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01 July 2021

Dear Rob and Tom

**re: A66 Rokeby Junction Options – Historic England comments post site visit
23/06/21**

Chris and I appreciated the opportunity to make the site visit with the Amey-Arup Team on June 23rd. It was very helpful to do so with the DCC Landscape Officers as well – many thanks for arranging this with the Rokeby Park Estate.

As agreed, we set out below our advice on the options based on the evidence we currently have.

**Baseline (Preferred Route) Option (S08 General Arrangement Drawings DRAFT.
PDF)**

Our view on the baseline option as shown on the above drawing has not changed from our previous letter dated 14 June 2021. Namely, we feel that the impact of an overbridge and embankment on the setting and significance of St Mary's Church would be very harmful. The church would no longer be the focal high point in the landscape as it was designed to be and the embanked road would be visually dominant; therefore, we do not support this design option.

Also, to be clear we do not support any option which stays on-line (i.e. removes the vicarage). At present we still do not have adequate data about the significance of the Rectory to take a final view on its demolition. We still take the view that this must be further investigated if the online option remains on the table, and an informed decision for retention or demolition cannot be made until further information assessing its significance is shared.





The Rectory issue aside, we confirm our view that the close alignment of the new dual carriageway to the south of the existing A66 is harmful to the designated assets, particularly the church. The church is already harmed by the noise, pollution and traffic of the existing A66 single carriageway and this would be notably exacerbated by this alignment which would place 6 lanes of traffic directly south of the Church.

The Church is on the Heritage at Risk (HAR) register as a consequence of the impact the A66 currently has. Staying on-line would not remove the impact nor enhance the setting meaning that there is a possibility that the heritage asset is unlikely to ever be removed from the HAR register should an online option be chosen.

Western Option (HE565627-AMY-HGN-S08-SK-CH-000011)

This option lies to the west of St Mary's Church and follows the same off-line route as the above Baseline option with an underpass junction west of St Mary's.

The site visit consolidated our position that this is our preferred option at Rokeby.

We feel that the western junction option offers greater security in terms of minimising negative impacts on the designated heritage assets in this historic landscape; although a harm to significance does remain even with this option.

The proposed siting of the junction to the west of the church ensures the contiguity of physical features and experience of them; from Rokeby Hall, through the park, along Church Plantation to St Mary's Church. As we discussed at the end of the site visit, there is also greater opportunity for additional enhancements along the de-trunked A66 such as:

- biodiversity enhancements and
- improvements to public enjoyment of both the heritage and landscape.

As we noted previously, the combined benefits of the reduced impact to the church and the western arm of the registered landscape along with those associated with the use of the de-trunked A66 are highly beneficial. For this reason, we support the western option as we believe that the overall heritage impacts are much reduced across this option.

Eastern Option (HE565627-AMY-HML-S08-SK-CH-000016)

This option follows the preferred off-line route but places the underpass junction east of the church and closer to the main body of the Registered Park and Garden (RPG) and its associated listed structures. It physically cuts the Church Plantation which is part of the RPG and introduces new infrastructure in the open arable field to the north which is part of its borrowed landscape.





After the site visit, this remains our least preferred option. We acknowledge that it has a more limited land-take than required for the western option; however, it introduces a physical disruption in the landscape at right-angles to the historical grain of the designed landscape (north–south against east–west) and will cause irreversible harm to it.

The parcel of land to the north of Church Plantation in which the road would be placed, while not in the registered area, is a ‘borrowed’ landscape which helps to frame and enhance the bucolic experience of the RPG for the viewer. The inter-visibility between the church, the walk along Church Plantation and the main parkland (principally North Park north of and including North Lodge) is a very sensitive part of the setting of the park and its principal built features.

We believe that the proposed eastern junction option would also require more visually intrusive signage and infrastructure in the proximity of the park boundary wall both along the A66 and the C-road, in particular the south-west entrance gate and screen railings. The outside of the boundary wall and the way it is experienced is still part of the significance of the grade II* asset. The signage by its very function must be visible and eye-catching and will not lend itself to being mitigated.

Lastly, vehicles would be seen, not only passing alongside the boundary walls of the parkland – as they currently are and would be under any of the proposals – but would also be seen approaching the boundary wall where there is no historical entrance point. This may seem a rather insignificant matter, but on the whole, the surrounding network of roads and lanes provide continuation to the journey to and from the park and hall. Again, this right-angle junction with the park boundary is contrary to the historical grain of the landscape.

We looked at some of the key views on site and we re-iterate that a views assessment of the potential impact should be undertaken. This should include all highway infrastructure including lighting, signage and ponds.

On the balance of information currently available we still do not support this option due to the overall harm to the setting and significance of the Gr II* RPG and its associated designated assets.

Conclusions

Historic England have welcomed the opportunity to meet the design team for this scheme and partners from Durham County Council on site to view the two main options being proposed at Rokeby.





Historic England

Our preferred option remains the underpass junction to the west of St Mary's church with an off-line route which re-joins the existing A66 dual carriageway at Rokeby (the junction with the C-road). We believe it will cause the least harm overall to the designated heritage assets and potentially deliver the most opportunity for enhancement in terms of both biodiversity and heritage.


Historic England recognise that yourselves and Highways England must now sift the various impacts, advice and comments received to determine which option you will take forward in line with the assessment methodology . We will, of course, work with you to ensure that whichever option is finally chosen that the impacts on the designated historic environment are avoided, reduced and mitigated – preferably enhanced – where possible.

Yours sincerely



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