

SEEND PARISH COUNCIL

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Seend Parish Council Response to Melksham Bypass 2nd consultation

Introduction:

As with the first consultation, Seend Parish Council has sought the views of its parishioners about the proposals being recommended in the 2nd consultation. This response includes many of their comments.

Preferred Choice would be No Bypass

Our interpretation of the responses to the first consultation shows that the least favoured options were route 10d and 10c and that the majority of people preferred for the existing road network to be improved upon rather than the creation of a new road. This would have the least impact on the surrounding countryside, and with the changing ways that people are working, with more working from home, the traffic growth predictions may not be realized.

When the government is trying to reduce road usage and pollution, it seems contradictory to be encouraging more road use by building more roads.

With global warming and climate change very much in the news with reports of extreme weather across the world, Councils should be looking at ways to reduce their carbon emissions across the country. The Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP, Secretary of State for Transport, in a recent talk on aviation stated that "A bigger problem was road transport which contributes 90% of transport related carbon emissions in the UK". Greg Archer, of the Green Alliance, Transport and Environment, states "The government must level with the public that to avoid dangerous climate change there will have to be fewer cars, less driving and many fewer flights."

It also contradicts Wiltshire Council's bid to become carbon neutral by 2030. This aim should not just relate to its own property and operations. In its climate strategy, it states "*Wiltshire Council has made a firm commitment to becoming a carbon neutral council by 2030, there is a focus on reducing carbon emissions from its operations and property. However, the council also has an ambition for the county of Wiltshire to become carbon neutral. This will require coordinated action by the public sector, businesses and residents working together towards a shared goal.*"

Building the bypass will surely contradict this aim, increase traffic and air pollution, destroy vast swathes of countryside and increase the carbon emissions that the Council is claiming it wants to reduce. If climate change is to be stopped, then hard choices are going to have to be made. Just because money has been made available it should not be used to justify the building of a bypass, when this will encourage

greater reliance on cars. Wiltshire Council should step up and take the lead by saying no to any further major bypass construction of any of the routes. By doing this, Wiltshire Council will really be future proofing our county for following generations.

That said, and to acknowledge that this consultation wants feedback on the recommendations being made, Seend Parish Council would like to make the following comments.

Seend Parish Council is pleased that the Route Option 10d has been dropped from the shortlist because of the likely environmental impact and high costs associated with having to cross the Kennet & Avon canal and Semington Brook. We note it was the least preferred option during the first consultation and we are glad that those concerns have been listened to.

We are saddened that all route options on the western side have been dropped as we did believe that Route 8b had a lot of merit and advantages.

Reasons against Route 10C

It is noted that Route 10C now seems to be the only route option being recommended. With our first response, we raised concerns about both Route 10d and 10c and would have preferred that neither route option was selected. Therefore the choice of 10c is still deeply concerning for us for the following reasons. We are concentrating our comments on the southern section of the route that most affects us and our neighbouring parish.

Impact on Residents of Bowerhill

The building of the bypass along route 10c will have an adverse impact on the residents of Bowerhill, restricting their access routes to the Kennet and Avon Canal and the countryside beyond. Currently there are a number of paths that link the housing estate to the canal and woodland. The new road will effectively put a ring around Bowerhill separating it from the countryside.

Whilst the area that includes Giles Wood and Brag picnic area is inside Seend Parish boundary, it also represents the heart and lungs for the Bowerhill and Melksham people whose easy access to fresh air and exercise brings nature closer to their doors. It is a shared enjoyment by both Melksham and Seend residents as well as canal boat users.

As our Neighbourhood Plan cites: *Footpaths, bridleways, a national cycle route, the canal, woodlands such as Giles Wood and recreation space such as the Brag Picnic Area are valuable assets, and key elements in our Parish green infrastructure enabling access to the countryside and opportunities to enjoy proximity to nature throughout the seasons, whilst promoting good health and wellbeing. Within the settlements, green infrastructure also plays a particularly important role in the character and distinctive characteristic of place, with green verges a prominent feature especially in Seend Village and Seend Cleeve.*... (Seend NP. SP5 Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity).

The proposal states that there will be one crossing point along the route of bridleway SEEN13 which will then bridge the new road creating just one access point to the canal, Giles Wood and surrounding countryside. Bridleway SEEN 17 is being re-routed and it is not clear if footpath SEEN18 will be retained or diverted. SEEN17 runs from the canal bridge through Giles Wood to the fields behind, and is regarded as a better route for horse riders to use rather than SEEN13.

The proposal states that the bridge will be of a size and width to accommodate pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders. As one horse-riding parishioner has pointed out, for a horse and rider to safely cross this bridge they will have to dismount and lead the horse for fear of it being spooked by the noise and movement of heavy traffic below. Concentrating all three users groups has the potential to create some conflict. SEEN13 is already a busy right of way, particularly at weekends. This will only increase with the reduction to one crossing point.

Loss of Tranquility

Neighbourhood Plan: *The BRAG Picnic Area and Giles Wood are places of tranquility alongside the canal, and recreational spaces for those from both Seend Parish and Melksham Without Parish, and for the many visitors to the Kennet & Avon Canal. (Seend NP. SP6 Local Green Space Designations).*

This tranquility will be lost with the bypass as its close proximity, even if not seen, will be heard and smelt. Currently, there is virtually no traffic noise and plenty of fresh air.

