

# SEEND PARISH COUNCIL

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30<sup>th</sup> November 2020

## Comments from Seend Parish Council in response to the public consultation on the proposed Melksham Bypass

### Introduction:

Seend Parish Council would like to make the following comments in response to the Melksham Bypass Consultation. At a public meeting, we invited members of our Parish to give their own views on the bypass proposals, and these comments have been taken into account in this response.

We note that there are a number of options being considered from upgrading the existing A350, short bypass routes that stay close to Melksham and longer bypass routes taking a wider route on the east and

We acknowledge that the Melksham Bypass Proposal is just one small part of a wider national transport infrastructure project called the "Western Gateway". The A350 is a strategic route connecting the M4 with the south coast. Melksham is just one of the many towns along its route that needs to be travelled through.

### Route Options:

The Parish Council has looked at the various options put forward. It has been intimated in the consultation documents that the route options on the western side of Melksham have more problems to overcome than the eastern side, such as railway lines, electric sub-station, solar farm, golf course as well as a flood plain. However, the benefits of going west should not be overlooked, and therefore all options must still be considered from all angles.

### Route Option 8b

Route 8b should not be discounted as a worthy option. Although this is the longer route around the west of Melksham, it would have the advantage of making access to Bath and surrounding towns quicker but, more importantly, it will make travelling to Bath hospital much quicker. RUH is the main hospital for Melksham and surrounding villages and, at present, it can take far too long to travel there, particularly in times of emergencies. Therefore, this option must be given serious consideration, despite the expenditure of the structural obstacles, as the economic benefits may mitigate these extra costs.

In preparing your case for a bypass, you cite extracts from the draft Melksham Neighbourhood Plan. No mention is made of Seend's emerging Neighbourhood Plan. In it we identify the Kennet and Avon Canal and its surrounding countryside as a major environmental and

recreational asset for both Seend and Melksham. Two of the route options, 10c and 10d, will cause great harm to this landscape.

As the Parish Council is representing the parishioners of Seend Parish, we have concentrated our comments on the two routes that would most affect us.

### Route Option 10c

This route was the one most favoured by Wiltshire Council when it was submitting its Strategic Outline Business Case in 2019. It is cheaper than option 10d and the lowest cost of all the long routes. It does not require bridges to cross the canal and Semington Brook. And it is likely to draw the most traffic from the existing A350 and other routes.

However the building of the bypass along this route would have an adverse impact on the residents of Bowerhill and restrict their access routes to the Kennet and Avon canal for recreation. Rights of way would be affected restricting easy access to the countryside on the south side of the canal. Whilst Giles Wood would be better protected by this route than 10d, further forestry and landscaping would be needed to protect the environment and surrounding properties.

However, it is vital that, where possible, parish boundaries are preserved and if the bypass were to run south of Bowerhill, north of Giles Wood, this could go a short way to protecting the parish boundaries between Melksham and Seend. Avon Needs Trees (ANT) have already intimated they would be willing to contribute towards planting of trees and it maybe that Giles Wood and surrounding areas would be enhanced with more planting of trees not only for environmental reasons but also to cut down on noise for surrounding properties. More forestry in this area would also enhance the visual amenity of the Kennet & Avon canal.

The raised level of Seend and Seend Cleeve would mean that this bypass route would be highly visible and there would be heightened noise and air pollution that would need to be mitigated by natural screening.

For freight traffic travelling to and from the various industrial estates in Melksham, route 10c with the additional dualling of the A350 between Semington and Littleton roundabout would have major benefits.

Were this to still be the favoured route of Wiltshire Council, then we would expect much needed mitigation in the form of mass tree planting, landscaping and bunds to reduce the impact on the surrounding countryside. It would be crucial to the wellbeing of all residents impacted by this route that green landscaping is created rather than an infill of housing. This would need to be factored into any costs prior to building.

Where the A350 south would join Hampton Park West, little work and expense would be needed to widen the existing A350 to the Littleton roundabout. When that was built in 2004, allowance was made for the road to be widened in later years and there is sufficient width under the canal bridge to do that.

