

M25 Junction 10 (TRO 10030) – M25/A3 Development Consent Order (DCO)

Attn: Mr Gavin Jones, Lead Member of Inspector Panel

Written Submission from Councillor Colin Cross (Guildford Borough Council Member for Lovelace Ward, covering Ripley, Ockham and Wisley Parishes)

Dear Sirs,

A) Introduction and Background

Further to my attendance at the Preliminary Meeting on Tuesday, 12 November, I wish to present this paper so as to ensure you are aware of the main local issues that attach to this Highways England (HE) Proposal. Before doing so, however, I wish to make it clear that HE personnel have made minimal effort to contact me for my views or meet to discuss them.

I am the sole GBC Councillor representing this ward and virtually the entire proposed project is due to be carried out within the curtilage of its three Lovelace Villages. To prove my point, even the current HE exercise of making all the proposal documents available to the public totally omits to have any such availability within this ward, yet they are made available in far-flung locations such as Woking, Sunbury, Cobham, etc, towns that are not even within Guildford Borough.

A further anomaly is the public consultation as to whether Option 9 or 14 was preferable (commenced in December 2016) resulted in an approximate ratio of 2:1 votes* in favour of Option 9. In March 2018, HE announced the results of this exercise by stating that they had opted for Option 14, in spite of overwhelming public opinion to the contrary. Why bother to go through this futile exercise then? (*64% chose Option 9 and 29% chose Option 14).

B) The Case Against This Project

1. Financial

I have not been kept informed of the overall project budget, particularly the added costs of the A3/Wisley flyover concept, which will have to run from Ockham Roundabout to Wisley Gardens, going over the A3 and carrying 2 lanes of traffic plus room for pedestrians, cyclists and horse-riders in both directions. Judging from conversations with the RHS Wisley Management and others I estimate the current budget to be £250-300 million. There are also likely to be hidden further costs, as yet unknown, relating to land replacement deals (of which I believe there are up to 50 so far). My objection to this expenditure is that it represents appallingly poor value for money. The advantages being advertised are quite minor in reality and could be achieved without this massive expenditure and huge, lengthy, inconvenience to both road users and locals alike. (There are also the environmental and pollution factors to add to the case against, which I will outline later). In my conclusion (pg 4) I will outline altogether more cost-effective solutions, utilising practical methods already in use both in UK and overseas.

2. Practical

Examining the benefits that are supposed to accrue from this upheaval we see that there will be (temporary) improvements in the speed of traffic using the junction, although only at certain times of day. In particular it is emphasised that increased feeder lanes on the A3 and the abolition of traffic lights at the M25 slips will enhance the driver experience and speed-up in travel time.

In practice all it will do, whether heading north, south, east or west on either highway, will be to get the vehicle to the nearest congestion point quicker and thus be part of a greater volume of traffic arriving there at that time, thus creating yet greater congestion.

This is fact, based on living within a mile or so of the junction and using it since it first opened in the 1980's. The potential for traffic hold-ups going towards London or Guildford on the A3 is extremely high and at Guildford in particular peak travel times the jams often back up to the A3 Ripley Service Stations, about 4 miles north of the infamous 2-lane Guildford 'flyover' near Stoke Roundabout. That's 4 miles and 3 lanes of traffic, with some filtering off and queueing at the A3 Burpham sliproad. It does not end at the start of the flyover however, the 2 through lanes there are fed by slips which, in practice, limit through traffic to one lane and this creates multiple hold-ups out to the Hogs Back turn-off, another 3 miles further south. That's 7 miles of queues in all and it gets worse yearly.

In summary, my point is that 'solving' the M25/A3 Junction 10 problems is both temporary in nature and does little or nothing to alleviate the real underlying problems on these major arteries. The phrase "pushing the meat around the plate" perfectly sums up what will actually be achieved.

3. The RHS Wisley A3 'Flyover' Proposal by HE

This proposal is the epitome of the victory of hope over experience as for 3 years now HE have insisted that they will be able to control the A3 north bound RHS Wisley traffic from coming off the A3 at Send and travelling through Ripley to get to the Gardens on the A3 sliproad, thus avoiding the lengthy detour up to the M25/A3 Junction 10 and back to the Ockham roundabout (an extra 5.3 miles of travel). Both the RHS and local Parish Councils have insisted that this is impossible to control.

It is now conceded by HE that their modelling results show this as a reality and it is acknowledged in the DCO papers. RHS Wisley and their solicitor, Richard Max, have been most eloquent on the manifold problems arising from this proposal (see their 10 page submission of 6/9/2019), I do not therefore plan to expand on my criticism further. I do, however, fully endorse their alternative solutions and comments.

4. The Local Environment

This DCO should not be considered in isolation as there are a number of highly relevant local developments which are coming together at around the same time, including:

- a) The former Wisley Airfield project (promoted by Wisley Property Investments Ltd - WPIL)
- b) RHS Wisley Site and Membership Expansion
- c) Garlicks Arch 550 Homes Site Development on Portsmouth Road, Ripley/Send
- d) The Drift Golf Club Course Redevelopment (approved by SCC)
- e) The necessity for a new local Sewage Works, (close to A above)

The former airfield project is planned for a site in Ockham (not Wisley) and will have access to the A3 via a sliproad and Ockham Roundabout. The total housing number is 2,000+ with more land available for a larger number. Additional travellers pitches and employment sites are also included. The likely outcome of this site going ahead in the near future (i.e. 2021) is that ultimately it will spill some 4,000+ vehicles onto the A3, M25 and local roads, on a daily basis and all making multiple journeys. There is no public transport on site and although there are plans for community-owned private mini-busses, it will be a skeleton service and its viability is unproven. The release of properties onto the market is likely to be 200 p.a. over a 10 year spell, whilst the ongoing

construction of both infrastructure and housing will demand a decade of HGV's on both local and arterial roads.

