



A417 MISSING LINK - WRITTEN REPRESENTATION AT DEADLINE 3
(REFERENCE NO. TR010056)

Cotswolds Conservation Board (the 'Board')

1 February 2022

This Written Representation aims to provide the Examining Authority (ExA) with further information on the Board's position on the proposed scheme.

In particular, this Deadline 3 submission will include the following information:

1. The written summary of the Board's oral representation at the ISH2 (Environmental Matters) Hearing on 27 January 2022;
2. The Board's comments on other matters that have arisen during the Hearing;
3. The views of the Board with regard to the Cotswold Way National Trail Diversion Report (following a request for further information from the ExA on 14 January 2022).

The Board is aware that the ExA has requested that the Board submits their position with regard to the scheme's holistic approach to the historic landscape. The Board will endeavour to provide a substantive response by Deadline 4 (14 February 2022).

1. ISH2 (Environmental Matters) – the Board's oral representation:

Agenda Item 3 - Assessment of Alternatives:

Before giving the ExA our considerations on the Assessment of Alternatives, The Board would like to clarify their position on a statement contained within National Highway's Written Representation under the section titled "Impact on the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and policy compliance":

"National Highways considers that it is important to highlight that the statutory body for the Cotswolds AONB, Cotswolds Conservation Board (CCB), has confirmed in their Written Representation (REP1-030) that they overall consider that exceptional circumstances do apply in the case of this scheme; that it would be in the public interest; and that it does comply with the NPSNN. CCB has also stated in their Written Representation that National Highways has sufficiently considered alternative options for the scheme, including those previously suggested by CCB. National Highways believes that the views of the statutory conservation board vindicate the landscape-led approach to the design of the scheme."

The Board would like to clarify that 'exceptional circumstances for the scheme do apply' does not, on its own, lead to a 'vindication of the landscape-led approach of the scheme'.
Assessment of alternatives

Cotswolds Conservation Board

The Old Prison, Fosse Way, Northleach
Gloucestershire GL54 3JH



The Cotswolds National Landscape is a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), managed and looked after by the Cotswolds Conservation Board.



Chairman:
Brendan McCarthy

Vice Chair:
Rebecca Charley

The Board would like to make it clear that the suggested alternatives it has previously put forward related to potential design changes to Option 30. The Board requested that National Highways considered and assessed them against the current design, rather than suggesting that they were better options.

National Highways consulted on the proposed scheme in autumn 2019. At that stage, the scheme incorporated a 25m deep cutting up the Cotswold escarpment and would have involved approximately one million cubic metres of material being taken off site. When reviewing the proposed scheme, the Board identified that a cut and cover tunnel could potentially be incorporated into the scheme design, instead of the 25m deep cutting, at a similar cost. The Board recommended the inclusion of a cut and cover tunnel in its formal response to the statutory consultation (8 November 2019). The Board considered this cut and cover tunnel proposal to be a very different engineering solution to the tunnel options that had been previously considered and/or recommended.

Following the 2020 design changes, National Highways changed the proposed gradient of the road up the escarpment from 7% to 8%. This has resulted in the depth of cutting now being reduced to around 15m. As such, there is little requirement for material to be taken off site. The Board accepted that these changes reduced the benefits of a cut and cover tunnel.

In May 2021, National Highways provided the Board with a report (*Cut and Cover Tunnel Feasibility Study*) that set out the reasons why the suggested cut and cover tunnel option would not represent an improvement to the proposed scheme.

Between 2018 and 2019, the Board also put forward a number of additional variations to the preferred route for National Highways to consider. These variations were put forward because the Board considered that they would potentially be less harmful / more beneficial for the natural beauty of the AONB as well as potentially delivering additional economic and social benefits. These proposed variations included:

- having a Birdlip link road that connected the B4070 south of Birdlip with Cowley Junction (rather than the link road connecting with Shab Hill Junction via Barrow Wake);
- moving the Shab Hill Junction further north (in order to reduce the impact on the valley at Shab Hill);
- re-aligning the A436 link road to a lower contour line, closer to Ullen Wood (in order to reduce the visual impact of this link road).

