

**NOTES OF MEETING HELD WITH STEVE WILSON, MAJOR HIGHWAYS PROJECT ENGINEER,  
WILTSHIRE COUNCIL ON 8 JULY 2021 AT 4.00PM  
REGARDING THE A350 BYPASS PROPOSAL (2<sup>ND</sup> PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON ROUTE 10C)**

**Present:** Councillor David Pafford (Vice Chair of Council)  
Councillor Alan Baines (Chair of Meeting)  
Councillor John Doel  
Councillor Mark Harris  
Councillor Holt (via Zoom)  
Councillor Richard Wood

Teresa Strange, Clerk  
Lorraine McRandle, Parish Officer

As current Chair of the Highways & Streetscene Committee, Councillor Baines took the Chair and welcomed Steve to the meeting to discuss the emerging route of the A350 Bypass (10c).

Councillor Baines stated he appreciated that all possibilities had been investigated, and whilst some people may feel it was a done deal that 10c would be the preferred route, this was not necessarily the view of the Parish Council and noted at least 90% of the proposed route was in the parish.

**North Part of Route (Lacock to Woodrow)**

Councillor Baines noted 3 options were currently being looked at with regard to the northern end of the emerging route near Lacock and appreciated the reasoning for the longer option in order to cross the river, flood plain and Roman Road in one go.

Steve explained that when looking at the northern end of the route a key design factor regarding this section related to the crossing point and arrangements for Woodrow Road/Lower Woodrow Road.

With regard to the best crossing point over Woodrow/Lower Woodrow Road there was no obvious location which avoided impacts and/or required the potential need for properties or business land or buildings, which might require the use of compulsory purchase orders. The intention was to seek a solution which minimised impacts if possible, to houses and businesses.

Steve explained that one thought was to look at putting a roundabout near to the junction of New Road. However, due to an overhead powerline, this was discounted as the land needed required the powerline to be taken down, which would have cost implications without potential benefit for the business case.

The other key consideration related to whether a junction would be beneficial at Woodrow Road/Lower Woodrow Road. It was felt that the introduction of a junction could potentially increase the use of Woodrow Road as a convenient route for those travelling to/from

Chippenham and on to M4, and that this increase would potentially be not appropriate given the nature of Woodrow Road.

Councillor Baines agreed having a junction on Woodrow/Lower Woodrow Road would perpetuate rat running through New Road, Woodrow Road and Lacock.

Steve explained if there were to be no junction here, then one road (either Woodrow Road/Lower Woodrow Road or the bypass route itself) would need to be elevated over the other. This would have potential issues regarding the overhead powerlines and require significant land take to accommodate the road embankments. Therefore an alternative solution was considered to seek a crossing point to minimise the impacts near Hack Farm.

Steve explained having fixed this point, this effectively fixed the southern part of the northern section and it did not seem sensible to bring the route further over to the west of Queenfield Farm and over towards Halfway Farm.

Steve explained that during the first round of consultation, responses had been received highlighting the issues of traffic through Lacock and at the Melksham Road junction into Lacock. Therefore, a solution was looked at that addressed some of those issues with a potential opportunity to provide an enhanced southern access to Lacock, which may assist with regards to accessing the National Trust (NT) car park area.

Steve explained other constraints at this end were the river, floodplain and Roman Road and archaeological aspects associated with this, therefore a solution was looked at to provide a single bridge over all of these. This solution would require NT land which has a particular status and this may not prove possible. As such, other ideas for alternative northern connections have been provided. Initial discussions have taken place with NT. Any decision regarding the potential availability of land would be by NT trustees nationally.

Councillor Baines stated the crossing point at Lower Woodrow/Forest Lane was much further out than expected, expecting the alignment would be more down the track access from Woodrow to Queenfield, but appreciated there is a business opposite this alignment and felt a better crossing point would be where the diverted Forest Lane comes off Woodrow. The suggested alignment impacted on the listed farmhouse at Rhotteridge Farm, severed access to Hack Farm and came almost immediately adjacent to the brand-new farm worker's dwelling and close to 227 Forest Lane.

Councillor Baines felt coming inside of the access track to Hack Farm would alleviate most of these difficulties and although it might be slightly difficult to take Woodrow/Forest Lane over the top, there was a route around the back of 6 Guinea Cottage and into the track at Queenfield and coming off the first corner of the double bend in line with Clink Lane.

Councillor Baines explained the proposed route also affected a number of PROW<sup>1</sup> in this area.

