



TAAG

Teddington & Alstone A46 Advisory Group

TAAG NEWSLETTER #16 - MARCH 2021

In our last newsletter in December we advised residents that the public consultation due to take place in early 2021 had been postponed until the summer: this was because Highways England needed more time to consider route options and due to local Council elections in May.

While there has been little news in the last three months, there are a few matters to update you on. We also thought it would be useful to provide a summary on where we currently are.

MARCH 2021 UPDATE:

- We have recently provided a response to Midlands Connect (MC), who are inviting views on their strategy refresh. Our feedback to them has focused on proposing that rather than slavishly sticking to the existing A46 route for the proposed Midlands Trade Corridor, they should also consider a northern route from Alcester or Evesham to existing junctions 7 & 8 on the M5. This route has previously been discounted but we don't know why, as it has many benefits. We have also made the same proposal to our contact at Highways England.
- We have had sight of the feedback to MC provided by the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) and the Transport Action Network (TAN). The former raises some specific challenges to the Ashchurch bypass and the latter wider concerns that the MC strategy does not adequately address environmental priorities. Subject to their approval we will share further details on our website.
- There are ongoing sightings of red kites and we have made contact again with Gordon Kirk about coming back to look for evidence of red kites nesting. If you spot any signs of nesting activity please get in touch with Jan (07941 727963). In itself, evidence will not prevent a new road development but it would place some constraints on approach.
- Cllr Vernon Smith has advised of a request by Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) for an additional £5m to produce the required "Outline Business Case" for the Department for Transport (DfT) by Spring 2022. This deadline is set for after the public consultation which we are told is still expected to take place this summer.
- At an online Fiddington Housing Consultation in early March we learned that detailed progress has been made with Highways England for a significant upgrade of Junction 9 M5, an action independent of bypass considerations. If approved, it appears to remove an option to relocate the existing junction and, therefore, a bypass will require either a new junction sited a minimum two miles further south, or to use J10.
- We have been in contact with Oxenton Parish Council who share a number of our concerns with the bypass proposal, especially the possibility that a dual carriageway or expressway

could be routed along the existing path of the A435. They have produced their own response to the Ashchurch bypass proposal which has been sent to several councillors and Laurence Robertson MP.

* They have also told us that Atkins (contracted by GCC) are seeking to conduct ecological surveys at two farm sites within the Cotswold Natural Landscape (previously known as the AONB) in Oxenton and Woolstone. These, along with a proposed survey in the Special Landscape Area between Teddington village and the Teddington Hands roundabout, may simply be part of fulfilling the wider process but they are worrying nonetheless.

*TAAG submitted its response summarising views and concerns last August. This has been shared with all key stakeholders. A copy of this document can be viewed on our website.

You will recall we commissioned a report in late 2019 from Gerald Kells, an experienced road campaigner who has worked closely with CPRE. We are looking into whether specific 'expert' input to the public consultation proposals would add some credibility, recognising that funds are limited.

SUMMARY OF CURRENT POSITION

Regional Transport Bodies

There are currently 8 of these in England operating as a partnership of local authorities (e.g. GCC), enterprise groups (e.g. Chambers of Commerce) and national agencies (e.g. Highways England). They set transport priorities at a regional level* and lobby the DfT via its national agencies for approval and funding. Midlands Connect have long promoted development of a Trans Midlands Trade Corridor that starts/ends at J9 M5 although, their immediate focus is to seek funding of road developments further north. Western Gateway, with GCC as a key member, have taken up the mantle to promote the building of an Ashchurch bypass.

* The A46 Partnerships Group was formed in 2015 to co-ordinate efforts across different regions with membership from multiple councils as well as both Midlands Connect & Western Gateway.

County & Borough Councils

In our area, this is GCC and TBC. GCC are responsible for producing and maintaining a comprehensive Local Transport Plan and also have a decision making role within Western Gateway. TBC are driving (rather slowly) progress on the Ashchurch Garden Town. The proposal to build a new Ashchurch bypass is supported by GCC and TBC as an enabler of significant local economic growth and to alleviate current A46 congestion. They also support the role a bypass would play as part of a national corridor in proposing this is a dual carriageway or expressway.

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Funding

The size of investment for the proposed bypass, most recent estimate c£200m, will require national funding approval from the DfT. There are a few different road programmes in place but, technicalities aside, each sets out detailed guidance on the process to be followed. In March 2020, it was announced that the Ashchurch bypass proposal had successfully made it onto the list of Large Local Major Schemes (LLM) and as a result Western Gateway are going through a succession of three different business case stages finishing with an Outline Business Case expected Spring 2022. If approved, construction would typically begin around two years afterwards.

Public Consultation

Officially, this is still expected to be in the summer but it could slip into autumn. It's understood it will run for around six weeks. This will be a critical period, not only because route options will have been shared for the first time (and possibly no more than two) but because opportunities to influence changes beyond this six week period are likely to be limited. While we believe that feedback from statutory bodies like CPRE and Cotswold Natural Landscape may be particularly important, it is also crucial to maximise the level of response and engagement from residents.

Routes

We can only speculate at this stage. However, from what we've seen it looks increasingly likely that it will either be a new junction south of Junction 9 or come from the existing Junction 10 with the road running somewhere around the back of Pamington towards the Teddington Hands roundabout. Whether it utilises the path of the existing A435 or passes in-between the B4079 and A435 to join the A46 could make a huge difference to our quality of life. The former, especially, if a dual carriageway, would have a devastating impact.

Type of Road

Western Gateway continue to refer to the scheme requiring a dual carriageway solution although when challenged it seems this may be a default assumption rather than a final business case view. The increasing significance of environmental considerations is key.



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TAAG's Objective

While we initially challenged the need for a new road at all until GCC & TBC had considered an upgrade of the exiting A46, this argument became largely redundant once Garden Town status was awarded to Ashchurch in 2019. Our current pre consultation lobbying position is to influence where the road should go (and should not go) and that it is proportionate to local needs (i.e. only a single carriageway). This is driven by our headline objectives: to minimise adverse environmental impacts on our villages and avoid any severance of access to the local amenities at Teddington Hands. Depending on route options we may call for appropriate mitigating actions.

TAAG's Approach

Since our inception in June 2018, we have consistently sought to adopt a constructive rather than confrontational approach, believing this to provide the best opportunity to engage and gather support. Whether this leads to a route proposal that most of us judge as broadly acceptable remains to be seen. If not, we recognise there may be demand to take a more direct campaigning position (e.g. involving media, support from wider lobbying or political groups). This is something we consider can only be decided with the wider approval of residents, together with the TAPC, once we have seen the proposals.

Jan Mallett Gin Kirkham Chris White Paul Noke

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