It was agreed that this should be raised directly with the Strategic Manager, Community & Traded Services.

Members raised the outcome of the County Farms review and whether this would be included in an update on property disposal. It was agreed to check this with the appropriate officer and it was confirmed that a response had been received from the Cabinet Member.

Following debate, the Committee requested the following addition to the work programme:

- Connecting Devon & Somerset Broadband Programme update (April/May)

65 **Any other urgent items of business - Agenda Item 9**

There were no other items of business.

66 **Appendix to Minute 60 - Public Questions - Agenda Item**

(The meeting ended at 1.40 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Appendix to Minute 60 – Public Questions

Item 5 – Taunton Transport Strategy

Alan Paul

Will the Scrutiny Committee formally recommend that Somerset County Council Highways include communities where massive housing developments are due to happen, their Parish Councils, local Councillors, and Resident groups where appropriate as Stakeholders in the next stage of the Transport Plan and carry out a programme of Community Engagement, not just an online consultation?

Does this suggest that you really want to carry out any Community Engagement before the Plan is endorsed by Cabinet? So the key question is "Will you engage with local communities now before you make final decisions which fail to address the problems we have identified?"

SCC Response

SCC proposes to hold two open engagement sessions for members of the public to discuss the plan, these will take place during the consultation period. The first of these will take place on 5 March between 0900 and 1230 in the Hobhouse Room at County Hall. The second session will be confirmed once a venue has been found.

Roger Ashelford

1. The Plan describes a new car park for Park & Ride users in Comeytrowe, It's actually in Rumwell, much further out of Taunton. A cursory analysis shows that only a very tiny segment of Taunton residents wishing to reach Wellington will use it. **Why was it accepted as a key element in the Rapid Bus Route Wellington and Taunton?**

SCC response

The plan included committed schemes to demonstrate the whole picture of changes to the transport network that will be forthcoming. This gives those people who are not acquainted with the development related improvements the complete understanding of planned and likely changes. It's not the remit of this strategy to revisit the decisions made through the planning process.

2. The key rule for a successful Park and Ride is that it should get commuters to their destination quicker and cheaper than travelling by car. The Plan admits that cuts in Government funding make it harder every year for Councils to subsidise bus services (including Park and Rides) where necessary. P&R services at Henlade have already been cut. The Plan relies heavily on expanding bus services and creating a Rapid Bus Transit Route between Wellington and Taunton, expanding to Bridgwater. Every Park and Ride project needs subsidy initially, possibly for many years. Yet the so-called Park & Ride at Rumwell

depends on “voluntary contributions” from residents and businesses in the new estate.

How does SCC Highways intend to subsidise this service and the entire Rapid Bus Route where necessary ?

SCC response

SCC does not propose to subsidise the service from SCC resources. SCC will be looking to developers and the Community Infrastructure Levy to support services for an agreed number of years time until they are commercially viable.

- 3.** When the Silk Mills P&R was planned, officers refused a request for a diversion around Musgrove Hospital because that would put off commuters wishing to get to their destination as quickly as possible.

How do SCC Highways justify taking the high speed bus between Wellington and Taunton on a much longer diversion around the new estate, which would put off commuters ?

SCC response

The details of service changes, routing and timetabling necessary to support the proposed park and bus service will be discussed and agreed at the next stages of planning with the aim of minimising any adverse impact on current services.

- 4.** When Silk Mills Park and Ride was designed, officers considered it far too risky to put more Bus lanes on the Wellington Road into Taunton. Now they are to be included, which will force traffic heading into Taunton towards several different strategic routes (e.g. Third Way, Junction 25, the A358, the A38 to Bridgwater, South Road) into 1 lane.

Does Highways accept that there is a very high risk in doing so, since the flaws we have identified could result in gridlock ?

SCC response

Bus priority measures on the A38 from the southern edge of Taunton to the town centre were included as a proposal within the 2011 Bridgwater, Taunton and Wellington Future Transport Plan and have therefore been tested. However such measures are now less reliant on bus lanes due to the advances in technology so the implementation may vary from the original proposal.

- 5.** The Silk Mills Park and Ride involved :- Subsidy, no diversions, no extra bus lanes on the Wellington Road. The Rumwell so-called 'Park and Ride' or 'Park and Bus' involves :- NO subsidy, LONG diversions, extra bus lanes on the Wellington Road into Taunton. **If the Silk Mills Park and Ride was deemed by SCC Highways to be based on best practice, why are they now implementing a plan which contradicts this best practice ?**

SCC response

It's not the remit of this strategy to revisit the decisions made through the planning process.

Thirza Ashelford

The text states “Traffic Surveys have found that 90% of inbound vehicles on radial routes into Taunton at peak times have a destination in the town itself rather than passing through to reach destinations beyond it. This suggests that bypass options would not address the needs of the majority of vehicle movements...”

Members of the public reading this would conclude that 90 % of commuter traffic are deliberately heading towards the town to destinations in or the other side of the town centre.

We have been given a communication from Mike O'Dowd to Staplegrove Parish Council with a map which clearly shows “a destination in the town itself” as anywhere between Monkton Heathfield, Staplegrove , Bishop's hull, Comeytrove, Killams, Holway and beyond, including Junction 25 of the M5 and the A358, including part of the A38 towards Bridgewater. Most of this traffic would not choose to go anywhere near the town centre if alternative routes were in place.

Question 1 : How do you justify using the same definition of “inbound vehicles into Taunton to a destination in the town itself” to describe a journey from Comeytrove to a destination in the town centre and a journey from Comeytrove via a Southern Relief Road to the Killams area en route for the A358 or junction 25 ? Will you rewrite the text of chapter 6 of the new Transport Plan to avoid the inaccuracies and confusion of the first draft ?