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<sup>1</sup> Public Rights of Way

Steve explained there was a risk that the emerging route was being seen as fixed. However this was an emerging route and whilst the broad alignment was the best performing solution i.e., 10c, and some of the crossing points of 'A' roads were fairly obvious and clear, if alternative suggestions and thoughts came forward, there would be some scope to reconsider. The development of the route may require having to go through the compulsory purchase process, particularly given the number of landowners involved. Until that CPO<sup>2</sup> process is concluded, the details of the route alignment would be subject to modification. A public inquiry may also identify alternatives, and that process may also amend the proposals. The emerging route at the moment is very much an outline design in engineering terms. Members could provide alternative ideas as part of the Parish Council's consultation response.

Steve explained one of the aspects of the design which needed to be looked at early on, was to establish the drainage strategy for the road and how that would work. At this early stage of the design, balancing ponds are anticipated along the length of the route, which could provide opportunities for wetlands, new habitats and new points of interest, if located near to PROW in particular, thereby potentially adding amenity value. Atkins as the designers of the scheme would be considering this.

The Clerk asked whether the additional traffic which would be generated from new developments in the parish had been considered in any traffic modelling. Steve explained these and any other identified developments in the core strategy would have been included in any traffic modelling. Assessments were done using high growth and low growth scenarios.

The Clerk asked how the route impacted the plans for the Wilts & Berks canal link from Melksham to Lacock. Steve explained the historic route of the canal was protected in the Core Strategy and the current assumption was that there would be a requirement to bridge the existing alignment of the canal. However, as the scheme proceeds and engagement takes place with the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust, the requirements may be better defined or amended.

### **Woodrow to A3102 (Sandridge Road)**

Councillor Baines felt the route from Woodrow to Sandridge did not appear to cause too many issues and felt the location of the proposed roundabout was okay.

### **A3102 (Sandridge Road) to A365**

The northern part of this section dissected Praters Lane which is a valued bridleway and cuts across Sandridge Solar Farm Land.

With regard to the bulge in the alignment in this section, Steve explained that as part of the 1<sup>st</sup> round of consultation, the location of a potential buried historical settlement in this area was raised, and that this presented a potential archaeological interest risk. The response thus

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<sup>2</sup> Compulsory Purchase Order

far taken has been to move the route away from this area. Over time, and following further investigations, the alignment may be further refined in this area depending upon the nature and scale of the potential archaeological interest and through key stakeholder engagement regarding this matter.

Councillor Baines felt this would please the residents of Redstocks adjacent to this section of the route. However, it was noted the proposed route did miss Browns Lane.

Steve explained the crossing of the A365 would be near Vernon Farm.

### **A365 (Devizes Road) to A350**

Members noted there was a clear message from Bowerhill residents that they were not happy with the proposed route near Bowerhill and questioned how they would access the picnic area and Giles Wood.

Councillor Baines explained that the Parish Council had a lot of questions about this section of the route, and why several options as per the northern tie-in were not proposed, explaining the Council felt there was some value in looking towards the 10d idea of crossing the canal, where the canal changes direction and then negotiating Semington Brook and the floodplain and asked for clarification on the way the choice was made that 10d was not an option.

Steve drew members' attention to the information pack on the website which included an appendix summarising the reasons why options were not taken forward, and explained that whilst 10d performed well against the primary objectives and with similar traffic benefits to Option 10c, it had a higher estimated cost and additional environmental impacts were likely, particularly in relation to crossing the Kennet & Avon Canal and Semington Brook at the southern end of the route.

Steve explained that the cost side of the case for 10d were higher than 10c with no additional benefits. When developing the outline business case there was a desire to identify the solution which performs best in order to be best placed to secure future funding. When doing the strategic outline business case in 2017, which was then updated in 2019, a BCR<sup>3</sup> of 2.2 was anticipated. Currently, the BCR rate is now emerging as 1.5 or below. This change makes the scheme less certain, and as such it is important to develop the best performing solution in order to be best placed to obtain funding.

Steve explained this scheme would also be considered alongside other potential schemes for funding. It was noted that other potential sources of funding exist such as the 'Levelling Up' Fund which may offer options. However, there was still a way to go in order to secure funding.

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<sup>3</sup> Benefit Cost Ratio

The Clerk asked with regard to the impact on people in Bowerhill how was that measured against environmental impact for instance. Steve felt this was more of a relatively detailed matter which may need to be put to the business case development team at Atkins.

Steve explained there were various benefits when considering a road scheme such as traffic improvements, economic benefit in supporting the local economy and development, journey times, accessibility, and ecological benefits, and suggested that often the focus is placed on the negative impacts. The business case is being developed in accordance with DfT requirements.

