

IPC

- 9 MAR 2012

Kathryn Powell,  
Case Leader, IPC,  
Temple Quay House,  
Temple Quay,  
Bristol BS1 6PN.

REF:

6<sup>th</sup> March, 2012

Dear Ms Powell,

I write to you regarding the A556 Project, Cheshire, which is in the process of consultation with residents and other affected parties.

I live adjacent to the A556 on \_\_\_\_\_, Rostherne, Cheshire, and I would be obliged if you could register me as an interested party, and keep me informed of progress and opportunities to be involved in consultation.

My purpose in writing to you is to make two points clear. Firstly, the consultation process has been seriously flawed, and secondly, to emphasise the HIGHWAYS AGENCY'S (HA) own key objectives and their failure to make them clear to the public. The stated objectives are:

- Improve the local environment in Bucklow Hill and Mere;
- Improve road safety and journey time reliability;
- Reduce conflicts between long distance and local traffic; and,
- Minimise the environmental impacts of the scheme, during construction and once open to traffic.

**Seriously Flawed Consultation:**

I understand that your organisation requires the HA to undertake "adequate public consultation". I believe the consultation undertaken so far has been very seriously flawed, and does not meet the required standards set by you at the IPC. The consultation has not been conducted in the spirit of localism.

The Summary Document (SD) provided by the HA is, at best, extremely misleading in several respects:

For example, diagrams illustrate all Mere properties but do not acknowledge the homes to the West of the road – this gives an extremely misleading impression to readers of the document in a wide catchment area of Cheshire and South Manchester. People in the wider area could honestly form the view that NO properties are affected by the route.

The maps which have appeared in circulated documents have been misleading. Non-locals are being asked to complete a questionnaire based upon flawed and misleading information in respect of there being very few dwellings shown to the West of the existing A556. This HAS led people to believe the scheme will have little or no impact on any community.

A revised map for pages 8/9 and 10 (and covering letter) were circulated on 29 February, because the original document maps were so misleading.

The result of this flawed consultation is that the public cannot possibly make an informed decision in the timescale provided, and therefore IPC should not consider the results of the questionnaires – because the HA provided incorrect information. This reflects a very poor standard of 'Public Consultation'.

The HA were required to deliver Summary Documents before 23<sup>rd</sup> January when the public consultation began, and in time to alert people to the three exhibition dates. There were six Deposit Locations, one as far away as Sandbach (15-20 miles). All received their SDs by Friday 20<sup>th</sup> January, 2012. Little Bollington School was the deposit for people living closest to the A556, they did not receive their SDs until 3.30pm on Friday 27<sup>th</sup> January, when most of the children had already left and the school were unable to distribute them. By the time they were sent out, the only weekend exhibition (Sat. 28<sup>th</sup>) had passed and very little notice was given for the second exhibition on Tues 31<sup>st</sup>. For some inexplicable reason the HA did not inform the school they were to be a Deposit Location and when the documents were delivered the School did not know what they were supposed to do with them! This reflects very poor thinking through of 'Public Consultation'.

The HA state they put forward the new "Preferred Route" in 2010 as a result of "feedback from local residents and community groups" in 2009. They did not consult with anyone in Millington, High Legh, Bucklow Hill, Hoo Green, Hulseheath, Rostherne or Tabley. Local people in these areas strongly suspect the HA only consulted with the Mere community who persuaded them to move the road **even further offline**, and to abandon their 2007 options in favour of the creation of Millington and Tabley Junctions. Clearly, they were successful.

I request that the IPC inquires into the records of this 2009 consultation and reveal the extent of feedback from local communities. How many replies were received? What did they request? Which communities were they from? The HA informed CBO that they would be contacting landowners and their representatives in advance of the public consultation. However, I understand that the principal landowner in Millington, whose land will be most severely affected, has never, to January 2012, been approached by the HA. As the HA will be compulsorily purchasing land from the Landowner I believe this is a very serious oversight in the consultation process and reflects a broad and overwhelming lack of emphasis on understanding the impact of the new road on key landowners.

The HA's language, attitude and terminology is not clear and dispassionate. Many statements are biased and misleading. For example, the latest documents use the term "Environmental Improvement" – despite the fact that everyone west of the A556 will be negatively affected. And in addition, if the current Baseline goes ahead, then the peace and tranquillity of the historic village of Rostherne will be seriously disturbed by traffic taking the most direct route to and from the new Baseline Junction and the main gates of Tatton

Park – which is currently developing an attraction to encourage a further 200,000 visitors!

One advocate of the published scheme, Jeremy Bloom, has stated in the local press “It will also improve life for people living along the existing route of the A556, by taking traffic away from local communities”.