SCC response

A journey bound for A358 / J25 / M5 would not have been classed as going to a destination in the town. The data extracted from the 2011 Taunton traffic model showed that on the radial routes into the town that a very high proportion of trips were destined for the town itself and would therefore not benefit from a new orbital link. The paragraph chapter 6 in the strategy, and the ‘90%’ statistic is intended to illustrate in very simple terms why the current traffic patterns and traffic from planned developments assessed in the current development plan does not necessitate any further ring-road infrastructure at this point in time. Decisions about the required infrastructure have not been based upon this simplified statistic but are based upon a complex traffic model that examines movement between many origins and destinations both within and outside the town. We will seek to re-draft this section in the final version of the strategy to make this clearer.

Question 2 : What research have you done to assess the viability of a southern relief road ? The Comeytrove Resident Action group has submitted a detailed plan of how this could be achieved avoiding the Vivary Green Wedge. This question also applies to other links to relief roads around Taunton, as suggested by Staplegrove Parish council.

SCC response

It's not clear what viability means in this context. Studies have been carried out to consider the vehicle demands for both southern and northern link roads and to test the potential effects of such roads on traffic movement in the town.

Question 3 : Do you accept that with proposals to improve and dual the A358, a new motorway junction, an employment site at Nexus 25, and massive housing growth in south-west Taunton, there are likely to be many more residents of south-west Taunton seeking access to these destinations avoiding the town centre in the next 10 or 20 years than at present ?

SCC response

Future demands are factored into the traffic modelling however the impact of A358 proposal requires additional testing as the data wasn't available until very recently. The traffic modelling study of the TDBC Site Allocations and Development Management Plan (<http://www.somerset.gov.uk/EasySiteWeb/GatewayLink.aspx?allId=113676>) shows the impacts of the proposed developments on the highway network (including currently planned housing developments) and sets out which junctions require improvement as a result of these impacts.

Question 4 : If the very high-risk 'Park and Bus' scheme on the A38 fails, the result will be gridlock at peak times along Trull Road, Wellington Road and Silk Mills Road as traffic converges on an increasingly pedestrianised town centre which commuters would wish to avoid if they possibly could. Do you accept that in this eventuality, the Spine road linking the new housing estate between Comeytrove and Trull with the A38 and the Trull Road would simply link two gridlocked roads, and would therefore not supply the kind of connectivity for which the Transport Plan makes inflated claims ?

SCC response

It's not the remit of this strategy to revisit the decisions made through the planning process. The development spine roads (particularly for Comeytrove and Staplegrove) are primarily intended to enable new development to connect into an appropriate standard of road on the road network rather than performing any strategic role in moving traffic around the town. The final draft of the document will make this clearer.

Tessa Dean

Trull Parish Council continue to have concerns about:-

1) How the spine road through the development from the A38 will interface with Honiton Road in the heart of the village and how the increased traffic will be accommodated down Trull Road and into Taunton via Compass Hill.

2) Rat running from this proposed roundabout through Trull to the Killams area in order to avoid queuing, creating a danger to the many young and

elderly residents of Trull village which has no pavements.

SCC response

Statement doesn't contain explicit questions but a response to some of the key points has been provided.

The detail of the spine road and connection with Honiton Road will be developed at the more detailed planning stages in due course.

Concerns about potential rat-running are noted but the absence of any significant or attractive road connections between Trull and Killams mean that it is highly unlikely that this will become an issue.

Highways England do not propose to connect their possible M5 junctions with the local road network.

The transport plan is meant to be a high-level strategic document that can be updated in due course as necessary to reflect any fundamental changes.

The comment regarding further sections of ring road does not relate to any specific proposals but is a recognition that further roads infrastructure may be needed in the future and this will be examined in detail as part of any further development planning for the town.

Anthony Kent

We were asked for our views on the draft paper and have a number of concerns. Key stakeholders were involved in the consultation process but no-one saw fit to engage with the Parish Councils most likely to be affected. My particular concern is the potential impact on the A358. 3 options were put forward for consideration one of which involves a new motorway junction within the Trull parish, the so called orange route. This is shown as an all-movements motorway junction 1.5 miles south of Junction 25 at Killams. The current plans say this will provide south bound access to the M5 for traffic off the A358 but does not rule out potential access to the M5 from Killams. We see this as inevitable during the 20 years covered by this transport strategy given the potential growth in housing and traffic. The impact for Trull is very significant with a potential ratrun from the Comeytrove development to Killams on narrow roads, few of which have pavements, hazing pedestrians and causing further congestion. No mention was made either of another option of a motorway junction half a mile closer to Junction 25 in a heavily populated area. This is also described a free-flowing junction. What impact will that have on traffic in Taunton? It is hard to understand why the proposed 20 year Transport Strategy which has the vision of considering a range of transport interventions to support economic growth is being put forward to Scrutiny now without knowing which of the options is to be preferred. Surely this is going to have a major impact on the town traffic flow.

SCC Response

Highways England's consultation material makes it clear there is no proposal to link either of their proposed new junctions on the M5 with the local road network. The local authorities do not have any proposal to provide a local road link connecting with either of Highways England's potential new M5 junctions. It is unlikely that either of the two junctions proposed would have a significant effect on traffic

movements around the urban area of Taunton other than on the local roads adjacent to Junction 25 which show increases in congestion on Toneway under some scenarios.

In any event the transport strategy has been drafted based upon our current understanding of committed proposals at this point in time and is intended to be a flexible document that can be amended in future should that be required.

Michael Clark

Why is there no intention of making the very short connection between the proposed northern extension of Nerrols Drive to Cheddon Road, (which is connected to the Monkton Heathfield Western Relief Road, the A38, M5 Junction 25 and Nexus 25, plus onward on the soon to be dualled A358 to the A303) to the east, with the planned Staplegrove Spine Road and Silk Mills Road to Wellington Road to the west?

