



RAMBLERS

Gloucestershire Ramblers Area

A417 NH DCO Barrow Wake - [REDACTED]

Re: A417 Missing Link at the Air Balloon

National Highways Application for a Development Consent Order

Adverse Impact of the scheme on Barrow Wake View point, Car park and SSSI

A number of organisations responded to the ExQ2 section 2.3.6 request to:-

'Produce a detailed position statement setting out the respective positions regarding the potential effects of increased recreational pressure upon the Crickley Hill and Barrow Wake units of SSSI'.

The current proposals severely reduce parking and facilities within the area near Barrow Wake, tripling the pressure on the View Point car park with resultant impact on the SSSI. The scheme should be reviewed, to retain parking and facilities elsewhere to benefit the View Point car park and SSSI. Updating the scheme could also provide a Biodiversity net gain.

Background

Barrow Wake View point car park is unique in Gloucestershire as somewhere people can park and enjoy the views while reading a newspaper, enjoying a cup of coffee or perhaps eating fish and chips. It's also a welcome meeting place for walkers taking in parts of the Cotswold Way or circular routes to Shab Hill or Birdlip.

To keep the view point clear of long term parking, the access road to Birdlip is used by cyclists, horseboxes and walkers. Further north the Air Balloon provides facilities and parking too.

Loss of parking and facilities in the A417 scheme could lead to pressure to triple the number of visitors to Barrow Wake, which could lead to parking on verges, the protected landscape of the adjoining SSSI or within Birdlip Village.

Promoting the Birdlip Bypass as the Air Balloon Way active travel route could also impact Barrow Wake if its destination is not the Air Balloon.

The applicant's proposal should be reviewed to assess whether the present local road arrangement could be reinstated within the plans and whether the Air Balloon could be retained.

Separation and Overlap of SSSI and A417

The Magic Map right highlights, in light blue, the Areas designated in 1986 as a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

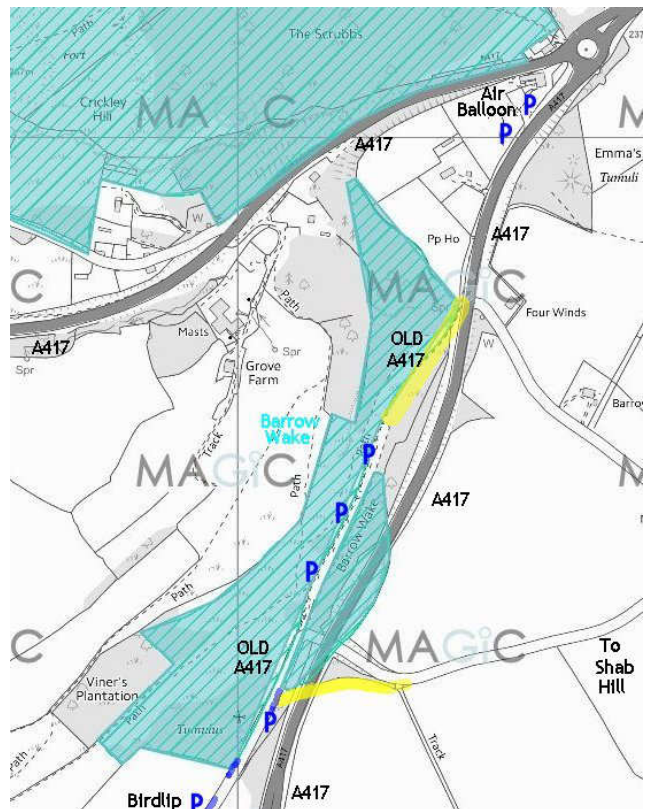
It was assumed that the old A417 would continue to pass between the two pieces of Barrow Wake SSSI with roadside parking for the views. (Yellow shows the old road to the Air Balloon and old minor road to Shab Hill.)

However updates to the A417 were approved at the same time, apparently without knowing about the SSSI. Hence the location of the current A417 (grey) and underpass (white) to Shab Hill within the SSSI boundary.

