

By email and post



Queen Camel Parish Council

Chairman – Mr John Brendon

Karen Wilkinson,
The Planning Inspectorate
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2 The Square
Bristol BS1 6PN

Your Ref : TR010036-000004 (FAO Karen Wilkinson)

22nd December, 2017

Dear Ms. Wilkinson,

Information to be included in the Highways England (HE) Environmental Statement (ES)

In response to your letter of 29th November we would be grateful if you would take account of the information below in drawing up your Scoping Opinion; all references are to HE's *Environmental Impact Assessment Scoping Report* of November 2017 [version P13]. Although the sections in this response follow the order of the *Scoping Report* please bear in mind that this Council's greatest concerns relate to part 3 of Section 13, the scheme's **impact on the local road network** (see below).

Section 2 The Scheme: The Scheme is predicated on a longer term plan for the A303 which anticipates "that future enhancements would make this section 'expressway' compatible" (2.3.3, p.6). We would be grateful if you would advise the applicant that the environmental impact of the current proposals cannot be properly assessed without more information on the nature and scale of these possible "future enhancements". We hope that the ES will include a summary of any further engineering works required to turn the road into an 'expressway', a list of the licensed and unlicensed classes of vehicles and drivers which would be excluded from the 'expressway', an indication of what provision would be made for the excluded vehicles, and a forecast of any consequential change in traffic volumes.

Section 6 Air Quality: The proposed road realignment at the Sparkford end of the Scheme as well as a probable increase in traffic on the upgraded A303 would likely increase the exposure to pollutants of young children and staff at Hazlegrove School, along with residents of properties at Camel Hill and Blue Haze. These properties would be closer to the realigned road and in the prevailing southwesterlies they are downwind from it. We would therefore be grateful if you would advise the applicant to reconsider his decision not to implement any air quality mitigation measures (6.8.2, p.30) and we hope that such measures will be included in the ES.

Section 8 Landscape and Visual Effects: we hope that the ES will detail measures to mitigate the visual impact of the raised section of road on the western ridge of Camel Hill, as seen from the south.

Section 13 People and Communities

1. **Study area** (13.2, p.97): there may be technical reasons why the study area extends no further than 250m. from the scheme but this does seem unduly limited. It implies that the scheme will not greatly affect the majority of Queen Camel residents (who live <1200m. from the scheme) let alone the children and staff at Hazlegrove School (<600m.) In reality all will be much affected by the Scheme, especially during the construction phase.
2. **Severance** (13.3.8, p.101): the list of communities in the vicinity of the Scheme should include the hamlet of Wales and the Preparatory boarding School at Hazlegrove Park.
3. **The impact of the scheme on the local road network**: this is a matter of major concern to this Council and residents of Queen Camel, especially in relation to the construction phase.
 - In claiming it is “*possible*” that overnight work “*could cause temporary disruption for MT’s along the A303, A359 and adjoining side roads...and cause disruption for local communities*” (13.7.1, p.106) the applicant gravely understates the problem.
 - We appreciate assurances that “*The People and Communities assessment will factor these traffic management requirements in*” (13.7.1, p.106) and that “*A Traffic Management Plan (TMP) would be implemented during the construction phase of the Scheme, to ensure that access is maintained and disruption is minimised as far as possible*” (13.8.1, p.108). However more concrete detail is needed at an early stage.
 - **We therefore respectfully request that you advise the applicant to show a far greater appreciation of the magnitude of the traffic management problem and ask that detailed mitigation measures be set out in the ES rather than leaving them to be worked out with consultants and contractors at a later time.**

The applicant may find the following local information helpful in assessing the problem:

1. Local traffic on Queen Camel High Street (the A359) averages c.7,000 vehicles in the course of a 12-hour day, with almost 800 vehicles per hour at peak times, resulting in periodic congestion. Whenever there is congestion on the Sparkford-Ilchester section of the A303, for example at weekends and holiday times (especially in the summer) or after an RTA, the High Street is flooded with through traffic using Satnavs to find a way round via local roads. The knock-on effects include more severe congestion on Queen Camel High Street, heavy traffic along the West Camel Road (an unclassified road) and gridlock on Wales Road and Blackwell Road (a narrow unclassified road, partly single lane).
2. The A359 is heavily used by emergency service vehicles and as a result congestion in Queen Camel can have a serious effect on people and communities over a much wider area.
3. Vehicles avoiding the congested section of the A303 are often directed by Satnavs to the West Camel Road, passing close to the Medical Centre and the Primary school - both of which serve communities far beyond the village. Patients attending the Medical Centre use the road and local children have to cross it on their way to and from school, so congestion on the A303 inconveniences and can endanger two of the most vulnerable groups in Queen Camel and neighbouring communities.
4. We understand that throughout the construction period the applicant plans to keep open one lane of the A303 in each direction, as at present, but it will be necessary to reduce the speed limit from 50mph to 40mph in coned lanes. This is bound to increase the frequency and severity of congestion on the A303 with greater congestion of local roads an inevitable knock-on effect.

5. We understand that nighttime closures of the A303 will be required on occasion and this is likely to result in heavy traffic flows through the heart of Queen Camel all night.
6. There is a 7.5t. weight restriction on the High Street and other Queen Camel roads but it is widely flouted and seems unlikely to deter HGV drivers trying to avoid congestion on the A303.
7. There is a right-angled corner at the southern end of the High Street where long or wide commercial vehicles trying to squeeze past each other find it difficult to avoid mounting the narrow pavement at times, endangering pedestrians including children walking to and from school.
8. At times the density of traffic on the A359 leads to gridlock between the three pinch points on the High Street.
9. Roadside parking on the High Street and at Hill View (on the A359 to the north of the bridge) often restricts traffic to a single lane, especially when wide agricultural and commercial vehicles are involved, and this creates further congestion.

We would therefore request that the following mitigation measures be considered to supplement whatever official diversions are put in place:

- i. Signage on the A303 (east of Sparkford and west of Ilchester) advising that drivers using Queen Camel High Street and West Camel Road to bypass congestion on the A303 are likely to encounter longer delays.
- ii. Similar signage warning HGV drivers of the measures in place to enforce the 7.5t. weight limit on local roads (see iii below).
- iii. Setting up a system in conjunction with the County Highways Department and the Police to ensure compliance with and enforcement of the 7.5t. weight restriction on the A359 and West Camel Road. One possible model is the Hinkley Point traffic management scheme with its use of advanced number plate recognition technology.
- iv. In the longer term, investigating the merits of retaining the existing A303 carriageway as a possible A303 relief road and for local traffic.

We hope you find this information useful in helping you prepare your Scoping Opinion for Highways England's Environmental Statement.

Yours sincerely,

Patrick Pender-Cudlip

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