This option would not incur further expense of crossing the K&A canal and Semington Brook.

### Route Option 10d

We note that this option was not one of the original route options in the Strategic Outline Business Case presented to the DfT, but came about because of a suggestion at the March 2020 Melksham Area Board meeting.

This route, if chosen, would have the most damaging effect on Seend Parish.

The description in the consultation document of this route describes it as follows: *“There are no statutory environmental designations expected to be impacted by this option. The corridor passes through land associated mainly with farming and equestrian uses. The crossing of the Kennet & Avon canal is likely to affect its setting, with potential visual and amenity impacts.”*

The quality and value of the landscape in both environmental and amenity terms is very much understated in this description. More green field sites in this option would be used either for structural buildings and/or further housing development. Melksham/Bowerhill is already undergoing extensive development and these green field sites should not be used as an attempt to build yet more housing, particularly as it would be likely that Bowerhill would meet up with Seend, thereby not leaving any gap to decipher the parish boundaries.

Option 10d uses the largest amount of land (23 hectares) and is one of the longest routes at 5.9 miles. It would need two bridges to cross the canal and Semington Brook and major structural work to cross a flood plain. It would also need improvements and a new junction made on the A361. This makes it one of the most costly of all the routes.

### Kennet and Avon Canal

The Wiltshire Core Strategy recognizes the Kennet and Avon Canal as a significant asset within Wiltshire’s sustainable transport and green infrastructure network, and undertakes to protect the canal’s landscape and natural beauty through several of its core strategies. Putting a 4-lane dual carriageway trunk road across the canal in the middle of open countryside is manifestly incompatible with Wiltshire Council’s objectives with respect to the canal.

Two bridges would be needed to cross the Kennet & Avon and Semington Brook. Any bridge over the canal will have an impact on the visual amenity of this historic, tourist, waterway and environment. It would be visually intrusive and out of keeping with the local landscape character and will result in severance of the landscape and visual continuity. The Kennet & Avon canal is of special architectural interest, an historic feature which must be protected for future generations as part of Seend heritage.

### Extracts from Seend Neighbourhood Plan

The Kennet & Avon Canal and its surrounding countryside features strongly throughout our Neighbourhood Plan and the various policies set within it.

*“The canal and its setting, as important assets to Wiltshire, must be key considerations in any decision on routes and delivery of the road.....*

*“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 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)*

Leisure - The use of the canal as a leisure route (for walking, running and cycling) has increased since Covid19 and access to the canal has been particularly important for providing people from built up areas with somewhere they can exercise and relax. It does not make sense to destroy such a significant local asset when alternative routes are available and make more sense for other reasons.

The stretch of canal and surrounding countryside that is at risk if route 10d is chosen, is highly valued by people from Seend and Melksham and visiting tourists. It would be fair to say that it is the largest area of open and accessible countryside within walking distance of the two settlements. Giles Wood, a private woodland that the landowner has kindly opened up freely for public use, would be severely impacted by Route 10d as part of it would have to be destroyed to accommodate the road.

For many years, the Giles family at Seend Park Farm, have allowed the Scout Association to camp on its land, enabling many young people to experience the joys of the countryside.

### Flood Plains

The land south of the Kennet and Avon canal is a designated flood plain. It remains flooded for much of the year, and even a small amount of rainfall, as shown in the attached photographs taken on 15 November can render the fields completely water logged. Any road that has to cross this stretch of wetland would have to be raised making it highly visible, especially to Seend Cleeve residents, and so noise and air pollution for those residents would need to be taken into account. The structural work, due diligence and extra construction time for this added work required to cross this stretch of flood plain would be immense and costly. (Interestingly the point of adverse landscape and visual impacts due to scale and height of structures needed to cross floodplains (road and rail) is mentioned in Routes 8a and 8b, but not 10d.).