RHS Wisley expansion plans have been funded by a £65 million injection into a 5-year plan, now in its 3rd year. A £30 million new science block is under construction and plans to open is 2020/21 (a 37% increase). The membership plans are to expand from the 1.1 million now to 1.5 million by 2021. The implications to local traffic are immense as there are virtually no public transport facilities at the site and it relies wholly on private vehicles. There are also up to 700 staff and volunteers working at the Gardens, the majority full time.

The specific problem is that traffic coming from the south via Ripley to visit the RHS equates to up to 400,000 more car journeys p.a., that's over 1,000 per day, 10am to 5pm, 7 days a week on average. The real problem is that visitors come more in the warmer weather and at weekends. That pushes the daily car movements to 2,000+ per day and up to 4,000 at peak summer 'event' weekends. That's +570 extra hourly car movements in an already busy and congested Ripley High Street, just related to RHS traffic. (There are 100+ staff at the adjacent Wisley Golf Club and many National Trust workers at offices in Wisley Village).

The planned/approved local developments at Garlicks Arch, The Drift Golf Club (also in Lovelace Ward and at nearby Ockham Road North) and a new, locally sited, sewage works are all substantial construction projects which will go on over a number of years in each case. (Further details are available).

The amount of HGV movements altogether are incalculable when added to the two major projects of the former Wisley airfield and RHS Wisley sites. Just how that can be made to work alongside the A3/M25 construction traffic and the inevitable semi-permanent road congestion will take a whole new level of traffic modelling skills. Please note that on a visit to Ripley Village will be imperative, particularly in rush hour, to see first hand the unique problems caused by the narrowness of Newark Lane (in the centre of the High Street and a main route to Woking station). In a fairly recent SCC Traffic Study of Ripley, it referred to the problems there as being "unmitigable" and "severe".

5. The Environment and Pollution Problems

There are widespread environmental and ecological concerns regarding the Ockham and Wisley Commons, designated Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area (TBHSPA) and Site of Scientific Interest (SSSI). The delicate natural balance has so far survived and is the provider of a unique habitat for many rare species. The proposed huge expansion of the site, together with the inevitable increase in pollution and increased toxicity levels locally needs to be fully addressed by this Examination. The presence of an internationally renowned and unique horticultural centre such as the RHS Wisley is further reason why this is not just a routine matter that can be rubber-stamped and then forgotten.

C) Summary

Hopefully the above remarks begin to paint a picture of a local environment that is uniquely under threat from this and other local major developments. There is a real fear that, unless there is some form of overarching strategic plan in place to cover the next decade, our 3 villages will not survive the pressures and changes being thrust upon them from all directions. It is geographically a large area but sparsely populated, as can be seen below.

	<u>Population</u>	<u>Houses</u>
Ripley	1,600	1,000
Ockham	300	180
Wisley	<u>100</u>	<u>80</u>
Approx. Total	<u>2,000</u>	<u>1,260</u>

It is a historically richly endowed area, with many Grade 1 and Grade 2 listed buildings and a unique architectural heritage to be proud of but which is now seriously under threat. Its rural nature is borne out by its many country lanes, with no street lights, pavements or cycle lanes to speak of.

It exists in direct and stark contrast to the 2 "superhighways" that carve a mighty "T" across it like a scar in the local landscape and both then co-exist in splendid isolation to our local lives most of the time. However, that is now slowly changing as the A3, once known as the Ripley Bypass, regularly blocks and diverts its cars so that Ripley High Street turns into the A3 Bypass. This occurs weekly now and gets worse every year.

D) Suggested Solutions

Solutions are not easy to come by but the RHS Wisley proposal for two northbound spurs on the A3 Ockham Roundabout are an obvious place to start. They would do a huge amount to alleviate much of Ripley's current and future traffic problems and have much local support. Please consider this option.

In terms of other alternatives to going ahead with the HE proposal, there are other ideas that can be considered:

- Imposing a 50mph speed limit on all vehicles within a 1 mile distance of the A3/M25 Interchange.
BENEFIT: Less accidents in a highly congested area.
- Construction of overhead and gantry signage on the A3 (north and south) to get vehicles in the right lanes well ahead of time.
BENEFIT: Reduce the high incidences of late lane changing when approaching that junction.
- Make the northbound traffic coming out of Wisley Lane onto the A3 go down a dedicated lane to the A3/M25 underpass only, and not try and cross over lanes to the A3 flyover.
BENEFIT: This traffic will still be free to choose to go onto the A3 north to London, but via the underpass sliproad which is a much safer route than lane hopping across the A3.

Compared to £350 million+, the cost of these 3 improvements would be minimal, save lives and improve safety generally. The fallacy that more investment will make for quicker journeys will not be borne out in practice as arriving more quickly at the next jam is not a genuine time saving.

Please consider these simple and proven alternatives before accepting the HE proposals.

NOTE: I am happy to discuss any of the above if it is considered to be of any further assistance.

Colin G Cross
Guildford Borough Councillor, Lovelace Ward
Email: [REDACTED]

24/11/2019