

Record of Meeting of the Parish of Winterbourne Stoke, St Peter's Church - 1900 hrs 26th January 2017

1. Welcome

Following thanks to the Churchwardens of St Peter's Church Winterbourne Stoke, the meeting was opened by Cllr Dr Andrew Shuttleworth. In attendance were Cllr Tony Zacks-MacGoldrick and Richard Watts.

Some 30 + parishioners were in attendance, plus John Glen MP (JG)

Apologies were received from Cllr West, who was involved in Wiltshire Council duties and Sara Zacks-MacGoldrick who was on childcare duties.

2. Introductory Statement

Cllr Shuttleworth began with a modern parable to set the scene for the discussion we were about to have, followed by an introductory statement:

"The reason we are here is that the Parish Council wished to give villagers the chance to discuss their concerns arising from the Highways England plan to bypass Winterbourne Stoke and the route options offered. We all, as individuals, have the opportunity to comment on these plans and express an opinion as to which route we might prefer and what concerns or suggestions we might have to make these options less detrimental or even better in written responses to Highways England.

Had the village been unanimous in its views, the Parish Council could have put in a consolidated response, with a route preference. As it is, it has been clear from the outset that opinion is divided in a way that isn't even binary, its not just north or south. We know already from our doorstepping activities prior to this meeting that there are already villagers who are torn between the options, with their heads saying one thing and their heart the other - it isn't easy. There has also been a clamour for more information from Highways England to inform the debate.

So, we aren't hosting a "which route is best" meeting this evening - that would be for someone else to organise, should they so wish. We have very limited goals and our agenda has two very simple items.

3. Concerns

The purpose of the Parish Council here this evening is simply to try and establish what your concerns might be about each of the routes proposed and what further information or assurance you want to inform your decision, if you are yet to make up your mind.

4. Mitigations

The second part of what we want to do, is to identify what mitigation measures could be employed by Highways England to minimise the less acceptable features of each of the two route proposals.

We need to keep this evening as positive as we can make it, else there is a real danger that we move from being a village divided by the A303, to a village rent asunder by the bypass.

Hopefully, by the end of the evening, the Parish Council will be in a position to begin to put together these collective concerns and mitigation measures, for both routes, in a draft response to Highways England.

Equally importantly, you will have had the opportunity to raise your own concerns and hear those of others. You may offer or hear ideas for mitigation that give pause for thought. Most importantly of all, we hope it helps you decide which option is both best for you and which is best for the village as a whole.

The Parish Councillors will try to facilitate the discussion and record key points".

Identifying the Concerns of Villagers

5. There being no dissent as to the aims and scope of the meeting, villagers were invited to discuss those issues that had concerned them most regarding the consultation process:

5.1 **Nothing happens.** A real fear for many villagers was that once again, the whole bypass idea would cause a lot of acrimony, then fail as it so often had in the past. JG ventured that the government was clearly committed to the process this time around and this had been

demonstrated by its willingness to set funding aside for Highways England. The Chairman observed that during the door-stepping exercise, a number of villagers had expressed the view that they would prefer the status quo. This was either because they felt they had not been given sufficient information on which to base a rational choice, they didn't trust Highways England and it was a case of "better the devil you know."

5.2 **Lack of detailed visual impressions of either route** (3D models, routes from multiple directions and ground level fly-thrus)

5.3 **Time Frames** - there was near unanimity that the time frame of the consultation was too short, particularly as so little detailed information had been provided.

5.4 **Noise** - was a major concern and all wanted to be assured that whichever route was eventually chosen, they would be no worse off than they were at present. There was concern that Highways England did not appear to have the slightest idea of current levels of noise within the village, nor the impact that the wind had on this. This was particularly noticeable in the south west of the village where sound levels were (subjectively) similar to those experienced closer to the A303 in Church Street. JG offered to chase HE for noise data, if it existed.

5.5 **Flood** - there was disquiet that the bridging of the River Till, particularly in the case of the northern route, might exacerbate surface water outflows. It was noted that borehole monitoring for the project was going on in the vicinity of Cleeve View. It was further noted that water levels at Tilshead were at a 4-year low and this needed to be brought to the attention of Highways England.

5.6 **Impact on Footpaths and Byways** - there was general concern that both schemes would lessen the amenity value of the footpaths and byways that led out from the village, but particularly mention was made of those that led to the south of the village, used by dog-walkers, runners and families from both Winterbourne Stoke and Berwick St James. Several walkers from the village expressed concern that Highways England had not considered footpath usage in the winter in assessing environmental inputs. Villagers had pointed out that some footpaths were more heavily used in winter than summer, because in summer, grazing cattle tended to keep them off the paths in particular.

5.7 **Pollution** - there was unanimous concern that too little information had been provided to show the benefits (or decrements) in air quality that each scheme offered Winterbourne Stoke. A passive nitrous oxide sampling tube had been observed in south Church Street in summer 2016.

The Chairman commented that he had asked Andrew Alcorn of Highways England for the sampling data several months previously, but despite being promised it, nothing had materialised.

5.8 **How Was Route Preference Being handled by HE** - was this going to be based on the quality of argument ,or simply by the numbers of people voting for each route. Were the views of locals (ie Winterbourne Stoke) going to be given more weight than those from further afield. Would the archeological concerns over-ride those of the living?