This would provide a six mile long orbital route round the outskirts of two-thirds of Taunton's built-up area, on the west, north and east sides, enabling much traffic to avoid adding to the congestion in Taunton town centre. If 800 vehicles an hour, during peak periods, are currently using the country lane through Staplegrove village then this number will very significantly be increased on Staplegrove Spine Road due to the additional vehicles from the 1628 houses to be added to Staplegrove, plus those from the thousands of houses remaining to be built at Ford Farm, Norton Fitzwarren, Nerrol's Farm and Monkton Heathfield.

I realise this might mean crossing the National Trust's land at Pyrland Hall but, if they want to build houses on their land to the west, then accepting a road only, with no houses alongside, across the southern part of the parkland should be a necessary requirement on their behalf.

Such a link would also enable Staplegrove to be included in the planned high-quality bus services connecting the garden communities and Nexus, which is not the case at present with the Transport Plan.

SCC response

The Council tested several options for road connections in association with planned development in the North of Taunton which helped inform Taunton Deane's Site Allocations Development Management Plan. This concluded that in the context of the current development plan there is no strategic need for an additional east-west route to the north of Taunton and that there was little traffic demand for such a route. The work concluded that proposed development sites could be accommodated by localised spine road connections as has subsequently been taken forward through planning applications. The need for further strategic road infrastructure connections will be explored further as part of the next round of development planning.

Tony Smith

1. What comprehensive, current traffic-survey data are necessary to calibrate their traffic-models ?

SCC Response

Strategic traffic models have a set base year and then have traffic growth added to this based on a process prescribed by the Department for Transport and set out in WebTAG. The current base model for Taunton uses traffic data - roadside interview surveys and traffic counts - from 2014 and has been validated against data from automatic traffic counters and other traffic counts for the same year. SCC has around 50 automatic traffic counter sites in the Taunton area that operate 24 hours per day, 365 days per year.

2. Do their models incorporate all the known SID data ?

SCC Response

No, SID data is not needed. Strategic models model speeds based on design / max legal speed of the road unless there is a specific reason not to and in this instance additional data is used from speed surveys.

3. Is there, and has there been, any 24-hour air-quality data from the Borough, along, or adjacent-to proposed strategic traffic-routes ?

SCC Response

TDBC is responsible for collecting and publishing data about air quality. SCC considers air quality in the development of schemes such as the Junction 25 improvement where an environmental assessment has taken place. Air quality impacts were also considered during the development of the Future Transport Plan.

4. Why do the “Bad and Ugly” bullet-points exclude any reference to the dangerous delays, from congestion and obstruction, to emergency-vehicles servicing the regional hospital ?

SCC Response

The document is intended to be a high-level strategy document. Detailed concerns from communities regarding localised traffic management issues are dealt with on a day to day basis via the Council’s traffic management team.

5. Is the figure of 4000 town-centre car-parking spaces up-to-date, and has the Referenced Car-parking Strategy document been published ?

SCC response

Yes the figure for centre parking spaces is correct, the full breakdown can be found in table 5 of the strategy which has been published by TDBC in their scrutiny papers here –

<http://www2.tauntondeane.gov.uk/webpages/tdbcagendas/Meeting.aspx?MID=20172005>.

6. Do the projections for rail-traffic passengers acknowledge the decision NOT to electrify the route to Taunton ?

SCC response

Electrification of the route to Taunton was never planned. The Network Rail Long Term Planning Process calculates passenger growth based upon standard growth factors from the passenger demand forecasting handbook (which have tended to underestimate) and the business case work for electrification wouldn't factor in Taunton as it was not intended to bring it to Taunton.

7. Can SCC/TDBC place in the public domain their risk-analysis of their projected-traffic impacts, to demonstrate that the central tendency of their estimates, based on current data and permitted housing-development, does not exceed the "Severe" threshold ?

SCC response

The traffic modelling that supports the Taunton Deane Site Allocations and Development Management Plan demonstrated the impact of growth on the traffic network is likely to be significant at some junctions. The study is available here - <http://www.somerset.gov.uk/EasySiteWeb/GatewayLink.aspx?allId=113676>, please refer to figures 3 and 4 of the document. The severe threshold was not used in this work however the study does indicate the junctions where traffic demand is likely to exceed the available capacity and congestion is likely to occur, and therefore where junction improvements are likely to be needed. It is a matter for individual planning applications and the local planning process to determine whether the impact of specific development proposals is likely to be severe and if so whether mitigation can be put in place such that it is appropriate to grant planning permission. The traffic impact assessments used to inform such judgements are in the public domain.

Carolyn Warburton

This report shows that Taunton traffic congestion remains a serious obstacle to continuous economic growth. Your Strategy must be to find solutions. Current policies introduce conflict. You've got to concentrate on facilities in the town centre but not increase the traffic. Garden city principles are that there are no principles. Instead we have large green field development re-badged. Too far from the town centre to be accessed by bike or on foot, clogging up roads with traffic from housing estates, bereft of community facilities or jobs. Despite rhetoric about walking and cycling, the best we can expect is low-frequency bus services. 17,000 new dwellings with no extra car parks. There is no overall assessment of the impact on traffic. It is assumed that people will use their cars 30% less than existing residents at a time when the government judges economic success by how many cars they sell. And money; developers are adamant that someone must fund the essential works they won't fund spine roads, off-site cycle paths or foot paths. Public transport? No. Strategic CIL money received by Taunton last year was £1.5m. In addition to transport, this covers: education; redevelopment;

regeneration and flood risk. No CIL money was spent. Staplegrove spine road alone cost £10m. The councils are applying for funding from the Housing Infrastructure fund but this isn't to bail out developers who have overpaid for land. It requires clear evidence that the infrastructure would result in additional homes. If the grants are refused then planning should be refused. Where else can you get funding? The LEP. But sadly they don't know where Somerset is. So they are reliant on European funding anyway.

