

Community Scrutiny Committee – 16 May 2017

Present: Councillor Coles (Chairman)
Councillors Mrs Blatchford, Davies, Mrs Floyd, Gage, R Lees, Martin-Scott, Ryan, Townsend and Watson.

Officers: Andrew Goodchild (Assistant Director – Place and Energy Infrastructure) and Marcus Prouse (Democratic Services Officer – Scrutiny).

Also present: Councillors Beale, Henley, Mrs Prior-Sankey and Stone.

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm).

22. Appointment of Chairman

Resolved that Councillor Coles be appointed Chairman of the Community Scrutiny Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

23. Appointment of Vice-Chairman

Resolved that Councillor Ms Lisgo be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Community Scrutiny Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

24. Apologies

Apologies were received by Councillors Ms Lisgo, Mrs Reed and Ross.

25. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting of the Community Scrutiny Committee held on 27 April 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and were signed.

26. Declaration of Interests

Councillor Coles declared personal interests Member of Somerset County Council and Member of Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service. Councillor Gage declared a personal interest as a Member of the Board for GLL. Councillor Martin-Scott declared personal interests as a Trustee to Bishops Fox's Educational Foundation and Trustee to Trull Memorial Hall. Councillor Prior-Sankey declared personal interests as a member of St James Church, a Member of Somerset County Council, a member of the 'Home Stop' Scheme at Taunton Association for the Homeless and as her spouse was a user of the CCTV Service. Councillor Townsend declared a personal interest as his business was located in Coal Orchard. Councillor Watson declared a personal interest as a Member of Bishops Lydeard and Cothelstone Parish Council.

27. Response to Highways England's A358 Taunton to Southfields Dualling Scheme Public Consultation.

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the Response to Highways England's A358 Taunton to Southfields Dualling Scheme Public Consultation.

Members of the Public made the following statements:-

1. David Orr

David Orr expressed concerns over the consultation and was of the view that Henlade deserved a bypass due to the large volumes of traffic heading to Devon and Cornwall.

A request was made to amend this report's recommendation that A358 improvements and a new M5 junction were to be "welcomed" with the following caveats:

1. The A358 scheme should be joined up with Devon's A30 scheme, to reduce environmental and community impacts between West Hatch and Taunton and, to avoid using Taunton as the default route for heavy traffic bound to South and West Devon and Cornwall.
2. The Highways England Ltd consultation to date, is so flawed and badly executed, that a completely new consultation should be started from scratch, with all viable options on the table and with all the information for a meaningful consultation provided.
3. For the A358 Southfields to Taunton scheme, Highways England Ltd should not be entrusted with the wide-ranging, centralising powers under Development Consent Orders. Instead, and like the J25 improvements and Nexus Park development, our elected Councils and our local Councillors should retain their key local planning roles on behalf of the communities they serve.

2. Mike Farrell - Speaking on behalf of Stoke St Mary Parish Council

On 18 April Stoke St. Mary parish council made a formal complaint to Highways England Ltd regarding this purdah period, a request was made for the consultation process to be extended by the duration of the purdah period. The Parish advised by standard, pro- forma letter on 3 May that the consultation period would not be extended, and were later informed on the 5 May that purdah would now continue until after the General Election.

It was the opinion of the parish that Highways England Ltd. have failed in their duty to supply sufficient, detailed information regarding the proposed road scheme for anyone to make a considered judgement as to the viability of the overall scheme.

The Highways England Ltd "Technical Appraisal Report" did nothing to further the ambitions of this proposal as it was full of contradictions and misinformation. There was no evidence within their published document that show the current proposal would achieve any of the reasons for Highways England Ltd to construct a road.

Stoke St Mary Parish Council would continue to press for Highways England Ltd to abandon the current consultation. Furthermore the Parish Council would ask them to start again with considered, meaningful options, which would benefit the population of Taunton Deane and greater Somerset.

3. Mike Baddeley

Mike Baddeley attended the presentation at the Holiday Inn and was very disappointed to find only one proposed route. There were no other options on display. After obtaining a copy of the technical appraisal report which actually proposed four different routes.

Referring to the appraisal the following issues were raised.

Para. 4.15 of your response read:

'It is worth highlighting that Highways England have not proposed to meet with Parish Councils individually or collectively during the consultation and have refused requests to attend meetings (citing Purdah)'

Only with the intervention of our Member of Parliament did Highways England Ltd agree to a presentation at Stoke St.Mary on the 11th May. However, that was cancelled at very short notice, citing Purdah due to the forthcoming General Election. No future date had been arranged.

