

A303 Sparkford to Ilchester Dualling Project

Phil Gamble – registration identification number 20015057

Submission to the Open Floor Hearing at the SSDC Offices on 12th December 2018.

I am speaking as a resident of West Camel who has lived in the village for over 40 years. I have been a Parish Councillor and was Chairman of the Council for a number of years.

Why am I here? I am disappointed and angry with Highway England's for their unwillingness to listen to local views and to give them due consideration.

My plea is to "Plan for the future".

I will begin by saying that everyone I have spoken to is fully supportive of dualling this section of the A303 and have been so since the first proposal back in 1990. It can't come soon enough. We have had a long time to think about it, suffer the consequences when the proposals were aborted, and welcome the separation of fast moving through traffic from slower local vehicles.

I wish to challenge two issues which are linked:

- 1. My first challenge is the need for a mid-section east-bound junction at Downhead. This junction does not connect into the National A-road trunk network.**

To quote from the Highways England Consultation Report 5.1 para 5.3.5

The following significant comments did not result in design changes:

Requests to remove Downhead Lane junction *and Hazlegrove junction* from the scheme. These have been retained as they are required to maintain access between local roads and the A303, *and to enable local road and non-motorised users to cross the A303 once at-grade junctions are removed;*

I support the need for a junction at Hazelgrove which connects with the A-road trunk network.

The Downhead junction only provides local access but I recognise it would provide easy access for two large agricultural enterprises situated north of the current A303. In a recent article ([published in the Times "Tractor ban on A-roads puts farmers in a jam" page 18 Saturday 27th October 2018](#)) Jim O'Sullivan, chief executive of Highways England, confirmed their continuing commitment to convert a small number of dual carriageways into motorway standard expressways starting with the A14(M) between Cambridge and Huntingdon.

The A303 is high on that list of upgrade to expressway - see recent Highways England publications

- ["Creating an Expressway to the South West, The case for the A303/A358 Corridor"](#) (PR155/16)
- ["A303 Sparkford to Ilchester Dualling Scheme, Public Consultation"](#) (PR103/16)

When this upgrade happens it would restrict access to slow moving traffic on this new expressway.

I believe to provide this new junction is questionable and certainly not a good use of public money to provide a junction which becomes unusable by a major user.

With regard to the safety issue. In Highways England's own words from their technical report "Fewer junction means improved safety - reduces junction hopping and carriageway weaving". With less than 6kms between junctions at Podimore and Hazelgrove the safe use of the proposed dual-carriageway could be improved by removing the Downhead junction.

Without the Downhead junction it would be possible to upgrade the A303 from Mere to Podimore and beyond to Expressway standard without any impact on local connectivity. Over this section there are existing local roads to maintain local access, with no further actions or expense necessary, assuming the southern link road is maintained.

2. My second challenge is to retain a southern link road – following the existing A303 carriageway.

The merits of this has been the central theme for many local people and reflected in representations to Highways England.

As local residents we "enjoy" the dangers and the disruption caused by the "overflow" of A303 westbound through traffic on a regular basis. We all support the dualling of our section of the A303 but please listen to us - future resilience is still important and the ability to provide this at any cost should be considered.

Several local people with considerable experience of similar projects have offered engineering details and contributed to the consultation process but seemingly their practical options have not been fully costed or, if they have, this information have not been shared.

In their Consultation Report 5.1 para 5.3.5 HE dismiss retaining a parallel link. They say the following significant comments did not result in design changes:

- Requests to retain the existing A303 as a parallel local road to assist local traffic flow and provide a diversionary route avoiding West Camel and Queen Camel in case the A303 is closed.

I would like to add that resilience is also required when the A303 is busy (West bound traffic already queues at the Sparkford roundabout. Will these queues just move on to Podimore roundabout until the Podimore flyover is constructed?!) The A303 also overflows when the M5 is congested or closed. (This happened in November 2017 when Highways England had one of their consultation days in the Davis Hall.)

An analysis of the environmental impact of the scheme had shown it would be marginally worse than the current proposal, due to the presence of the Camel Hill Transmitter Station Local Wildlife Site.

There is uncertainty about the availability of MOD land, which would be necessary for the parallel local road proposal. It would not be possible to rely on the use of this land, and doing so would be a risk to the delivery of the scheme.

The uncertainty about the availability of MOD land must be questioned. It was available for the 1990 proposals and, even at an early stage in consultations, Mott MacDonald admitted that availability of this land had not been a priority in discussions with the MOD.

Additionally, the cost of the parallel local road proposal, estimated at £180 million, was more than the £171 million estimated for the current proposal.

The Consultation Report suggests that the cost difference is £9M. Detailed financial information has not been shared and hence could not be challenged.

Does this take into account there would be no need at all for the Downhead Junction?

Does this take account of the reduced compensation to businesses on route that could continue to trade and benefit our rural economy?

Does this take into account the major benefits and savings during the construction phase? Minimal rerouting of through traffic, reduction in land required for construction traffic, haul routes etc. These are real and major benefits during the construction phase.

Highways England recognises concerns about the impact of the scheme on traffic on local roads raised during the statutory consultation. However, Highways England's modelling show that the effect will not be great enough to be considered significant in transport assessment terms.

Traffic calming is already an issue in the village, where the two through roads narrow to single track, because we are on a daily rat-run route and are unconvinced with predicted traffic modelling predictions.

In addition provision of the eastbound junction at Downhead would make it easier and in fact encourage commuters to the south east, Sherborne and beyond, to use West Camel village as a cut through.

Taken with the fact that the scheme is deliverable without the proposed alternative, Highways England would not be able to justify the inclusion of the parallel local road;

The scheme in principle has the full support of everyone, but it should leave a positive local legacy not a missed opportunity which leaves local business and the local community frustrated that yet again the people in charge, who don't have to live with the consequences, know what is best for us!

My plea is - Plan for the future and get the best overall value from the public purse.

The Parish of West Camel is a small caring and self-supporting active community – we have built an all-weather play court, a new village hall in 2001 and believe we should be heard. Drainage from the project is an issue with houses in the village flooded at least six times over recent year.