Steve suggested that the question regarding how and what benefits are considered may be better addressed through reference to the Atkins team. Information is however available as part of the scheme FAQs.

Councillor Baines stated Seend village had been looking for a bypass to take the A361 traffic out of the village which 10d would have provided and also did not have the disadvantage of bringing the A350 and Melksham Trowbridge traffic back together again on the existing A350 and Littleton Farm roundabout as 10c does, therefore dualling may need to be considered given this would be a pinch point. Steve advised Members and residents to refer to the consultation information appendix and the Options Assessment Report, for information regarding route choice.

Councillor Wood supported Councillor Baines in his comments and felt there was a missed opportunity in not bypassing Seend.

With regard to dualling, Steve explained this may be required to the north of Littleton Roundabout either as part of this scheme or as a separate project at a later date.

Councillor Baines asked what mitigation could be put in particularly near Bowerhill, such as a cutting, which would help to calm concerns as the route would not be visible, with a bridge over it to access the canal.

Steve explained that Atkins were considering the scope to include for a cutting, but that this would need to be considered in the light of ground water levels and flooding - but this was being considered.

With regard to noise mitigation Steve explained that until an environmental impact assessment had been done it was difficult to know what the impacts may be. However, mitigation, if needed, could take the form of noise barriers. The visual impact of these would also need to be considered and potential options for more natural green barriers could be considered.

Steve stated it would be helpful if concerns such as this could come through the consultation response, as this helps understanding and therefore helps inform the design.

With regards to the connectivity North to South on this section and access to the canal and BRAG<sup>4</sup> picnic area Steve explained a video of a bird's eye view had been produced to help people understand the route.

Steve explained the emerging proposals for the bridleway to Giles Wood, which would be realigned to connect with the canal route south of the emerging bypass. A bridge is anticipated with gentle ramps either side to enable easy access. The Giles Wood connection would still be there – but with an alternative alignment with a similar length.

Steve explained that consideration will be given to the bridge connection and whether concepts such as a 'green bridge' might be viable. These provided planting along the bridge which helps create an impression of continuous countryside. Examples have been built including in Cheshire and along the Weymouth Relief Road, however, these were very expensive. Another mitigation may be to consider the use of 'green' acoustic barriers rather than hard engineered barriers.

Steve explained one reason the route was not further south towards the canal was due to overhead power lines. Avoiding diverting these helps, due to the potential cost against the benefits which would be achieved.

Steve explained that something which may influence the placement of the roundabout connecting to the A350, was buildability considerations. Moving it slightly east may mean that most of the build would be 'offline' therefore reducing the need for traffic management. Details such as this will be considered as the scheme progresses.

### **Public Rights of Way/Bridleways**

Councillor Baines explained **MELW35** from Bowerhill Lane to Carnation Lane would be severed. Some 2-3 years ago, kissing gates had been installed funded by the Area Board and the Parish Council, and this is a useful route and therefore should not be extinguished.

Steve explained it was vital to raise such matters and the importance of such connections through the Parish Council's response to the consultation, in order for options to be investigated, such as a bridge.

Steve explained **MELW42** running along from Bowerhill Sports Field to the Canal (adjacent to Cereal Partners) would also be impacted and that the emerging proposal was to divert this PROW near to the proposed roundabout connecting to the current A350. This would require an "at grade" crossing, which may or may not be traffic signal controlled. This is still to be considered.

Steve explained a walking, cycling and horse-riding assessment report (WCHAR), which had been developed by an independent team, was available via the scheme webpage and provided useful information. The report covers various aspects including a review of existing facilities, accident records associated with PROW and any cluster sites for accidents,

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<sup>4</sup> Bowerhill Residents Action Group

and ideas for how PROWs and connectivity could be addressed. Stakeholder engagement had also been sought with various organisations including Ramblers and the British Horse Society providing input. User surveys, to compliment other data, had been undertaken on key walking routes in the area and site observations done in January. The conditions of PROW were also looked at. Having considered the available information, the WCHAR looks at how the scheme might address matters associated with horse riding, walking and cycling.

Steve explained this was a working document and therefore would be updated as the design advanced and if there was something that had not been considered to let WC know.

Councillor Baines stated **MELW24** from Melksham to the A365 was also completely severed and is a useful route. Having to go into Redstocks and back out again seemed a long way around.

