

Written Representation - Queen Camel Parish Council A303 Sparkford to Ilchester dualling

The Council has indicated its support for the proposed development at every stage of the consultation process but we have major concerns about three elements in the proposals, viz.

1. the absence of a detailed Traffic Management Plan for the construction phase;
2. the design of the Hazlegrove junction;
3. the absence of a local road parallel to the new dual carriageway.

We consider that in these three respects the proposals are detrimental to the local community, would cause unnecessary environmental damage and would incur unnecessary extra costs in both the short and the long term. The Applicant has been told of these concerns on numerous occasions during the consultation process but appears to have ignored them and regrettably this has undermined public confidence in the planning process.

1. Traffic Management. The Application ignores the serious impact on Queen Camel of traffic using the A359 to bypass congestion on the A303 between Sparkford and Ilchester.

- 1) The Application acknowledges that *“At present, significant congestion occurs between Sparkford and Ilchester on the A303, particularly during peak periods such as holidays, the summer and weekends, leading to delays”* and that this results in high levels of driver frustration (TRO10036, 6.1 Environmental Statement, Chapter 12, People and Communities, 12.7.7, p.28).
- 2) The Application anticipates that throughout the construction period the necessary contraflows and speed restrictions on the A303 will lead to even higher *“levels of driver frustration...due to congestion caused by slow-moving traffic, particularly during peak periods”* (TRO10036, 6.3 Environmental Statement, Table A.1, p.2).
- 3) However the Application signally fails to acknowledge how this congestion and frustration will impact on the local community when drivers using the A303 (in both directions) are directed by their satnavs to avoid this congested section of the A303 in favour of an alternative route via Queen Camel (or Wales), Bridgehampton and Podimore.
- 4) The Application states that *“vehicles travelling along [these] roads are predicted to experience temporary but not significant increases in driver stress due to delays to journey time, road closures, diversions and the presence of construction plant”* (TRO10036, 6.4, Environmental Statement, Non-Technical Summary p.24). Drivers who regularly experience such delays and stress might question the claim that they are *“not significant”*.
- 5) The application wholly ignores the impact on the local community caused by A303 traffic using local roads to avoid congestion on the Sparkford-Ilchester section of the A303:
 - A. Blackwell Lane (a narrow, single-lane road) is often gridlocked for hours when frustrated A303 drivers use it as a ‘short cut’.
 - B. Heavy traffic on the A359 at Queen Camel High Street creates severe congestion, mainly in the form of bottlenecks at the three ‘pinch points’ (curb-extensions), and also on Sparkford Hill (by Hill View) whenever a vehicle parks on the roadside leaving just a single lane.
 - C. Heavy traffic on West Camel Road and the High Street endangers children and their families crossing the road on their way to and from school and exposes children and staff at the school to high levels of environmental pollution.
- 6) At present these problems occur mainly at times of peak traffic flow, notably at weekends and holiday times (especially through the summer), or when there has been an RTA. However the 40mph speed limit proposed during construction would likely lead to congestion for much of the day most days throughout the 2½ years of the construction phase, with grave effects on the quality of life of local residents.
- 7) Residents of the neighbouring parishes of Marston Magna, Rimpton and Mudford would also be affected since they use the A359 to reach the A303 and points north.

- 8) Yeovil-based emergency service vehicles responding to urgent calls use Queen Camel High Street every day, and delays for them could mean the difference between life and death.
- 9) The Applicant's draft Traffic Management Plan (TMP) concedes that "*There is currently a perception of 'rat running' by traffic through adjacent villages*" (Annex B5 of the Outline Environmental Management Plan). The wording suggests some scepticism and the TMP fails to address the problems of congestion on Queen Camel High Street - but rather adds to it by diverting traffic onto the A359 during A303 closures.
- 10) A recent draft Statement of Common Ground prepared by Highways England states that a TMP "*is being developed in consultation with Somerset County Council, and will eventually contain measures for the prevention and mitigation of the adverse impacts of self-diverting traffic*". However no hint is given as to when let alone how these problems will be addressed.
- 11) This Council therefore requests that before the DCO application is approved the Applicant be required to:
 - A. assess the impact of self-diverting traffic on Queen Camel High Street and other local roads during the construction phase;
 - B. amend the proposals to retain the carriageway of the existing A303 as a local road (see Section 3., below), thereby substantially reducing serious congestion on Queen Camel High Street and 'rat running' on local roads;
 - C. demonstrate that in any event robust and effective mitigation measures* will be put in place.