SCC Response

Thank you for your comments. I confirm that detailed traffic assessments have been undertaken in support of Taunton Deane's site allocations development management plan, which has been used to determine the infrastructure necessary to support the level of development currently planned for the town, and has been confirmed as a sound evidence base for the development plan by the planning inspectorate. This transport strategy draws from that agreed evidence base and has not sought to undertake any further traffic assessment. The purpose of this document is to draw together and communicate a range of existing proposals and to outline the future aspirations for transport in the area at a high level. Your concerns about the challenges of infrastructure funding are noted.

Carl Smith

Page 13 of the document 'Taunton: connecting our garden town' put before you today refers to the current woeful situation in Taunton of 'congestion at key road junctions across the town, particularly during rush hours, impacting on road safety, noise, air quality, longer journey times...'

Without a new, second motorway junction, with full access to and from Taunton, the above dire situation will continue. And this will be the case as the intended benefits of various upgrades in the above document will be more than offset by the increased Taunton population and traffic (and their exponential effects on traffic queues and pollution). The increasing size of Taunton as the county town demands that we have a second motorway junction – and that needs to be politically committed to now – rather than leaving it as a long term 'aspiration' (meaning it may not happen at all). Why will SCC not grasp the huge opportunity afforded to it NOW by the Highways England A358 dualling proposals and negotiate for a full Taunton-access motorway junction to the south of Taunton?

SCC response

Highways England's consultation on their A358 proposals sets out that they have considered a wide range of potential options before putting forward three options for consultation. Highways England is not proposing to connect any new junction on the M5 with the local road network. It is The Council's view that it would not be appropriate for a connection to be created between the proposed Junction 'F' and the existing local highway network without provision of appropriate road infrastructure running between the new junction and destinations in the town. This view is on the grounds of the adverse highway safety, congestion and local environmental impacts that would be likely to arise due to the existing local network not being of suitable standard to carry additional strategic traffic.

David Lausen

Many of the key drivers in this document read well but the key drivers they don't understand them. One example, which is that 72% travel to locations in the town and this is going to continue when it isn't. 2010, Taunton Deane stated that 40% of people worked in government organisations. Since then every single government organisation has been dramatically reducing employees and that will continue. Broadly, employment has stayed static with higher paid jobs being replaced by lower paid jobs. So we are going to become much more of a dormitory town and we must, therefore, plan different ways of getting to the motorways or getting proper roads to connect into the centre. The document is cherry-picking what is happening blindly believing what the developers are telling them for big developments and we all know that they are all back-end loaded. They've got numbers and they promise infrastructure at the end and they don't deliver. What we are seeing reads beautifully but it's a nonsense. Please Councillors question it.

SCC Response

Thank you for your comments which are noted.

Dorothea Bradley

The government recognises the need for a joined-up transport infrastructure. The Highways Agency has become Highways England. Yet SCC transport strategies all pre-date this substantial policy change.

To function as a regional centre Taunton has to link up inside and out to the national network.. Specific proposals are required on which to negotiate.

Please include in this Taunton Transport Strategy a Junction 25A and an East/West distributor Road (dualled) round the South of Taunton.

It is strategic in name only: the rest is aspiration.

Also what resident numbers and bricks and mortar are needed to make a Garden Town of Taunton?

SCC response

The strategy already refers to the Highways England proposals (ch6 – roads and streets - shorter term commitments and Map 1 number 14).

The need for an east / west distributor road is covered in the text of chapter 6 under the title of a ring road.

The Garden Town designation is not specifically about residential numbers, more information on this can be found here - <https://www.tauntondeane.gov.uk/garden-town/>.

Michael Pitt

On Wednesday 24th January I asked SCC Officers to send me a copy of the traffic surveys referred to at chapter 6 of the Appendix which are said to have found that 90% of inbound vehicles on the radial routes into Taunton at peak times have a destination in the town itself and to suggest that bypass options would not address the needs of vehicle movements. I attach a copy of the

information sent to me on the pm of Friday 26th.

It is apparent that no real time surveys had been carried out even before the traffic model relied on was produced in 2011. Real time surveys should cover all routes in and out of Taunton and will show that much traffic goes through the town to reach Kings College and Richard Huish College in South Road, Queens College in Trull Road, Taunton School in Staplegrove Road, all the state schools, secondary as well as primary, Somerset College in Wellington Road, Musgrove Park Hospital, the train station and the shops at Hankridge.

Please ask for a proper survey to be undertaken, especially in light of recent road and house builds, outline consents for house builds at Comeytrove and Staplegrove, and the proposed Nexus 25 development and Henlade bypass and then for an analysis to be undertaken of the benefits of the northern relief roads proposed by Staplegrove Parish Council and my present suggestion for a southern inner distributor road, linking Trull Road with South Road/ Shoreditch Road and to link up with Chestnut Drive.

There is a congestion pinch point at Hurdle Way, Billetfield, Upper High Street, Shuttern and Compass Hill which needs to be relieved by a southern inner distributor road which will also take traffic from Trull, Galmington, Comeytrove and beyond which would otherwise go via the town centre to get to and from J25.

These 2 relief roads will assist the achievement of all but 2 of the 12 stated key objectives, they being pursuit of new technology solutions and ensuring people are better informed.

SCC response

The revalidation of the model used to extract this information was based on data from 63 traffic count sites and journey time data from automatic number plate recognition systems and moving observer surveys. The model validates to Department for Transport criteria for such models and is therefore an appropriate representation of an average day.

These two routes have been previously tested in traffic models and traffic patterns are unlikely to have changed so significantly that they would make a difference to the output of the tests.

It's accepted that the data is somewhat aged; since this data was extracted SCC has updated the traffic model to a 2014 base and it will be appropriate to undertake some additional work to understand changes to demands when the next round of development planning takes place.

