

**The Parish Council of Offord Cluny and Offord Darcy**

**The A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon Improvement Scheme**

**Final Submission to the Planning Inspectorate (DCO Registration ID 10030393).**

**Summary**

Having read through much of the documentation, attended various meetings during the course of the DCO consultation and communicated with Highways England on a number of issues, we can only state that our position remains exactly as it was at the start of the process, outlined in our submission to PINS as of June 2015.

It would appear that none of our concerns have been sufficiently addressed by Highways England.

We still have no physical indication regarding the exact position of the road with respect to its proximity to Offord Cluny – or indeed anywhere else along its route. We still have no graphics, CG images or any other representations of the road other than as a line on a map, which is just not acceptable in this digital age.

As far as can be ascertained, HE have not responded to our concerns regarding increased traffic along the B1043 through both Offord Darcy and Offord Cluny. Since the envisaged road layout does not enable traffic travelling north along the A1 to turn east onto the A14 towards Cambridge, and the alternative A428 is already gridlocked even before the very large housing developments along its path are completed, the obvious conclusion is that traffic from the south and south-west will navigate along the B1043 to Godmanchester and join the A14 at Fen Drayton via the “old” A14.

We continue to assert that regarding the proposed Huntingdon Southern Bypass, the whole exercise is misguided and unnecessary. The “Alternative A14” scheme proposed by the Brampton A14 Action Group is very largely what we have proposed from the start of this whole process. That by upgrading the existing A14 to modern A-road standards, with proper slip roads for entry and exit and the provision of a hard shoulder, by dualling the A428 between St Neots and Caxton and improving the A428/A1 link at the Black Cat roundabout, there will be a greater improvement in traffic movement in the area as a whole, at much lower cost.

But perhaps most of all is the realisation that this scheme just does not work. It addresses a relatively small part of the A14. Accidents and delays occur along the entire length of the road from the M6 interchange to Newmarket and points east. The delays for traffic heading into Cambridge will continue as before, since this is a Cambridge problem, not caused by the A14. The great majority of the delays along the proposed section are relatively minor accidents, breakdowns and vehicle fires, exacerbated by there being no hard shoulder onto which to move the obstructions. But the new A14 will not have hard shoulders either ! This alone would seem to indicate that the entire scheme at a cost of £1.5bn will not actually solve the root cause of the current problem!

## **The Route**

Some three years since the revival of the proposition to re-route the A14 via a Southern By-pass, there is still no indication of the actual route “on the ground”. With particular regard to the Offords there is still much anxiety surrounding the exact positioning of the viaduct, the bridge over the railway line and the point at which the road crosses the B1043 and thus its overall proximity to Offord Cluny.

The lack of detail and reference points on both the landscape itself and the maps provided by Highways England (usually marked “not to scale”) make it hard for a layman to ascertain these with a sufficient degree of accuracy. HE themselves have refused to put such markers on the land itself, although no good reason was offered. The Parish Council feel that HE are being given too much leeway regarding the road positioning (and indeed much other detail) and would ask, in the event of the development gaining approval, what safeguards are in place to prevent this happening and which body has responsibility for ensuring and enforcing the terms and conditions of this approval?

## **The B1043**

Both Offord Darcy and Offord Cluny are essentially ribbon developments, with houses sited either side of the B1043, roughly equidistant from St Neots to the south and Huntingdon to the north. At present, traffic commuting to Cambridge from St Neots will either take the A428 or the northbound A1, turning east onto the A14 at Brampton Hut. However the planned road layout will no longer offer this option. The A428 is already overburdened with commuter traffic and is a single carriageway from St Neots to Caxton Gibbet. It is gridlocked at rush hour with traffic joining from the new Love’s Farm development, a situation that will only get worse when the other developments in the area (Love’s Farm East and Wintringham Park) are completed.

