

MARCH 2019 UPDATE (Newsletter #4)

This, our fourth newsletter, provides an update on activities since the previous November issue.

Thank you again to everyone who has registered for e-mail updates on our website (www.taagroup.com). In future, we plan to only distribute newsletters electronically, with a paper version also displayed on the notice boards outside the Teddington Village Hall and Alstone Church. Our newsletters will also continue to be available on our website. Therefore, please register to continue to receive these updates directly. If you *don't* have an e-mail account or access to the internet and still want to receive updates, please contact us and we will ensure you continue to receive a paper copy. (Contact Jan Mallett on 01242 620765 or 07941727963).

Meeting with Laurence Robertson MP

Following our letter to him last November some of us met with Laurence on 18th January. This was a very useful meeting in which we were able to outline what we've been doing and our key concerns. Laurence listened carefully to what we had to say and appeared generally sympathetic, commenting that actions to improve existing road infrastructure should be pursued before resorting to a strategic solution of a new bypass. He subsequently raised a parliamentary question with Chris Grayling MP in order to clarify the process. This has now been referred to Jesse Norman MP, Minister of State for the DfT and Laurence has requested a meeting with him to progress.

We had also requested a meeting with our district councillor, John Evetts but have been unable to get any response from him.

Meeting with Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE)

Following a joint approach with the Parish Council, we met with local representatives of the CPRE on 5th February. They have set-up a working party in order to focus on the A46 and JCS initiatives. It was a very productive meeting and they have since approached their CPRE counterparts in the East and West Midlands to see if their existing brief for Gerald Kells (the road campaigns expert we mentioned in November) can be extended to cover the Gloucestershire section of the A46. It was decided that any work by Gerald for the local CPRE, should be a discreet project and we were invited to provide a brief of what we would like him to investigate. We have now provided this brief and are awaiting feedback on it from CPRE.

Meanwhile they have asked Gerald to provide a note on what Midlands Connect/Highways England are doing and any emerging thinking about the Tewkesbury/Ashchurch area, informed by a visit to the area by Gerald on March 27th. We have offered our assistance with hosting this visit and providing any support and information Gerald needs. This will also hopefully provide the opportunity to discuss scope for a second stage/supplementary report that addresses aspects of the brief mentioned above.

Midlands Connect (MC) Public meeting 28th February

This was the first ever open day hosted by MC in Birmingham. Two of us attended and although we learnt little new, we did meet with Alistair Cox who is the MC Interim Head of Roads and Freight and who represents MC at the A46 Partnership Group. He explained what was currently being worked on in Stage 2 of the A46 corridor study which is working-up the business cases for each section of the A46 corridor already identified in Stage 1 as requiring improvement. He confirmed this would still not involve any detail on routes or alignments and that the results were unlikely to be available publically until the autumn. He also confirmed that they had funding in place until March 2020 and didn't appear to be aware or concerned about the rumoured delay in RIS2.

Road Investment Strategy phase 2 (RIS2)

The Government's 2018 autumn statement announced that RIS2 would be the largest ever investment in England's strategic roads and that plans would consider the case for investment in the A46 between the M5 and the Midlands. There has been reference to specific funding priorities for 2020/21 through 2024/25 being decided in March 2019 and the most recent Highways England delivery plan states "The DfT's final RIS2 is expected to be published in summer 2019 and our final Strategic Business Plan in autumn 2019, although firm dates have yet to be agreed."

At the recent TAPC Meeting, Councillor Smith mentioned the diversion caused by Brexit and that this could delay the process by around six months meaning that we could hear very little now until late autumn. We have asked Laurence Robertson if he can gain any clarity on dates when he meets with the Minister of State for DfT.

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Funding

We announced in November that the TAPC voted to provide an amount of £1,250 to support our work, most specifically to help fund an expert third party report. You will now be aware that residents of Teddington and Alstone expressed the view that the 2019/20 Parish precept should be increased to allow this allocation to be put up to £2,500. Actual funding requests from this budget will need to be approved by the TAPC and our aim is to only request these for expert input and not day to day administration expenses.

Although CPRE are funding the current work for Gerald mentioned above, it may still be necessary to draw on this funding for any future expert input, including Gerald and/or engaging a road engineer but this is likely a step to consider if and when detailed proposals are known.

Feedback on Tewkesbury Borough Council (TBC) 19/20 Budget

Thank you to all of you who fed back on the recent TBC 2019/20 budget proposals, the more voices who feedback concerns on taking action to address the existing road congestion the better.

A46 online improvements

There have been various references to 'online' improvements, both verbally and in writing. Online means improvements/changes to an existing road as opposed to offline which is a new or realigned road. In our view, there are improvements that can be made along the existing A46 route that should be concluded before considering any by-pass.

After trawling through the TBC Joint Core Strategy and Ashchurch Concepts Masterplan documents we have found some detail on proposals to upgrade traffic lights at various junctions and to replace the level crossing north of Ashchurch with a bridge. We have made contact with the Head of Development at TBC requesting an update on the status of their proposals.

A46 Partnership Group

At the last meeting in January, Adrian Hardman of Wychavon District Council took over as Chair from Vernon Smith.

Alistair Cox from MC gave a presentation on the A46 Corridor Study and although we have requested a copy of his presentation, this has not been forthcoming on the grounds that the information is still in 'draft'.

And finally:

With an expected delay in publication of RIS2 funding priorities, it's possible that the uncertainty around new by-passes to Ashchurch and Beckford will roll on, possibly for much of this year. This is frustrating and we also recognise that when a decision does come it's likely to be binary, meaning that we are either presented with the feared detail of a proposed new road or the welcome news that no new development is planned for several years.

In the meantime we will continue to lobby and pursue ongoing actions with all the relevant parties.

We plan to produce our next newsletter in the summer but if there are any key developments before then, we'll provide a brief update to residents by e-mail and on our website.