5.9 **Why are the projected road levels so high?** - How much spoil is being generated by the tunnel, is one of the schemes seen to 'lose' more of it than the other. Is the Winterbourne Stoke bypass merely an excuse to dump as much spoil as possible to of the World Heritage site. The discussion wandered off into mitigation measures at this point and was dragged back on topic. Highways England had advised some that the high embankments are needed to ensure the gradient of the road did not exceed 2% for the benefit of HGV's. Several villagers believed this argument was specious as the A303 has many sections to the east and west, used by these same HGVs on long distance runs, that are substantially steeper than 2%.

5.10 **Why the difference in viaduct heights between the two schemes?** - the viaduct in the northern scheme seems unrealistically high, certainly compared to earlier bypass proposals. This all seems to be driven by the need to get rid of spoil. What is the fascination with putting the road on high earth banks? Several villagers had been told that the reason the viaducts had to be so high is because the the Till valley is an SSI and the height was needed to ensure that the area under the viaduct experienced daylight.

5.11 **Funding** - is the scheme fully funded? JG reiterated many of the point he had raised ice para 5.1 above. The government had shown its high level of commitment to this project and JG was a confident as he could be that it would go ahead.

5.12 **Disruption during Construction** - as a small village, there was considerable concern that we would be swamped by a major construction village on our doorsteps.

5.13 **A360 Access** - there was general concern that this route be maintained throughout the construction period as it is the main access to Salisbury.

5.14 **Access to Winterbourne Stoke** - there was general concern about the access to and from Winterbourne Stoke throughout the construction period.

6. Mitigation Measures

- 6.1 **Spoil** - a considerable part of the discussion centred around the way creative use of the spoil could create sound-proofing and eliminate a lot of the visual impact of both route proposals. The best way of achieving this was to dig the routes into cuttings and use the spoil generated and the spoil from the tunnel to create large earth banks on either side of the carriageway; very similar to the way the A36 is separated the village of Steeple Langford.. In the case of the northern scheme, earth banks, creatively employed, could be used to screen the proposed viaduct from the northern edge of the valley.
- 6.2 **Acoustic measures** - villagers wanted assurances that appropriate acoustic measures such as surfacing materials and acoustic barriers in addition to bunds, such as concrete sound barriers would be employed from the outset and not lost to cost-cutting measures
- 6.3 **Visual Screening** - villagers wanted similar levels of assurance that planting of hedgerows and other visual screening measures to hide the bypass from the village would be part of the scheme from the outset. It was also suggested that the planting of more mature specimens would aid either route to blend into its surroundings more readily.
- 6.4 **Traffic Calming Measures** - there was concern that the design of both junction options, but particularly the one suggested for the northern route, would encourage rat-running along the High Street by Shrewton bound traffic, keen to avoid the Airman's Cross section of the A360. What traffic calming measures would be applied to the current A303 as a matter of course during the build phase to discourage rat-running.
- 6.5 **Sign-Posting** - it was felt critical that local services, when disconnected from direct access, to the A303, should as a matter of course be advertised by brown signage off the bypass.
- 6.6 **Local Business Support** - whichever route is ultimately adopted, some local businesses will lose out. The village is keen to ensure that as much as possible is done to minimise the impact and to encourage diversification. The Chairman advised that the Chair of the WHS Committee has previously indicated that he wished to engage with businesses in the village to discuss diversification options that might benefit the village and the World Heritage Site.

6.7 **Re-location of Garage and Compulsory Purchase of Pub by HE** - one idea that has already been mooted was to set up a new filling station at the new A303/A360 interchange. That would free up the service station site within the village for housing or some other purpose. One “off the wall” suggestion was that HE should purchase the pub and give it to the village as a community asset.

7 Conclusion

7.1 There being no further suggestions for mitigation measures that could be offered in a response to HE, the Chairman explained that the output of the meeting would be captured, added to the feedback received from the doorstepping exercise and that this would be used to inform the Parish Council’s response to the Highways England Consultation. It was observed that we seemed to have had a fair cross-section of the village at the meeting: from north to south, east to west and the middle. It was never going to be an easy meeting to try and organise, run or even attend, as across the village opinions on route are split in a non-binary way; as our door-stepping exercise over the weekend showed.

It isn’t just a question of north or south. Some villagers must opt for one route or another because of the huge impact on their personal circumstances, others have opted for a route on the basis of their own understanding and knowledge. Still others have no clear preference, or want to have a preference but can’t get answers to their fairly basic questions from Highways England. Some because they can’t get answers, would prefer to stick with the status quo and some think the whole idea of a bypass is an enormous waste of money and are happy with the A303 as it is. We know already that of the many villagers who want to go ahead with the bypass, a proportion are torn between the two routes, with their head saying one thing and their hearts the opposite. This spread of views appeared to come as a bit of a surprise to some last night and was why the Parish Council did not want to host a discussion of “which route is best” as it would have been highly emotive, it would have constrained discussion and could have so easily turned to frustration and even anger. So thank you again, to all who came, for your forbearance, politeness and good humour. Thanks again to John Glen MP, who was put on the spot for answers, time and time again, and who must have gone away with a shopping list of questions to seek answers to as long as your arm.

The meeting was closed at 21:30.