Thus many commuters in the region will use the B1043 through Great Paxton and the Offords to avail themselves of the route that will follow the line of the existing A14 east of Huntingdon and head eastwards, joining the new A14 at Fen Drayton. It is likely that this volume of traffic will cause gridlock in Godmanchester, already severely congested at peak times.

Indeed the impact of the removal of access points onto the eastbound A14 at Brampton Hut and Godmanchester, with the resultant “funnelling” of traffic now with fewer options, does not seem to have been taken into account in any of the analyses of future traffic flows published by HE. We continue to have grave concerns over the impact on local traffic flows that this scheme will cause. Godmanchester is already gridlocked during peak traffic flows without this additional burden being imposed.

On a related note, there still appear to be no contingency plans in the event that the A14 is closed in the vicinity of the proposed Southern Bypass. It is difficult to envisage anything other than utter chaos when (not if) there is an incident sufficiently severe to cause its closure. Again this point has been raised by many participants in this DCO process, but does not appear to have been addressed by HE.

## **Huntingdon Viaduct**

In our previous submission we expressed concerns regarding the removal of the viaduct as it traversed the railway line. All the points raised remain valid. It is difficult not to come to the conclusion that HE's offer to remove the viaduct is nothing other than a "sweetener" to persuade Hunts District Council to back the scheme as a whole and to contribute £25 million towards the cost.

We also made the point that Huntingdon would lose significant amounts of recreational land, taken to provide an alternative route in the absence of the viaduct. This situation would appear to have worsened, given HE's recent request to allow the compulsory purchase of a much greater area of Mill Common than originally proposed.

## **The Landscape**

We have throughout made the point that the route as it crosses the Ouse Valley north of the Offords will destroy one of the most picturesque landscapes in Cambridgeshire.

And again we would make the point that even at this late stage of the DCO process, HE have still not provided any visual representations of the proposed viaduct west of the river Ouse, the bridge as it crosses the railway, and the road itself as it traverses from the railway bridge. north of the Offords to the B1043 and points eastwards. Surely, at the very least, it should have been a requirement of HE that they include such material within their original DCO submission on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2014.

We continue to assert that there is still insufficient detail regarding all these aspects of the proposed construction to enable the Planning Inspectorate to arrive at a fully evaluated conclusion.

## **Environmental Impact Assessment**

At a recent presentation given by HE to a number of Parish Councils at the Western end of the proposed bypass, the effect of pollution from the re-routed A14 traffic was covered. It appears that, according to HE's "models" there will be no impact whatsoever! This even in the proximity of Brampton, where an additional six lanes of traffic carrying upwards of 85,000 vehicles per day will pass within 200 metres of the community. When the presenter was asked what action would be taken if these models were wrong and that once the road was up and running, the various pollutants exceeded the permitted levels, he responded (whilst somewhat taken aback that the integrity of his wonderful forecasting models was being called into question) that probably no action would be taken to close the road.

Does this not make the entire exercise rather pointless?

## **Alternatives**

We continue to assert that if similar sensible measures were applied to the existing A14, then most of the issues regarding congestion caused by accidents and breakdowns on this stretch of road would also be addressed. A “hard shoulder” to enable offending vehicles to be swiftly removed from the carriageways, properly designed slip roads rather than right-angle junctions, to allow traffic to enter and exit the road safely and the removal of lay-bys (or “lorry-stops” as they have become) in order to reduce the number of accidents involving lorries. Provide a proper rest area for lorry drivers to compensate. The Brampton A14 Action group have produced a detailed version of this proposal, which HE appeared to dismiss out of hand, for no good reason other than it did not appear to meet with their agenda.

All this could be achieved at a fraction of the cost, both monetary and human, of Highways England’s proposed solution for improving the A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon route.

**The Parish Council of Offord Cluny and Offord Darcy**

8<sup>th</sup> November 2015

[offordspc@deltagamma.co.uk](mailto:offordspc@deltagamma.co.uk)