

Inadequate Consultation

As a resident of Cowley village, the community most negatively affected by option 30 and therefore a major interested party, I would like to state that we have not been adequately consulted and our views considered. There have been no public exhibitions in Cowley itself. Our parish council has been putting forward the views of Birdlip only which are directly opposed to those of Cowley. (It is a joint parish council with a Birdlip chairman, clerk and majority of members). Does the ExA realise that the option 30 scheme which has been presented as having the backing of the local community actually only has the backing of Birdlip? Other communities including Cowley back the improvement of the road per se but not option 30 above the other options.

I attended a consultation meeting in Brockworth where option 30 was being sold as the best option using many maps and analyses. At this point Cowley was not even shown on the maps and no one had visited the village to check out the local roads. As all previous schemes for A417 improvement had not affected Cowley directly, the village has not been actively engaged in the campaigns, unlike Birdlip who have been advocating a tunnel as the solution for at least 22 years (the length of time I have lived in Cowley). It was therefore beholden upon Highways England to actively seek out the views of Cowley, Stockwell and Coberley to take their views into account. By the time these communities had woken up to the ramifications of the option 30 proposal, it had already been adopted as the favoured option and the community felt powerless to make their opinions heard. Indeed the route of the road moved considerably closer to Cowley (230m) without any consultation with locals under the guise of 'best land fit'. No further consultation was sought at this stage despite the increased impact on Cowley village.

Is option 30 really the best option?

Speed: My understanding is that the final choice between the two favoured option 12 and 30 came down to a section of the road in option 12 which would have a 50mph speed limit due to the road curvature. This was seen as having an economic impact due to marginally longer estimated journey times. Given that speed limits will inevitably reduce on all major roads as part of an environmental protection drive, this should not be the deciding factor. Indeed, journey times for option 12 would be substantially shorter than at present due to the elimination of traffic jams.

Environmental impact: Option 30 goes through virgin AONB countryside disturbing wildlife habitats and ruining the tranquillity and landscape of the very popular public footpaths in the vicinity of the new road. Option 12 by contrast follows the existing route more closely and therefore has a less detrimental impact. Can the ExA be shown how the two options compare in this respect? Surely leaving virgin countryside untouched is more environmentally beneficial than re-wilding an existing road?

In summary, whilst I believe that the A417 needs to be made dual carriageway along its entire length, I believe that option 30 is the wrong choice of route for this improvement. Highways England need to reconsider all the options including the tunnel and option 12 in the light of the changed priorities of today where environmental protection is highly valued and people's working and shopping habits have fundamentally changed the way we now use our roads.