Alan Debenham

There is a petition afoot calling for the following: -

1. To undertake a review and evaluation, based on quantitative and qualitative research of the transport needs of Somerset's urban and rural communities

SCC response

This level of work will take place when the next round of development planning for Taunton is carried out; this will feed into a review of the Local Transport Plan for Somerset.

2. From the outcomes of the review to plan and develop imaginative and innovative solutions to a 21st century problem, to meet the needs of the diverse rural and urban communities

SCC response

Agree to this but must be evidence based and reflect best practice in transport planning.

3. To undertake a financial review to support a socially and environmentally sustainable transport system, which is financially sound, supported by a County precept.

SCC response

SCC has been regularly reviewing the financial support to the transport system however at this point in time funds are extremely limited. The potential for a precept is unlikely to be favoured by many who already consider they pay taxes that should be sufficient to pay for a transport system.

Brian Larcombe

Can this Committee please confirm that it believes SCC Highways has gathered sufficient traffic movement survey information and carried out adequate traffic modelling to enable it to: -

a) form draft proposals that are based on accurate data,

SCC response

Yes, the traffic model is validated to DfT standards and is based on data collected and validated to appropriate standards

b) capture all aspects of residents and visitor journey needs,

SCC response

The model reflects an average week day as this is when there is the most traffic on the network; this is standard practice. The model reflects patterns of use at the time that the data was collected and then has new developments added to it reflect future year scenarios.

c) that any town centre road closures or route revision is informed by sound and publically available evidence,

SCC response

See below under f)

d) that any assumptions of future traffic flow volumes and demand is soundly based and takes full account of the extent of current volume and access issues on the western side of Taunton and the raised problems future development will create for traffic movement to and from the area,

SCC response

The model reflects all of the main roads and many of the minor roads in the town (it's not possible to include every route), this appropriately represents the existing situation. In order to consider future scenarios the traffic from all planned developments is added into the model, as are the planned highway improvements.

e) that the mitigation measures put forward and advocated by SCC Highways when outline planning permission for the Trull/Comeytrowe development was being sought by the Developers and considered by TDBC Planning Committee were realistic and based on accurate data,

SCC response

The council is content that the TA for the development was appropriate. It's not the remit of this strategy to revisit the decisions made through the planning process.

f) that the transport strategy will, if delivered, resolve the huge traffic congestion and access issues on the western side of Taunton looking to cross the town and access facilities in other parts of the south and east via Wellington Road and Compass Hill?

SCC response

The strategy accepts that it is not possible to "solve" the traffic congestion problems and aims to keep the network congestion to the current levels whilst accommodating growth and development. It proposes targeted capacity improvements, as set out in the TDBC Site Allocations and Development Management Plan that will provide for the forecast growth. However the town will be reliant on behaviour change. All of the data indicates that a large proportion of the car trips cover very short distances; reducing the number of short trips would reduce the levels of congestion. This can be achieved in a variety of ways, it may be that some journeys can't change but it's likely that there are some that can on some days and this could make a big difference.

g) that the closure of East Street and St. James' Street will not seriously impede car access and volume dispersal and that there is sufficient traffic flow data gathered and traffic modelling evidence to show that the only realistic remaining route via Upper High Street and Hurdle Way can cope with traffic the traffic volume that will be funnelled along it via Compass Hill?

SCC response

Traffic modelling information for the proposed changes to the management of the road network in Taunton was placed in the public domain in September 2017 when public consultation was carried out on the scheme. This modelling information was based upon the 2014 Taunton traffic model that is validated to Department for Transport standards – the validation report for this is available on SCC's website

alongside the Forecasting report which provides information about the way growth has been tested in the model up to 2033.

More work on this proposal is underway and a short engagement exercise will be undertaken before any trial takes place.

It should be noted that the Northern Inner Distributor Road has recently opened and modelled scenarios take this into account as it has spare capacity to support the changes that are proposed to be tested in the town centre.

Item 6 – A358 Consultation

Patricia Power

In HE's consultation brochure it is stated that the preferred route could contain elements of each of the 3 proposed options. ie the Hybrid option. I urge SCC to pressure HE to choose one of the 3 options consulted on. If HE has a hybrid option in mind why isn't it here in the public domain? If a hybrid option is chosen why bother with this consultation process with attendant waste of public money?

I would also draw your attention to the fact that HE have still not included modelling for holiday traffic even though they refer to the traffic problems being worse at holiday times during the summer months and at weekends in their brochure. Why is the holiday traffic not modelled? What does HE have to hide?

Turning to the Orange option Junction F. HE have planned a huge elevated all movement split level junction approximately 200 metres in size, the size of two football pitches. 6 motorway lanes, 4 expressway lanes, 4 slip roads and a massive roundabout with attendant lighting, slap bang next to the existing Killams residential area and the developing Killams Park, which is again omitted from HE maps. The north bound slip road will be cheek by jowl with residents back gardens as the current very narrow buffer zone will be destroyed to make this slip road.

Can you imagine the tremendous impact this will have on these residential areas, unbearable noise, air and light pollution? For what reason – no economic benefit for Taunton, highest environmental impact and no holiday traffic modelled in!

Turning to the Pink Option, Junction A. While still in a residential area you can clearly see Junction A has a much wider buffer zone than Junction F. Coupled with the fact that Junction A will only be an up and over bridge with 2 lanes and 2 slip roads this will have much less impact on local residents than Junction F. The Pink option also has the best Cost Benefit Ratio, links to Nexus business Park, takes most traffic away from the A358 and last but not least has the lowest environmental impact.

I urge SCC to back the Pink Option.

SCC Response

Why isn't a Hybrid Option in the public domain? Primarily a matter for Highways England but I repeat below an email response on this matter already sent to Mrs Power:

I think it is helpful for Highways England to acknowledge that there could be different combinations of the elements of the various routes that they have put forward and that they would welcome views and suggestions on this. The consultation is structured so that people can give their views on the pro's and con's of the various possible road links and junctions and can suggest different combinations.