This is seriously misleading - the current Baseline only improves the lives of **one** community – Mere. At least **six communities** will be devastated when traffic is driven through the heart of villages and hamlets on roads that have never been designed for motor vehicles – they are simply historic routes that over time have been covered in tarmac.

The historic verges and hedgerows are still in place so on very many stretches of the rural roads two vehicles can only pass each other with the very greatest of care. This will cause a great safety issue!

I also believe that the Options laid out in the SD are too numerous and too confusing. I recall the very first misleading consultation which in brief was Option A – 17 houses demolished, or Option B – no houses demolished. Guess which option was chosen!

The same disingenuous and misleading consultation appears to be taking place now, except that rather than two choices there are several options. Whilst everyone was previously forced to think well of Option B they are now in a position to be divided and thus conquered! The present consultation process will lead to a variety of junction/road choices being favoured – so the HA will be able to pursue their own favourite.

For example, the Millington Hall Lane to Chapel Lane Link Road - This will be extremely dangerous as the lanes are far too narrow to cope with the 2000-3000 cars **on average** per day which will be “fed” onto Chapel Lane, down Peacock Lane and into High Legh. The junction will be yards from the most treacherous bend in the whole area and where the lane narrows to barely two cars wide. Horse riders, cyclists and pedestrians (including parents with prams and young children) will be in substantially greater danger than at present. Find a map and also see the dangerous bends in the Rostherne area.

I request that surveys are conducted of traffic speeds on the roads as they are now. All the local country roads are subject to the national speed limit – and very many drivers using these back roads drive as fast as they can. For example, I can say personally that on Rostherne Lane traffic taking a short cut through to Knutsford regularly travels past my house at over 50mph – legally allowed but ridiculous.

None of the HA consultation documents show any awareness, or request views/feedback about the very large number of examples locally of large vehicles from the UK and overseas relying on ‘Sat Navs’ and getting stuck –

for example the articulated car transporter, with attached trailer that had to reverse 400m down Rostherne Lane and back onto the A556!

I understand that both Jeremy Bloom and Mohammed Swapan acknowledge that the rural lanes will be unable to cope with the expected level, and size, of traffic.

Why, as part of a Public Consultation process, are the HA putting forward for consultation a variety of Options which are clearly dangerous. Further, I know, as do other locals, that when the M56 backs up beyond Junction 7, which it does on a weekly basis, and several times per week in poor weather, cars will exit at Millington Junction and use the rural lanes as a rat run. In addition, when the A556 is heavily congested due to time of day or an accident on the M6, the lanes surrounding Rostherne become a rat run and many drivers are happy to test the speed of their vehicles and their driving skills. A check of the hedges on the outside of bends will confirm that local farmers/householders are frequently repairing hedgerows after vehicle collisions. Gridlock and **accidents are guaranteed** and in icy conditions (which are frequent in winter) some of these accidents could be fatal.

And now, briefly, to my second point:

To emphasise the HIGHWAYS AGENCY'S (HA) own key objectives:

- Improve the local environment in Bucklow Hill and Mere;
- Improve road safety and journey time reliability;
- Reduce conflicts between long distance and local traffic; and,
- Minimise the environmental impacts of the scheme, during construction and once open to traffic.
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I will deal with each of these in turn because **NONE** of these key objectives appear clearly as a relevant question to be answered in the Public Consultation Questionnaire by the public likely to be affected. Even worse, the questionnaire does not even mention what the key objectives are!

So:

'Improve the local environment in Bucklow Hill...' – this very much depends upon what area 'Bucklow Hill' covers, and how 'improve' is defined. If this is a key objective then how are the HA going to define 'success' and measure it? 'Improve road safety.....' This phrase must mean road safety on the new A556 compared to the new road. That will be possible to measure because most accidents on the existing A556 are serious and reported to the Cheshire Police. Clearly with appropriate state of the art road design the new road should see less serious/fatal accidents.

BUT, who is measuring the serious accidents on the rural lanes adjacent to the A556 which have happened in the last few years, and what comparison will be made with the accidents that are likely in the next few years if the Baseline scheme goes ahead. To what extent will the Highways Agency be liable under law for the deaths and serious injuries which might arise as a result of flawed consultation leading to poorly designed roads adjacent to, and supporting, the new A556?



'Reduce conflicts between long distance and local traffic' – In my view, main road traffic should be kept on main roads. How can rural side roads be expected to cope with main road traffic?

In conclusion, I am very disappointed the overall strategy of the consultation process is seriously flawed by poor methodology.

Yours sincerely,

TP Burgess

BA(Hons), MBA, Chartered FCMI, Chartered FCIPD