Para 4.24 of the response read:

'The fact that there was only one option presented for consultation was very concerning and suggested that responses to the consultation would have very little bearing on the scheme which Highways England would bring forward within the Preferred Route consultation planned for Winter 2017.'

This reflected the greatest concern, the fact that there was only one option. This concern was also expressed in para 4.26 of the response.

Para 4.39 of the response stated very clearly that a Henlade by pass is highly desirable. The current preferred route did not offer that option. This requirement was also referred to in Somerset County Councils submission in para 4.49.

Para 4.70 re affirmed the previous points.

The biggest single issue is the provision of a by pass route for Henlade. The Highways England proposal could not provide this facility and may could exacerbate the Henlade traffic problems.

Siting the new junction 25A even further south, as alluded to in the response document, would further aggravate the Henlade problem as well as by passing Taunton. Large goods vehicles travelling north would certainly not be using the new road to access the motorway but would use the Henlade road to avoid, what will effectively be, a 10 to 12 kilometer diversion.

One area that had been overlooked was the impact on farming and the farming community. There were three farms which are likely to be affected by some degree or another. The land required by the proposal is, in the main, prime grade 3

agricultural land. All 3 farms were food producing farms. At least one, if not two, would be sufficiently adversely affected to result in cessation of farming activities. Can we really afford this as a County given that over 40% of UK foodstuffs already have to be imported.

4. Steven Bushell

Mr Bushell commented that he agreed with the Council's response to the proposed new junction. This was not part of the Council's Core Strategy and would not alleviate routes. Concerns were expressed relating to the diversion of traffic to the south of Taunton. A request was made for the Chairman to include in the Council's response objections to the short term diversion and long term connection of the B3170.

5. Mrs Lindsay Bushell

In a private meeting on the 8th April 2017 with Highways England's Compensation Representative and the Designers of the proposed route 8/8B+NFS, the question was put if new proposed Junction 25a would link up with Trull and beyond. All three participants twice vehemently denied that it would. It was questioned why it was necessary to have a new Southbound junction when routes 8/8B+J25 and 2A/2B both formed a Henlade bypass, could link with the Nexus Development, provide a Southbound slip road on to the M5 and achieve all the objectives set out by the Transport Minister Mr Chris Grayling?

6. Mrs Patricia Power

Argued that the consultation from Highways England is deeply flawed.

There is only one option in the consultation, therefore it is not a consultation. She disputed the Highways England's assertion that the A303/A358 is a corridor between the South East and the South West.

Indeed Highways England's own map on the first page of their consultation document showed clearly in red that the A303/A30 is the main corridor and the A358 a link road into Taunton. The A358 is a vital link road into Taunton but it is not the corridor between the South East and the South West.

This consultation is an attempt by Highways England to use the cheapest monetary option to connect the A303 to the M5 by seeking to make the A358 into this corridor. The consultation as presented, make the problem of South East/ South West connectivity and the separate problem of the upgrade of the A358 into one issue with one solution.

The flawed solution presented to us brings with it, amongst others, a wholly inappropriate new junction to the M5 at Killams Avenue with complete disregard to the disruption and intrusion it will cause.

The map on page 4 of said consultation document shows a red circle where the junction will be.

This proposed junction is within the existing urban boundary and will deeply affect existing housing at Killams bringing with it untenable amounts of noise, light and air pollution adding to already existing levels from the M5.

It would create 4 more lanes of traffic added onto the existing 6 of the M5 plus slip roads. That is 10 plus lanes of traffic.

Picture this, 10 lanes of traffic with attendant infrastructure. At times of accident and congestion there would be stationary, idling traffic banked up with no where to go belching out noxious fumes within a designated urban boundary.

How can this be justified?

Why should we accept additional traffic, noise, noxious fumes because Highways England want a cheap fix traffic corridor between the South East and South West.

How can this be a serious consultation when such disruption is represented by a red circle with no detailed plans?

Indeed on page 6 of said consultation document Highways England seeks to down play these huge environmental impacts with their understatement that there will be, and I quote, " Some adverse visual impact for residential properties alongside the M5 motorway near Junction A. "

This is clearly a flawed consultation.

I applaud Taunton Deane Borough Council's response to this consultation but would urge them to press Highways England for a brand new Consultation after the General Election with all options included. A Consultation to include our partner Councils in the South West so a long term working solution can be found, not the cheap, short term sticking plaster option we have been presented with.