* Detailing such measures is beyond the scope of this representation but they might include linked ANPR cameras at the A359 and Podimore exits of the Sparkford and Podimore roundabouts (to detect HGVs flouting the local 7.5t. weight limit), a Wig Wag warning sign outside the school, a Pelican crossing on Queen Camel High Street, and a movable SID.

Before setting out Sections 2 and 3 we would draw your attention to the individual representation submitted by Mr Bryan Norman BSc(Est Man), FRICS, an experienced project manager. We concur with his conclusions about Hazlegrove junction and the parallel road and we commend the detailed solutions he suggests.

2. Hazlegrove Junction. The unorthodox design and layout of the proposed Hazlegrove junction will have a negative environmental and economic impact on local communities by:

- 1) destroying far more of the Listed Hazlegrove Park than is necessary;
- 2) needlessly increasing the length of journeys to and from Hazlegrove School and potentially causing gridlock at the beginning and end of the school day.
- 3) needlessly increasing the distance travelled by traffic joining the eastbound carriageway of the A303 from the A359 (south).
- 4) encouraging such traffic to take a short cut through the middle of Sparkford village.

The Council therefore asks the Examining Authority not to approve the DCO application without first considering the alternative design submitted by Mr Norman. It is demonstrably more sustainable, both environmentally and economically, and it would be cheaper to construct.

3. Parallel Road. The application fails to give serious consideration to the advantages of retaining the carriageway of the existing A303 for local traffic alongside the new dual carriageway between Hazlegrove and Camel Cross. Such a 'parallel road' would:

- 1) Reduce the need for speed limits and road closures during construction, resulting in less congestion on the A303 and local roads.
- 2) Reduce the cost and the duration of construction.
- 3) Enable heavy farm traffic to access Traits Lane and Eyewell Farm from the north (as currently), keeping it off narrow Blackwell Lane, and obviating the need to alter and enlarge the Traits Lane - Blackwell Lane junction.
- 4) Keep Traits Lane, Gason Lane and the spur road past the Shell Filling Station as through roads. Under the existing proposals they would all become 'dead-ends', attracting fly-tipping and anti-social behaviour
- 5) Safeguard the future of current A303 businesses which depend of passing trade like the Shell Filling Station, Mattia Diner, West Camel bakery and Wayne's Bistro.
- 6) Add spare capacity alongside the dual carriageway; this would give the A303 greater resilience and improve access for emergency vehicles in the event of an RTA.
- 7) 'Future proof' the local road network when the A303 becomes an Expressway from which slow moving (including agricultural) vehicles are excluded.

The Applicant maintains that there is insufficient width between the Scheduled monument and MOD land on Camel Hill to accommodate a parallel road alongside the dual carriageway, and that negotiating a land-purchase from the MOD would jeopardize the programme (*Draft Statement of Common Ground, doc.8.10, Rev.1*). The Council asks the Examining Authority to examine these contentions closely as information presented by Mr Norman casts doubt on both.

4. Other considerations

- 1) We have been raising these concerns and suggesting improvements to the Hazlegrove junction and retention of the parallel road since the beginning of the consultation process and do not understand the Applicant's reluctance to take them seriously: they would improve the project and save costs.
- 2) Many of our recommendations have featured in previous A303 designs and we are unaware of any changes in road design requirements over the last 25 years which might have invalidated them.
- 3) Our recommendations will generate substantial savings in construction costs and to the community and environment, both during the construction phase and thereafter, in perpetuity.
- 4) We believe that the suggested changes are not significant enough to require a new application but could be dealt with as modifications to the existing Application before the detailed design stage.