In August 2021, National Highways provided an Options Report (*Cotswolds Conservation Board – Options Report*) which addressed each of these options in turn and concluded that none of them would represent an improvement to the proposed scheme.

Finally, in 2019, the Board put forward potential variations to how the A436 might link with the A417. In the public consultation in autumn 2019, these were identified as Alternative 2 and Alternative 3 in the A417 Consultation Booklet. National Highways identified that Alternative 2 would be the best option, both economically and environmentally, and incorporated this into the design of the A417 Missing Link Scheme.

Agenda Item 7 - Landscape

The Board was encouraged that the ExA had a focus on the scheme's crossings. The scheme lies entirely within a nationally and internationally important landscape and the final design/aesthetics of these crossings is a significant matter for the ExA to consider. Indeed, the Air Balloon Way crossing will, in effect, act as a 'gateway' to the Cotswolds.

In the autumn of 2020, the Board (along with Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust and the National Trust) participated in a series of collaborative workshops with National Highways. These workshops led to welcome improvements to the scheme's design, including:

- the widening of the multi-purpose Gloucestershire Way crossing
- the creation of 'stepping stones' to enhance habitat connectivity

With regard to the aesthetics of the crossings, National Highways stated that this was a matter for detailed design which would occur post Examination. To support National Highways' thinking on this subject, the Board, Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust and the National Trust produced an '*A417 Briefing note for bridges in scheme*' (see Appendix A).

The Board suggests that this document will provide a very good basis on which National Highways can develop a *Design Code* for the crossings (as recommended by the ExA). The Board encourages National Highways to ensure the production of this code is a collaborative process.

Following on from the discussion of detailed design, the Board asks that the ExA considers making it a requirement that National Highways will be committed to continuing its collaborative approach to key environmental matters under discussion, should the DCO be granted (please see examples in the next section).

2. The Board's comments on other matters arising during the Hearing

Detailed design

On multiple occasions during the Hearings there was discussion around detailed design and at what point National Highways should consult on detailed design matters.

The Board recommends that, should the DCO be granted, the ExA places a requirement on National Highways to consult the Board and to encourage their positive collaborative approach in working with relevant bodies to ensure the scheme delivers the best possible outcomes for the landscape, nature, people and the local communities. Examples of themes that the Board would be involved in during detailed design include:

- Design of crossings
- Long term (30 years+) habitat management plan
- Trees species and planting
- Cotswold Way National Trail design, e.g. surfacing, user safety

NB – this shouldn't be considered an exhaustive list.

Lighting

At the ISH1 (Development Consent Order) the Joint Councils and National Highways discussed lighting on roundabouts. The scheme currently has no provision for lighting on roundabouts but the Joint Councils requested that lighting infrastructure should be included as the scheme is delivered. The Board would like clarity over which roundabouts are being considered for lighting infrastructure. The potential of lighting being introduced at a future date raises a concern for the Board as it would have an adverse impact on Dark Skies, one of the special qualities of the AONB.

3. The Board's views on the Cotswold Way National Trail Diversion Report

The Board's Access and Volunteer Lead (Rebecca Jones) met with Tess Jackson (Natural England's Senior Advisor and National Trail Partnership Manager) to discuss this matter on 26 January 2022.

The Board, in principle, supports the proposed diversion of the National Trail. The Board understands that Natural England is satisfied that National Highways should submit the variation order (for the diversion) as part of the DCO process, i.e. it is appropriate that SoS DfT make this direction rather than SoS Defra. The Board also acknowledges that this is on the condition that National Highways consults on this matter with Natural England, Gloucestershire County Council and the Board (as well as any other relevant bodies).

APPENDIX A - A417 Briefing note for bridges in scheme

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