

A27 EAST OF LEWES

PUBLIC MEETING, SELMESTON VILLAGE HALL, TUESDAY 12 JUNE 2018

Meeting commenced 19.05 with full room – 120 people counted.

[Abbreviations: MC = Maria Caulfield MP; HE = Highways England]

David Quysner, Chairman Selmeston Parish Meeting, chaired.

DQ: The purpose of this meeting is to give and share information. Recent announcements in the local media and information from Highways England have resurrected the subject of the A27. We all have our own views on what should be done on the A27.

I am acting as chairman so neutral on that today; I am not neutral about the situation we have, where people living in this area are not aware of what is being discussed and proposed by others.

Many of you have received or seen a letter from Maria Caulfield MP (“MC”)– which has caused more heat than light. She was invited to this meeting. It has had to be held at short notice because of events. Given her commitments in Parliament this week, it is understandable that she cannot attend.

MC’s letter refers to a leaflet showing alternative routes. The picture used is of a slide shown by Highways England at the stakeholder meeting on 3 May.

The ‘Reference Group’ which MC chairs has existed for some years. Its aim has always been to lobby for more investment in the A27 east of Lewes, regardless of route. To progress that, MC got the Secretary of State for Transport to divert £3 million from the budget for A27 on-line improvements to fund a study for a new road.

MC writes that she is ‘pushing for a widening of the A27’, But the members of her Reference Group want a new road. See Stephen Lloyd MP’s public statement that the case for “a new dual carriageway with a journey time of 10 minutes’ looks promising”.

This type of consultant’s study can be dangerous if it goes too far as plans can pick up a momentum. The better-informed that we are, the more influence we can have on what is happening.

Speakers

Vic Ient speaking for the South Downs Society – also a Lewes District Councillor

I attended the second Highways England (HE) Stakeholder workshop on 3 May for the South Downs Society, and took photographs of the slides. I was surprised to learn when it started that this was the ‘second and final’ meeting. Local Parish Councils were not invited to it.

(Showed several slides shown at the 3 May workshop:)

Showed the ‘three corridors’ map that Highways England displayed at the 3 May ‘Stakeholder workshop’.. This shows how far HE has reached. Concern that this plan will now ‘speed up’ – MC saying in the press that £450 million ‘is available’.

Showed the slide ‘The case for change’ – very thin on detail.

Showed map of area titled ‘Future situation – Planned growth’ (mainly in Wealden District).

I have spoken with the Planning Director at Wealden District Council, whose position is ‘we need a new road because we’re going to grow’.

Showed slide ‘Overview of emerging appraisal results’ (Major adverse effects on environment and landscape indicated on HE’s slide)

Showed ‘Environmental constraints’ map – HE slide

Showed some photos he had taken of local landscapes.

On traffic around Lewes including A27 roundabouts –HE offers no solutions. When asked at the Stakeholder meeting, HE confirmed it had not thought about the congestion at Southerham and Ashcombe roundabouts (the roundabouts at the ends of the Lewes Bypass). (the HE planned routes stop at the Beddingham roundabout)

Cost - £450m to £650m – how can this money just ‘appear’? ESCC has no money for local transport

VI said he suspected that if this plan is pursued the already-announced on-line improvements to the A27 would not go ahead.

Kia Trainor, Director, CPRE Sussex

CPRE’s role is to stand up for the countryside. The Government has published a ‘25-Year Environment Plan’ whose objective is to leave the environment better at the end of this time period than at the start. But at the same time the Government is committed to building new roads.

The Wealden Local Plan proposals for new housing are predicated on a new A27 Lewes-Polegate. The A22 through Wealden District cannot be widened or have more traffic put on it because of the environmental limits at Ashdown Forest where nitrogen emissions must not increase.

Showed slide of Toads Hole Valley, south of Brighton Bypass. When Bypass was approved, this was to stay as open space between Brighton and A27. But now B&H Council wants to allocate this for housing. Shows how new roads lead to development.

Showed slide of the A27 Chichester Northern Bypass proposal as example of danger to area with more new roads.

Presented CPRE short video ‘The end of the road’ about the generation of new traffic from building new roads – with statistics.

Derrick Coffee, Campaign for Better Transport (CBT), East Sussex

CBT campaigns for different forms of transport and for a joined-up planning and transport policy not road-dominated. New roads lead to more journeys and longer distances travelled; resulting in local services declining and closing, as people can access their needs further away.

There is a Hailsham-Eastbourne ‘sustainable transport corridor’ plan to reduce use of cars in that north-south direction. A new road from Lewes to Polegate would collide with that and undermine policy to have sustainable forms of transport develop in the Hailsham-Polegate-Eastbourne area.

Housing developments recently given planning permission in Hailsham and Stone Cross are not designed to be served by public transport and do not have good walking and cycling facilities. This is adding to car-dependence and more road congestion in the Eastbourne area.