The alternative would have been to publish either a limited set of further combinations of the elements, which would then have led to concerns about why all possible combinations were not on the table; or to publish a document that included all possible combinations of the elements which would present a very large number of options many of which would be minor variations of other options. If they were to test the implications of all those options at this stage then I'm sure the cost of the analysis to the public purse would be enormous and the associated multiple technical reports would be difficult for people to digest.

On balance I think that sufficient information is available to enable people to suggest a different combination of the elements if they consider there might be a better combination from their perspective. That will enable HE to assemble a limited set of alternative combinations based on community views, and see if there is widespread support for any particular alternative combinations that they should consider and assess in the process of finalising their preferred route. There will of course be a further consultation on a preferred route in due course before it goes into the consenting process.

Why is holiday traffic not modelled? It is standard practice to model neutral periods, however SCC agrees it would be beneficial to understand how the schemes perform under seasonal traffic pressures. HE have confirmed they are preparing a summer weekend model to enable them to consider seasonal traffic pressures at the next stage.

Frank O'Sullivan

The stated purpose of the scheme is to relieve congestion, support economic growth and improve safety. The Orange option offers the least benefit in all of these respects.

- There is only a small reduction in journeys through Henlade with no by-pass
- It does not link directly to Nexus
- It achieves the least reduction in accidents
- It is the worst in terms of overall benefits
- It has a massive impact on our countryside, including close proximity to ancient woodlands
- It results in the greatest increase in noise, air and light pollution

The massive all movements junction at Killams is far more intrusive than the other options. It includes moving Killams Avenue and encroaching on the stream and narrow wildlife corridor between Killams Green and Killams Park. Retention of this corridor was a planning condition for the Killams Park development.

Local routes into Taunton from Killams and Corfe, via Shoreditch Road and South Road, are already overloaded with regular bottlenecks. If an all movements junction is constructed at Killams there will be pressure to open this junction to the local road network, resulting in:

- A massive increase in traffic and congestion on these minor local roads
- An increased risk of accidents, particularly considering the large number of children and young people attending schools and colleges on South Road
- Large scale development on the green belt south of the motorway which is outside of the Taunton Deane core strategy. During the last consultation, a Freedom of Information request from Highways England uncovered a plan for the all movements junction to support a development of 3,460 new homes south of the motorway. Is it any wonder that local residents are cynical?

We believe it is the Pink option that offers maximum benefits for Taunton whilst minimising the negative impact on our countryside, environment and communities.

SCC Response

Statement in support of the Pink Option. No question which is seeking a response.

David Orr

The statistics within the slides are for forecasts to 2038. SCC state: (Journey times on routes through J25 would be longer in the most intensive peak hour 08:00 to 09:00).

"The figures also indicate that for the Orange option, journey times are shorter travelling via the new route and new junction on the M5 than through Henlade"

Q1. Do these forecasts take into account extra traffic that currently goes and would have gone to Exeter to the M5 (via Honiton) on the direct and traditional route that will be rerouted when the new A358 Expressway opens? If so, how many additional vehicles per day and at morning peak time will that add to traffic flow to J25 on the Pink and Blue routes and through Henlade?

NB HE Ltd in an FOI response in 2017 showed average vehicle movements of through traffic (not stopping at Taunton) of 550/vehicle PER HOUR.

SCC has concerns about overloading J25 at morning peak periods for the Pink and Blue schemes with potential future delays:

Q2. Do these traffic projections take into account the planned J25 improvement scheme by SCC?

Q2a. What is the projected peak morning wait time for a "Do nothing" baseline option by 2038 on the A358 i.e. all traffic goes through Henlade as at present?

Q2b. You show the indirect Orange (original 8/8B + NFS) as having a markedly lower impact on J25. For those figures how many vehicles (bound

for Taunton or heading North on the M5) did you assume would continue through Henlade (as the Orange route requires a 5km detour heading the wrong way south-west before turning back north-east towards Taunton)? NB Many think that for the Orange option people will continue on the existing direct and shortest route through Henlade and not risk going on the M5 to get back to Taunton or to continue North on the M5.

Q3. Both the Pink and Blue routes have a visual impact but due to the split to J25 will only have two lanes of traffic to a closed junction. The all movements open junction proposal at Killams will have four lanes with 2x the visual impact - that structure is shown on page 3 of the consultation brochure and will be 200m across! SCC has not compared the levels of intrusion for both schemes (original Orange route versus Pink/Blue routes). Why not?

Q4. The Orange route with the Killams all movements large M5 junction was shown in the last consultation not to be a closed junction and will therefore open up the land beyond the M5 to development (to the south of Taunton) with forecast capacity for 3,460 homes (by HE Ltd). This will, by default, break the historical Taunton housing development boundary of the M5. The proposed massive M5 junction at Killams will facilitate development and the additional traffic will hit the B3170 including the limited Shoreditch/South Road route into Taunton which has a bottleneck at the junction with Hurdle Way. The Pink and Blue route options are closed junctions so do not allow for any development that will, in future overload modest local roads into town. The slides do not make those future local road impacts clear.

Q5. You mention "Suggestions can be made for hybrid options". Does SCC support that viable hybrid options should be explicit in this 2nd round of consultations? What hybrid option(s) would SCC support?