Steve explained within the consultation documentation there were suggestions for parallel cycling and walking routes in the area of land taken up within the width of land needed to provide for future dualling. One thought is that these could potentially help link existing PROWs and add to the network. If suggestions and comments were made on this approach that would assist the consultation and scheme development. However, these would only be included where it makes sense, is deliverable, and if it served a purpose to help provide a solution.

#### **Praters Lane (MELW40 Bridleway):**

Councillor Baines stated it was proposed to sever this bridleway with a diversion taken to the bottom of hill and noted the Parish Council had received representations for several years from someone wanting to get from the footway at side of Sandridge Common, passed the new development at Lopes Close to access Praters Lane off the a A3102, as there is no footway.

Councillor Baines stated the Parish Council had investigated the possibility of a permissive footpath to the rear of Lopes Close, unfortunately, the farmer was not keen on the suggestion. Councillor Baines felt the diversion of Praters Lane the other side of the bypass route was not a good idea as this elongated the missing link and would be dangerous, there needed to be some means of accessing the South East piece of Praters Lane beyond the bypass alignment, with the proposed route making the current issue even worse. Steve invited the Parish Council to submit this information with suggested mitigation.

The Clerk explained the access to Praters Lane has an old bus turning layby which is now used as an unofficial parking area, which many walkers/dog walkers use from the wider community.

Steve explained the roundabout required a lot of land in order to create it, but suggested the Parish Council could raise this as an issue for consideration as part of the scheme.

#### **Lower Woodrow**

With regard to **MELW61** and **MELW66** which was a strategic route to Lacock, Councillor Baines explained it looked like these would be closed at a point in the middle of a field, meaning people would walk to the middle of the field and back again.

Steve explained the footpath in this area would have a connection to the other side of the bypass. However, the river bridge at this location needed to be as low as possible, recognising there is a flooding issue, in order to mitigate potential visual impacts. There was also a need to consider the former route of the Wilts & Berks Canal in the area. As the bypass route at the location of these PROWs needs to be as low as possible, there was little opportunity for an underpass.

Steve suggested the Parish Council send in their comments on how this issue could be resolved.

Councillor Wood left at 5.30pm

### **Other Issues**

The Clerk stated the Melksham Neighbourhood Plan would be starting its review in September and asked if the line of the bypass would be protected in the revised Local Plan. Steve explained this would probably not be until Wiltshire Council had adopted it.

Steve explained it had often been suggested that the scheme was in order to accommodate more housing. Steve reiterated this scheme was not anything to do with housing development, but that it was a highway improvement scheme being progressed with DFT<sup>5</sup> funding. The need for future housing would be there whether the bypass moves forward or not.

Steve explained the issue of journey time savings had come up several times, with individuals potentially viewing this from the perspective of their individual local journeys. However, journey times looked at the cumulative effect of all journeys when looking at a business case and the time saved.

The Clerk asked if the reasoning for businesses locating in Melksham was due to better connectivity to the M4.

Steve explained progressive improvements of the A350 as they come further South from M4 was opening up Western Wiltshire to connectivity to the M4, other improvements were also proposed along other parts of the A350 in Wiltshire and hopefully there would be opportunities to apply for funding for other improvements in the future. Unfortunately, funding opportunities for large road schemes do not tend to present themselves that often.

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<sup>5</sup> Department for Transport

The Clerk explained two public meetings had been arranged week commencing 19<sup>th</sup> July and asked Members how they wished to present to residents and what the format of the meetings would be.

Councillor Baines felt the best way would be to listen to what residents thought and to try and alleviate their concerns and misinformation.

Steve suggested potentially starting with the video and then perhaps seeking feedback on say 5-6 "themes" (route choice, PROWs, environment impact etc) and having, say, 10 minutes on each theme to gain feedback.

The Clerk explained the meetings had already been advertised in Melksham News and asked whether Members wished the meetings to be publicised to other groups like Redstocks, Woodrow, BRAG, West Wiltshire Ramblers etc. It was agreed to make them aware and to encourage them to respond to the consultation individually and copy in the Parish Council who would be making their own response.

Councillor Pafford felt it would be best to encourage other groups to attend the Beanacre meeting, as the Bowerhill meeting would generate a lot of interest.

The Clerk asked if hard copies of the consultation were available to give to those who did not have access to the internet. Steve explained the facility to provide hard copies was not available at present but had been hoping to have a drop-in session at the Library. This was not thought possible under the current covid restrictions. The Clerk explained a 'drop in' event had been run by Wiltshire Council on the current Melksham House consultation very recently in the library. Steve agreed he would investigate in the hope of having drop-in information sessions arranged.