Visual and noise impact on Seend Cleeve

We acknowledge that, from Seend's perspective, Route 10c is better than 10d, but the raised level of Seend and Seend Cleeve will mean that Route 10c will still be highly visible and there would be heightened noise and air pollution that would need to be mitigated. A great deal of natural screening and raised banks will be needed to reduce the noise level and visual impact of the new road.

As cited in our Neighbourhood Plan *Seend Cleeve is an organic settlement form located within a rural setting, which has many fine views looking out over meadows and the Kennet & Avon Canal towards Melksham and Sandridge. The green setting of Seend Cleeve provides extensive views giving visual amenity and a sense of space for residents of both Seend Parish and Melksham Without Parish. (Seend NP: SP4 Landscape and Local Key Views).*

Roadside rubbish – Anyone who drives along the Semington bypass and the Western Way can't fail to see the amount of roadside rubbish. Easy access from the proposed bypass to farm gateways, etc is likely to increase the amount of fly tipping. Currently there is no easy access by road users and therefore the majority of visitors to the canal side, woodland and surrounding fields come on foot or bike.

Safety for walkers

At the moment, there is a real community feel about the countryside around Giles Wood, the BRAG picnic area and canal towpath. It is a visitor friendly place at all

times of the day whether you are part of a group or a lone visitor. Bringing a major road close to this area may jeopardize this sense of safety and well being.

Wilts & Berks Canal – we are pleased to note that included in the proposal is a planned bridge to go over the yet to be restored Wilts & Berks canal near Lacock. This important restoration will provide an off road route between Semington and Chippenham.

Road development link with potential housing development

Our preference remains ‘no bypass’ but we acknowledge that Wiltshire Council is under pressure to provide for the planned increase in housing on Melksham’s east side. Whilst it has been stated that the building of the bypass is to be financed independently and is not reliant on any money from housing development, there is concern that the required number of houses to be built in Melksham as cited in the Wiltshire Local Plan, means that the need for a bypass is inextricably linked. There is likely to be a large infill of housing development on the eastern side of Melksham close to the proposed bypass route, and particularly in the Redstocks to Sandridge area. Wiltshire Council should be protecting these greenfield sites robustly resisting the government’s demand that Wiltshire meets its house building targets.

The expected house building that is likely to occur following the building of the bypass, means that there will be a greater dependence on the car, further reinforcing the need for a bypass. Planning for safe cycling and walking routes into and around Melksham should be a priority to help reduce car dependence.

If Route 10C goes ahead – Mitigation

Seend Parish Council would much prefer it if route 10c was not chosen, but if we cannot fight the planned bypass, then we must insist that its impact is minimised. The people of Bowerhill and other affected residents along the route deserve this at the very least. Priority must be given to natural screening, tree planting and bunding over any potential infill of housing.

Land Purchase – when the land purchase is being negotiated with landowners, as well as purchasing land for the road itself, it should be built in the need for land to allow for screening purposes.

We would expect as a condition that the land south of the road and between the canal would not be built on but re-wilded in some way to fit in with the surrounding countryside Giles Wood and canalside. And, north of the road in the Bowerhill area, there are likely to small tracts of land that should be returned to nature and not used for housing infill, It could be that some of this land could be given for community use.

Tree Planting - A programme of tree planting must be implemented on all appropriate land combined with other environmental measures. This will help to screen the bypass, reduce noise and to offset the carbon footprint. There is a woodland charity called Avon Needs Trees which has a good track record for its tree planting projects across Bristol, Bath and Wiltshire and is committed to maintaining public access to these woodlands. They have a lot of local support. Offering land to them would be beneficial. Any tree planting would require a long term management plan and this would need to be built into any planned forestry work.

Banking - The stretch of road from Vernons Farm towards Redstocks and Sandridge will be visible to Seend and Seend Cleeve and should be screened by building up earth banks or rows of tree planting. This would also reduce noise and light pollution from the road.

Conclusion

Seend Parish Council strongly urges the Major Highways Project team to take on board the above concerns that we have with the route option 10C. We think there is some conflict with the criteria set out in our Neighbourhood Plan.

“In the event that a Melksham Bypass is constructed and passes in part through the Parish, the effect of the infrastructure proposal on the following elements of the canal’s setting will be expected to demonstrate how they will be mitigated: tranquility, light pollution, biodiversity assets in recognition of its status as a County Wildlife Site, heritage assets, including archaeology and access to the Canal”

“The landscape, biodiversity and heritage assets associated with the Kennet & Avon Canal are highly valued in the Parish and are underpinned by four Neighbourhood Plan evidence base reports: Seend Parish Character Statement (2020), the Seend Parish Green Infrastructure Report (2020), Seend Parish Local Key Views Report (2020) and the Locally Valued Heritage Assets Report (2020). Any developments affecting the canal must protect and reinforce its distinct character and enhance its setting and surroundings.”

This green space between Melksham and Seend promotes both physical and mental well-being, crucial in this current climate, and must be protected.

Ends