Q6. If "Seasonal traffic still to be modelled" then how can HE Ltd or SCC be sure that the Orange original route won't result in backed up traffic on the M5 and on the A358 Expressway where the two peak season flows meet (quite likely) as the North Devon and North Cornwall traffic has not yet exited the M5 at Tiverton? What air quality and accident impacts would then occur? Without that key seasonal traffic modelling then how can SCC and impacted communities respond by the 27th of Feb to something that could bring poor summer air quality to the whole of the south of Taunton for many years to come? This is an odd key omission by HE Ltd and does not allow local Councillors and affected communities to safely determine likely detrimental air quality, noise and accident impacts. **Why have the seasonal traffic impacts still not been modelled when the consultation has been delayed by 8 months for this second and final round of consultations?**

Q7. "16 February: Deadline for community views on proposed SCC response to be communicated to SCC via consultation portal". Is there a web link to this portal, please? When will it open for comment? How will SCC ensure that impacted communities know of the portal and the response deadline (only 3 weeks away now?).

SCC Response

(A written response has already been given to the same questions as follows, following an earlier direct enquiry via email).

Where are the peak season traffic figures and modelling?: Primarily a matter for Highways England. It is standard practice to model neutral periods, however SCC agrees it would be beneficial to understand how the schemes perform under seasonal traffic pressures. HE have confirmed they are preparing a summer weekend model to enable them to consider seasonal traffic pressures at the next stage.

Re-routing assumptions for regional traffic that currently travels to Exeter via Honiton: This is a matter for Highways England.

Do traffic projections take into account the planned SCC J25 scheme?: It is my understanding that the County Council's planned improvement scheme has been included in Highways England's traffic model.

Projected peak morning wait time for 'do nothing' 2038 on the A38: My presentation shows forecast delays extracted from Highways England's operational traffic assessment of J25 for each of the proposed options in 2038 to illustrate the possible scale of delay at the junction in the AM peak hour. These figures can be expected to evolve as further more sophisticated assessment is undertaken in due course, including consideration of the likely real-world optimisation of signal operations compared to the modelled results. The equivalent figure from Highways England's traffic assessment for the do-minimum option in the AM peak 2038 is 586 seconds.

Orange route traffic assumptions: To clarify – Somerset County Council has not made any assumptions. Highways England are best placed to answer this question.

Visual impact of the options: Highways England's technical report states that under the pink and blue options the spur to Junction 25 will be dual carriageway (i.e. likely to be 4 lanes) and the road connecting with the new junction on the M5 with south facing slip roads will also be dual carriageway (i.e. likely to be 4 lanes). No information is provided about the number of lanes on the slip roads. There is also no detailed information provided about the possible all movement junction at Killams, and no information about the proposed number of circulatory lanes or slip road lanes at that junction. I will therefore be unable to provide any information about this during my presentation, but I have covered the broad issues regarding visual impact.

All movement junction on the M5: The consultation material confirms that Highways England will not connect this junction into the local highway network.

Hybrid Options: Answer as per Patricia Power above. Somerset County Council does not support any specific option or hybrid option at this point in time.

Web link to portal: <http://www.somerset.gov.uk/policies-and-plans/schemes-and-initiatives/a30-a303-a358-improvement-project/>. Will be advertised via a press release.

Nigel Power

Thanks to SCC and TDBC for putting pressure on Highways England Ltd to re submit a serious and more meaningful consultation on the A358 by pass

proposal.

Now that we have a choice of 3 alternatives (and hopefully no more, given the get out clause in page 9 of the consultation document of a possible mix and match which would be circumnavigating the process in my opinion), I would like to make the following points in favour of the Pink option:

1. Junction C at Mattocks Tree Green is closer to Taunton, it spoils less countryside than other options and provide an excellent link to Henlade, Ruishton, Creech St Michael, Hatch Beauchamp and Stoke St Mary. This cannot be said of Junction E (Orange/ Blue) that has far less connectivity.
2. The economic benefits of Pink are clear in that they provide access to Nexus 25 (Junction B). There is no connectivity with Orange. While Junction D (Blue scheme) offers connectivity to Nexus, it unnecessarily cuts more into the countryside.
3. The Pink proposal provides a junction (A) to join the M5 (as does blue) that is far more acceptable to the public as it is a single direction junction, therefore providing far less pollution (air, light, noise) than in the case of junction F (orange).
4. Junction F is very poor suggestion with an all movements roundabout, providing the worst pollution outcome for no economic benefit.

Let me now turn specifically to the economic benefits or lack of:

As mentioned, pink offers connectivity to Nexus 25, Orange does not offer any Taunton connectivity. Orange is simply a by pass road and nothing more. The Pink route offers a more sensible and less cost option for vehicles travelling north (In contrast, Orange adds 4.2 miles per northbound vehicle compared to Pink or Blue). Previous HE proposals accepted that 30% of A358 traffic travel north which equates to 18,000 vehicles per day which in turn equates 27.6 million miles per year at say 30p per mile = £8.3 million per annum extra cost of miles travelled by UK motorists if Pink or blue is not selected.

Connectivity provided by Pink encourages commercial growth of Taunton, something that orange cannot offer.

In conclusion, taking account of previous statements made by HE Ltd and current literature, it is a clear cut case that Pink should be selected:

Best for Taunton economy

Least effect environmentally

Best connectivity to Taunton

Best Cost benefit ratio (Pink 2.08 Blue 1.87, Orange 1.64)

I trust SCC will put its weight behind the Pink solution.

SCC Response. Statement in support of the Pink Option. No question which is seeking a response.

Catherine Herbert

I am here today to represent the interests of my residents in Killams and Mountfield. I also need to balance those interests against the potential benefits of a well-designed A358 scheme that connects to Nexus Business Park and provides Henlade with a bypass, whilst minimising environmental

and residential impacts.

Last year, in Taunton Deane, we were taken aback by the one route proposed by Highways England (now called Orange) and with no consultation on routes with much greater benefits such as the Pink route (formerly 2A/2B). The Orange route gives my Ward many significant negative impacts yet fails to provide the economic benefits for Nexus and to provide a bypass for Henlade. The huge interchange amongst existing homes at Killams would not remain a closed junction; it opens up Taunton South beyond the M5 boundary to speculative development pressures outside of our core strategy which needs to be respected.