More people drive to work in the Eastbourne ‘travel-to-work’ area than in any other Sussex urban area. Compare Brighton which has a lot of public transport, and walking and cycle use. For example following the creation of the bus lane 40% of people travelling from Rottingdean into Brighton on the A259 in peak hour are now using buses. 48% of travel to work in Brighton is now by bus.

Showed the CPRE ‘tranquillity map’ for East Sussex. With a new road you lose tranquillity – example is the effect of the new Bexhill-Hastings Link Road on the Combe Haven valley behind Bexhill.

Movement by light goods vehicles distributing goods ordered by internet – growth shown by change in LGVs counted on A27 at Sherman’s Bridge (bridge over Cuckmere) –

- 2000, 2,500 LGVs/day
- 2016, 4,000 LGVs/day,

This is local traffic while car numbers have not grown to same degree.

Oliver Harwood (RH & RW Clutton)

I have managed the Folkington Estate’s beautiful landscape over the last 5 years.

Showed slide prepared by Dr Nicola Bannister, Landscape Archeologist, of the environmental and heritage constraints between Berwick and Polegate. She has established that the field system north and west of the village of Arlington is at least 1,000 years old, probably pre-Roman (that is, 2,000 years old). The area is preserved and managed and has kept its unique characteristics.

Showed slide summarising the ecological survey work by Graeme Lyons, ecologist at Sussex Wildlife Trust – he is carrying out a full survey of the Folkington Estate’s wildlife (not yet completed). This so far has found 680 species, including many that are rare or endangered – 32 species of bee, several rare spiders, 81 species of beetle, 63 of bugs, 48 of moths.

Some of the land affected by these HE corridors is low-lying and floods, so part of any new road would be on embankment.

There would be many impacts, which HE does not look at. Many are not compensatable under the Land Compensation Act 1973. Effect on views or the character of the landscape cannot be compensated.

Showed slides of Highways England's five questions put to those attending the 3 May Stakeholder workshop:

- **Have you got any comments on the options considered?**
- **Have you got any comments on the study approach?**
- **Have you got any comments on The Case for Change? Is there a clear need for a scheme?**
- **What should the existing A27 look like in the future?**
- **What should future stages – if applicable – consider?**

We can all of us answer these questions, and send our answers, to

Highways England mahmood.azam@highwaysengland.co.uk

Maria Caulfield MP maria.caulfield.mp@parliament.uk

The Secretary of State for Transport chris.grayling.mp@parliament.uk

I have talked with Mahmood Azam and with Tom Beesley, the project manager at HE for the on-line schemes. Mr Beesley told me that the on-line schemes that have been identified through the public consultation in 2017 will be started by March 2020.

Questions from the Hall

Brian Staithes, Selmeston: Why are train services not being improved?

Vic Ient: ESCC is sadly focussed on roads. This area has just had a cut in some train services – we need to oppose that and get them restored.

ESCC Co Cllr Philip Daniel (Ringmer and Glynde)

Would have liked that £3 million taken from the budget for the study work to be spent on a safe crossing of the A27 east of Beddingham.

Answer to a Q about communication with Parish Councils: Vic Ient said that the Association of Local Councils is offering to host a meeting in Lewes if Councils want to discuss a common approach.

Answer to Q (A by Oliver Harwood): At present the only messages Transport Ministers have been receiving since the 2015 General Election have been political communications from Caroline Ansell, then Stephen Lloyd (Eastbourne's MPs) and Maria Caulfield (Lewes MP). These have been lobbying for funding for a new road. We now need to tell the Minister that we do not want the sort of proposal that the MPs have been lobbying him for.

John Cooper, Berwick: quoted from letter received from Maria Caulfield and gave data on increased pollution levels from a new road.

Colin Webb Q: Highways England does not report to any local body; it is only responsible to the Transport Minister.

Chris Burn, Berwick Parish Councillor Q: If there was a preferred option chosen in 1993, why wouldn't it be the best route now?

A by Vic Ient: We have the South Downs National Park now and so context is different.
Selmeston resident

Q: How much say do we have as villages?

A by David Quysner: We have the opportunity now to get together. Individual Parish Meetings have little weight; we need to combine our efforts.

Q: Can we see all the Reference Group documents?

Oliver Harwood: Some past minutes of the Reference Group have been supplied under Freedom of Information to SCATE. I have asked Maria Caulfield to publish all the papers and minutes of her Reference Group – her reply is awaited.

David Barr, Chairman of Firle PC speaking as a local farmer: I feel that a new road is needed, perhaps a dual carriageway. Death toll on the road is horrendous.

A by David Quysner: Many would support improvements to the existing road. On safety, the accident data published does not show that the A27 is a dangerous road.

Richard Turner, Glynde Parish Cllr: Pressure from the building of new houses in the area means that a new road is needed. Ashcombe and Southerham roundabouts need improvement with slip roads.

Closing Remarks: David Quysner

Maria Caulfield has been alerted by this local publicity and public concern. We have brought into the open what has been going on. If and when she holds her local public meetings, everyone who can should attend and hear what she has to say.

Thank you all very much for coming.

(Notes taken by M Sullivan)

13.06.2018