

Improvement of the A417 is a priority to tackle safety and congestion and I recognise the applicant's efforts over the years to find a solution to this difficult problem.

However the village of Cowley is clearly the community most negatively impacted by this scheme in terms of noise, loss of local amenity and the potential for increased rat-running, particularly during construction. Other Cowley residents have considered this in detail and I am confident that is well set out in other representations.

However, having been responsible for arranging both informal and statutory pre-application consultations in support of Development Consent Order applications I do not believe consultation with the village of Cowley has been at all adequate and I am concerned that Cowley may suffer unnecessarily as a result.

It is evident from the Statement of Community Consultation and Consultation Report that the applicant has relied enormously on engagement with Parish Councils to understand the views of near neighbours to the road scheme:

"4.1.28 Highways England has engaged with Parish Councils in the vicinity of the scheme during its development. Whilst this has included formal consultation (as set out in Chapters 6 and 9 of this report), Highways England has also sought to engage with Parish Councils on matters raised by or affecting the residents they represent. This approach was of particular importance during the 2020 supplementary statutory consultation, during which Highways England took all reasonable steps to engage with local residents during COVID-19, involving Parish Councils to help overcome challenges to engage with residents face to face.

This approach also helped to involve residents through Parish Council representation as part of focused discussions on specific issues pertinent to local communities, such as provision of PRow, provision of new car parking and the effects of the scheme on local bus stops.

4.1.29 In addition, Highways England has sought to work collaboratively with Parish Councils to raise awareness of the scheme and statutory public consultations, such that all members of the community can participate. This has included briefing the Parish Councils prior to consultation and where possible, agreeing with them that consultation materials or advertising can be distributed or displayed from their premises."

Cowley is served by the joint Cowley and Birdlip Parish Council. The villages of Birdlip and Cowley are separated by the A417 which is currently closer to Birdlip but would move closer to Cowley as a result of this scheme. Birdlip has four seats on the Council (3 councillors and the Chair) versus Cowley's three councillors.

There is an obvious conflict of interest issue here which should have been noticed by the developer, who then ought to have been especially careful to understand Cowley views specifically, whereas the opposite appears to have been true.

Not only does there appear to have been no effort to directly engage face to face with the village, but requests for consultation events in the village have been declined. Not a single event was held in Cowley during consultation for this scheme. The mobile consultation vehicle did not visit. There was however an exhibition event held in Birdlip.

This issue has come into sharper focus as the proposals have matured. In Cowley the strength of feeling and degree of understanding of the implications of this scheme have increased and

developed but this has not been reflected in the representations of the Parish Council.

At least one representation made in support of the scheme by the Cowley and Birdlip Parish Council was not seen in draft by the Cowley Councillors, and in one case Cowley was not even mentioned.

The concerns and weight of consideration being given to these impact of the scheme by Cowley residents has been made clear recently by Cowley Councillors and is visible in relevant representations made earlier to this Examination. It will no doubt be further evident to the ExA from this current round of written representations. The Parish Council however has not reflected this in a written representation but instead voted to make no submission at all at this stage.

I am sure all the Parish Councillors are acting in good faith and attempting to do their best for the communities they represent, and as someone who has worked for many years in project development, I know that there is no solution to a big infrastructure project which pleases everyone.

However, it is reasonable to expect a developer to do their utmost to gather the views of most affected communities, particularly when it would have been so easy to do.

I would like to know how, in these circumstances the applicant can consider that it has fully heard the voices of Cowley in the process.

I would also like to know whether the ExA is confident that, given this, the applicant has been able to develop adequate understanding of the implications for Cowley to minimise impacts through in the scheme's design and devise appropriate mitigations including specific measures in Cowley, and compensation where impacts cannot be mitigated.

Finally I would like to know what conditions would be applied to Consent (for any option) that would ensure the applicant continues to monitor impacts, has adequate funding set aside, within reason, to deal with arising or unforeseen issues, and is required to put in place mechanisms which ensure the effective and formal involvement of Cowley residents.