My concern is that the longstanding diary date for this Scrutiny meeting doesn't fit with the consultation timetable set by Highways England.

Affected communities have not seen a report from this Council as the statutory consultee with a key highways role.

The slides outline the current position and highlight the issues but are not a substitute for a formal report with recommendations.

In Taunton Deane, we have a Scrutiny meeting six days after yours and the draft report will be ready in time to pre-circulate to affected communities. We then bring it before Executive in public session for a final decision.

Whilst this Council's Constitution should be respected as a guide to conduct, I am very concerned that the actual report will be a non-key decision taken by one Councillor behind closed doors and without any opportunity for affected communities to attend or comment.

We are all here to serve our communities. I would urge this committee to take action to ensure that this Council's report on the A358 proposals is heard in public session – either by an extraordinary meeting of this committee or by bringing the report to an open public meeting of the Executive.

SCC Response

Concern about decision process: SCC feels this is an appropriate process for formulating a consultation response. The draft response will be published for public comment before being finalised.

Rob Hossell

I would like to draw you attention to page 4 paragraph 2 of Highways England Consultation Brochure which clarifies the **PURPOSE OF THE SCHEME**.

1. **Relieve congestion** – With the orange route the majority of traffic to Taunton and the M5 North will still pass through Junction 25 via the old A358, and hence congestion will not be relieved through Henlade. In contrast the Pink route acts as a Henlade By-pass, a specific Highways England objective, and “bringing benefits to local communities adversely affected by traffic on the existing road”, as referenced in the same paragraph.

2. **Support economic growth** – As the orange route provides no direct connection to Junction 25, the Nexus Business Park, or Taunton there will be no local benefit; it merely allows traffic to flow from the south-east to the south-west. However, the Pink option will provide these connections and act as a catalyst to local economic growth, reflected in the highest Benefit to Cost Ratio.

3. **Improve safety** – The orange route increases the cost of accidents, which is a clear transgression of any social requirement for a new road, let alone Highways England's requirements to improve safety.

Finally I would like to remind you that Rebecca Pow spoke on 18th Jan this year in the House of Commons requesting "an assurance that the upgrade [of the A358] will not only deliver strategically, but for the local people and for productivity in Taunton." Chris Grayling, Secretary of State for Transport responded, "... they have to work for my Hon. Friend's constituents and others in the region, particularly for the new employment area next to the motorway in her constituency."

Hence the PINK option is the only route to both benefit the new employment area AND achieve the defined purposes of this scheme.

SCC Response. Statement in support of the Pink Option. No question which is seeking a response.

Michael Baddeley

Mike O Dowd Jones has picked out some of the salient points in the Highways England Technical Appraisal Report.

I would like to draw your attention to the Environmental impact the orange and blue proposals will have on the local landscape,

The latest route map exhibited by Highways England show the orange and blue routes cutting through the ancient woodland of Huish Woods and running very close to the Ancient woodland at Stoke Hill. The route follows around Stoke Hill, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Then it crosses, what Highways England call open land, arable farmland to a proposed junction at Killams.

In the Technical Appraisal Report there is reference to the National Planning Policy Framework regarding Ancient Woodlands (extract from page 56 below).

Paragraph 118 states that if significant harm (to biodiversity) cannot be avoided, adequately mitigated, or (as a last resort) compensated then consent should be refused. **Consent should also be refused if irreplaceable habitats such as ancient woodland and/or veteran trees are lost or deteriorate in quality as a result of the scheme, unless the need for and benefits of the development clearly outweigh the loss.** Additionally, where a project would be likely to adversely affect a SSSI, the development would not ordinarily be permitted, unless the benefits of the development clearly outweigh impacts on the features of the qualifying features of the SSSI.

The proposed orange and blue routes would be contrary to that policy. These two routes would severely impact on the Huish Wood Scouts campsite and could well affect its viability. The Millennium woods at the top of Stoke Hill were purchased by the Woodland Trust and partially funded by local residents. Degradation of that woodland would not be appreciated by all concerned.

Unfortunately whichever route is taken will consume valuable food producing farmland thus decreasing the amount of food produced in the UK necessitating further imports from overseas.

We really need to pressure Highways England to reduce their land grab to the absolute minimum and revisit the possibility of utilising at least part of the dual carriageway from Thornfalcon to Lower Henlade.

SCC Response. Statement raising concerns about land requirements for the schemes. No question which is seeking a response.

Item 7 – MTFP

Alan Debenham

1) We have all heard the protest chant: "They say cutback, we say fightback!" Yet again we see this Tory government continuing with its ideologically imposed austerity programme of cuts upon cuts against Local Government, in particular against local residents by attacking our Taunton Deane and Somerset County Councils. What has this Scrutiny Committee or its individual Councillors done, or is doing, or will do, to fightback against this ideological injustice and defend our services which we have elected them to defend with their role as our Councillors?

SCC Response. This question was answered verbally by the Leader of the Council at the February Cabinet meeting. The Leader stated that "we continue to lobby government for Fairer Funding and want to thank our MPs in Somerset for campaigning for this and speaking to ministers on our behalf. We received an extra £2m in the final settlement and while we know this is not enough, we are pleased that our need is acknowledged."

2) How is it the proposed SCC Council Tax overall demand is increased by 5.99% - way above inflation - at the same time as still making yet further cuts of some £5 million in Corporate Services as outlined in today's report AND why is it these proposed cuts are described in generalisations rather than specific detail e.g. showing the number of posts/jobs to be cut ?

SCC Response

This question was answered by Kevin Nacey verbally at the Scrutiny Committees. He stated that there are a number of pressures facing the council, the loss of grant, the pay award, the demand for our services and unfortunately the simple fact is that just increasing council tax does not close the budget gap and we have to make savings too. The detail of individual posts is something we cannot include at this stage as we are still in consultation with unions.