7. Mr Rob Hossell

A powerpoint presentation was given requesting a thorough examination of the Technical Appraisal Report, along with focusing on enhancing the Taunton Deane Borough Council Response

Highways England had only proposed one route for consultation. Other A303 schemes – both Stonehenge and Sparkford had two options for consultation,

8. Mr Steve Smith

Councillor Beale referred to a recent meeting at the Wyvern Club to discuss the issue, which was well attended, identical concerns had been raised relating to the consultation that had been expressed at the committee. The opportunity and funding were welcomed for the scheme, the general view was that proposals were located in the wrong place but the correct consultation was required with further options needing to be looked at. Taunton Deane Borough Council, Somerset County Council and Highways England had all been involved in discussions.

Councillor Henley stated that there was little gain in the Taunton Deane area from the proposal set out in the consultation, concerns were expressed that this would push the one plan forward with no greater benefit to the area, altering the fabric of communities and business. It was determined that this would only have a 7-11% reduction of traffic. Factors of the a poorly undertaken consultation, controversial proposals during purdah periods of both elections were considered cynical. Highways England were requested to withdraw proposals and engage in meaningful consultation.

Councillor Mrs Prior-Sankey commented that highways England didn't have the interests of Taunton in mind with the proposed plan, with their main aim to provide a route to the South West.

During the discussion of this item, Members made comments and statements and asked questions which included:-

- Concerns were expressed that this didn't achieve and resolve the Henlade bypass and enhance the links to Taunton, or the East and West of the M5 to bring in new traffic
- There would be an adverse effect on people living in the area, there would be a noise and lighting impact along with huge detriment during the construction period. It was suggested that consideration be given in placing the junction away from homes and further south, the existing plan could compromise the Vivary wedge and could lead to development on this.
- Members considered the proposal a deeply flawed plan, it was questioned if Highways England were producing acceptable plan to suit their remit and to save money.
- There would be the opportunity to add details from the response from members of the public that made statements to the committee.
- Members requested for Highways England to extend the consultation or take the opportunity to come forward with alternative options and add more detail to support rational assessment of options so all parties could understand the rationale and cost/benefit of the options.
- With additional information, a next preferred proposal could be found or some middle ground for a new proposal. With Taunton Deane Borough Council setting out what it wants to achieve in the proposals as a starting point before detailed information is achieved from the proposition.
- Caution was advised in putting all eggs in one basket in linking up A130, A303, and A358. The road investment strategy given to highways England from the government was to improve A303 and A358 corridor, there was the risk of no money for development of the A358 if agreement couldn't be reached.
- There was a cross party agreement at the members briefing that Councillors weren't satisfied with the proposals.
- Members of the public were thanked for their reasoned and relevant points provided to the committee.
- Members questioned the likelihood of the Taunton Deane Borough Council response having an effect in changing the existing proposal in the consultation, with consideration that Highways England could be seen to be achieving their aim.

- From experience of other consultations – the clearer all partner agencies were on their aims, the greater chance that highways England could be influenced and take notice of the aims and requirements of the local area. The more commonality through local people and local authorities in the communications with highways England the better.
- A request was made to encourage highways England to look at this from a technical perspective to compare options with the greater chance of a positive outcome in the proposals.
- Consideration was given that the consultation period be extended after the election to enable local residents to put submit their statements.
- Following meetings that were held at the end of 2016, generalised discussions were had on the process. The meetings were held with South Somerset, Taunton Deane Borough Council and Somerset County Council along with statutory consultees. From a strategic perspective it was recognised that Devon County Council are engaged with, working closely on a more aligned approach, giving a better chance of achieving aims for both councils.
- The risk not getting any relief on Henlade was recognised if further options were pursued.
- Devon County Council would be contacted to work with more closely and to make a case to Highways England to restart the consultation.
- This would provide the opportunity to reflect public responses and utilise parish councils to have a greater say in the consultation with highways England and emphasise other options. Comments from Parish Council and residents can be added in to add weight to the argument.
- It was confirmed that joint responses have been submitted in previous to work together with a wider network of authorities and express common themes along with individual points made.

Resolved that:-

2.1 That Members of the Council and the Community Scrutiny Committee had provided observations on the content of this report to inform the Councils comprehensive consultation response prior to its submission on 20th May 2017 (noting that Highways England have now paused the consultation and the deadline for a response has been extended);

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 provide 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 That the Community Scrutiny Committee agreed that Taunton Deane Borough Council will seek to engage with Devon County Council and Somerset County Council on the strategic approach to Trunk Road improvements in the South West and 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 that this option provides minimum benefit to Taunton; 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.

28. Community Scrutiny Forward Plan

Submitted for information the proposed Forward Plan of the Community Scrutiny Committee.

Resolved that the Forward Plan be noted.

(The meeting ended at 7.50 p.m.)