The view point car park is now a relatively quiet place compared to the continuous stream of traffic that used to pass through.

As well as the 70 spaces at the view point, a further 80 spaces are available in the access road from Birdlip. The Air Balloon has approx. 30 spaces and another 30 spaces in overflow.

The old road is probably an ancient ridge way predating neolithic Emma's Grove nearby.





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Barrow Wake today

Barrow Wake view point is unique along the Cotswold Escarpment as a place to be able to stop and enjoy the views, no matter the weather, read a newspaper, enjoy sandwiches or go for a walk. The car park is relatively quiet as through traffic on the A417, to the east, is well screened with trees and a mild embankment. The car park has 70 marked spaces (plus 2 disabled). When at capacity an extra line of parking can form to the east side.



In places the cats eye road studs still mark the centreline of the old carriageway.

Access Road to Birdlip

To keep the view point clear of long term parking, there is room for another 80 spaces for overflow along the access road to the south from Birdlip (the old A417).



The Applicant currently proposes this road as the main link to Birdlip with the loss of parking.

Air Balloon Parking and Facilities

Just north of Barrow Wake, the Air Balloon Inn has 30 immediate spaces on site and 30 spaces in overflow. It is a well known landmark on the Cotswold Way and for travellers of the current A417. With its facilities and food it is also used as a base for walking and cycling. However the Applicant is proposing that the site is demolished for the new A417 to cut through.



With appropriate bridge or tunnelling methods the new A417 could pass beneath the car park.



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What happens elsewhere when parking is lost?

The A417 scheme proposes loss of parking at the Air Balloon and in the Birdlip access road but where is everyone going to go?

At Cleeve Hill, the Quarry car park is now closed in the evenings and verge parking occurs.



At Barrow Wake, with over 200 spaces trying to use 70, there could be similar pressure to park on the grassland of the SSSI, on verges of surrounding local roads or within Birdlip village.

The scheme suggests parking is available some distance away at a layby outside the Golden Heart at Nettleton Bottom or at the layby at the Cowley Lane junction to Stockwell. However these are already in use so don't really offer extra or alternative capacity.

Shab Hill Minor Road

The image below shows a busy morning. The road is used as a low traffic route for walking, cycling and horse riding. It's planned as the main link road from Shab Hill junction to Birdlip.



Local Traffic

Birdlip Bypass is planned to be closed to all traffic - where is local traffic such as this tractor going to go? The alternative route is via narrow roads to Brimpsfield.



Improving the Scheme

It seems that the scheme has swapped around busy roads with quiet roads with disadvantage to both.

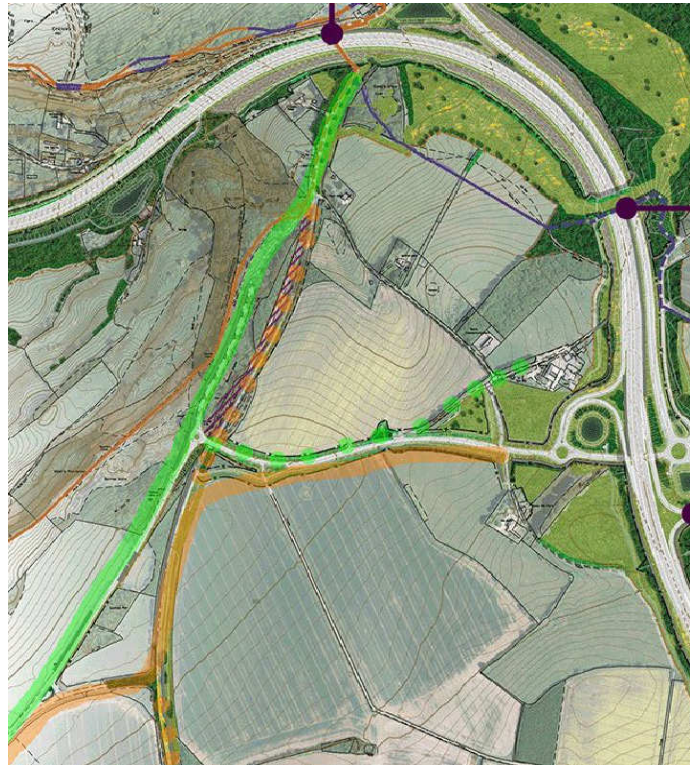
Currently there is a 'shoe' walking route along the pavement from Birdlip, through Barrow Wake and onwards to the Air Balloon, with views across to Crickley Hill.

The map right initially shows the proposed Shab Hill junction with a link road to a new roundabout in the SSSI. The route heads south to Birdlip and parking is lost. The current A417 is proposed closed to traffic and used for walking cycling etc.

If the road hierarchy is reinstated, the shoe walk (highlighted green) is retained and the link to Birdlip (orange) uses some field edge to meet the current A417 junction.

The current A417 can be kept in place south of the junction as a low traffic access to Cowley, Stockwell and Nettleton Bottom suitable for walking, cycling, horse riding.

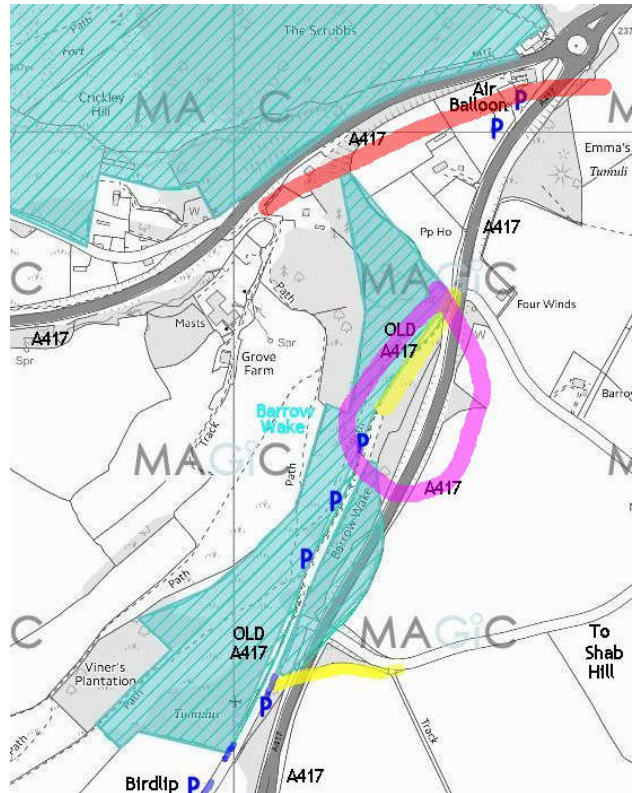
If the new road is constructed beneath its car park, not only can the Cotswold Way stay on its authors line, the Air Balloon and any spare road space there becomes the scheme recreational focal point, relieving pressure on the SSSI. The bus stop could be brought back into use too.



Biodiversity Net Gain

The current proposals pass the new A417 (red) through a deep cutting, removing the northerly tip of the Barrow Wake SSSI. Taking the road underneath would need less excavation and avoid seeking so much mitigation in the scheme. It may be possible to extend the SSSI there too.

Some spare ground (circled mauve) between the old and current A417 might also be useful for the SSSI although the old road itself (yellow) should be retained for at least foot access to the viewpoint car park, or perhaps one way traffic.



Conclusion

Loss of parking and facilities around Barrow Wake, due to the proposals, could not only adversely impact Barrow Wake View point car park, the SSSI could suffer too. Shortcomings should be addressed in the rest of the scheme.

It seems that the impact of the A417 plans on Barrow Wake is best resolved by retaining local parking, facilities and connectivity nearby. The SSSI could also benefit from the use of green bridges or tunnelling.

Footnote

Ramblers have campaigned here to remove through traffic from local roads to make them walkable and crossable, preferably with a tunnel so the landscape remains much the same. Ramblers haven't campaigned for closure of local roads, footpaths, tracks. The Countryside is a living working place and not just a tourism destination .