The cost to wildlife and the bio-diversity of this wetland area would be immense. This is not compatible with Wiltshire Council's core strategy in respect of its commitment to protect the historic and natural environment. The Landscape Character report identifies this land as "vale floor pasture with weak structure". The report states that an enhancement priority is to retain and manage wet grassland and meadows such as this land. It also identified as a development sensitivity that remnant pastures and meadows along the vale floor are a "scarce landscape and ecological resource, making them particularly unsuitable for development".

### Loss of View

*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).*

Route 10d would completely destroy the outlook for the whole of Seend Cleeve. The amount of high level structural work required to cross the canal, brook and flood plains mean that the road would be highly visible and would be accompanied by an unacceptable level of noise and air pollution. Owing to the nature of the land and the elevated position of Seend Cleeve this impact would be hard to mitigate.

### Traffic Increase through Seend

Routing the bypass across the canal, Semington Brook and the flood plains and bringing it out onto the A361 will require major road improvements to the A361 including a new roundabout.

Further engineering work and expense would be required for road improvements and a new roundabout/junction would also be needed where it meets up with the A361. Consideration would also need to be given to the A361 which would likely have to queue to get onto the new A350 at that roundabout/junction backing traffic up to beyond The Great Hinton/The Strand corner which would become more of an accident black spot than it is now. The new A350 towards Littleton roundabout would also need to be widened with the inevitable increase in volume of traffic. At present, it is difficult to get onto the roundabout from the A361 at peak times because the A350 has priority, so with a further increase in traffic, it will exacerbate the problems here. This makes it one of the most costly of all the routes, and would have the greatest visual impact as well as increase noise and air pollution to Seend Parish.

This route would bypass the Bowerhill Industrial area. This would be foolish since one of the few benefits of the bypass to Melksham would be to provide better access to its economic areas. In this respect Route 10c, or a route that joins the Eastern/Western way north of Melksham Spa would make more sense.

Millions of pounds was spent in 2004 building the Semington bypass under the canal in order to protect the canal side setting. It is already in a position to be widened. As stated in your description of Route option 7c, *"The southern section (7c) is the most feasible, with potential future dualling having been factored into the original construction of the road."* A bypass that did not make use of this stretch of the A350 would be extremely wasteful.

There is no mention of the potential impact of increased traffic through Seend which would result from route 10d. Any bypass that joined the A361 would increase the amount of traffic travelling through Seend, as it would be regarded by many drivers as a short cut rather than following the bypass route through to the junction with the A365, which is supposedly the preferred freight route through our Parish.

When the Semington bypass was built in 2004, it was understood that a weight restriction would be introduced on the A361 through Seend, but this did not happen and if this Option was finally decided, it is imperative that the freight route is considered again, bearing in mind the increase in volume of traffic, sharp bend at Seend Head, Baldham Bridge (which has seen several accidents just this year) and the dangerous pinchpoint in the centre of Seend. It is acknowledged that the A365 would also have an increase in traffic from Devizes towards Melksham meeting up with the new A350 but Seend centre has the added hazard of the dangerous pinchpoint which is particularly troublesome when large vehicles have to mount the pavement.

### Wilts & Berks canal

The ongoing restoration of the Wilts & Berks canal along with the Thames and Severn canals is supported by the Wiltshire Core Strategy as it supports the objective of creating a “Wessex Ring” of operational canals. Wiltshire Council’s Core Strategy with respect to canals includes developing the canal’s recreational and nature conservation potential. This potential would be destroyed by any proposal to have the bypass cross the canal.

It must be noted that none of the route options make any provision for a bridge that would be needed to cross the Wilts & Berks canal. Effectively route 10d would require 3 bridges, and route 10c 2 bridges, currently not costed in the work requirements. This is a serious oversight by Wiltshire Council, as the long term vision of those restoring this historic canal is to promote a series of walking and cycling routes from Semington through to Chippenham. Wiltshire Council must factor in the costs of bridging this canal before any route is chosen and building work begun.

### Conclusion:

Seend Parish Council strongly urge the Major Highways Project team to take on board the above concerns that we have with the route 10 options. We do not believe that the plans for these routes, (most particularly with route 10d), take into consideration 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 at all costs.

**Photos taken on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2020 after moderate rainfall**

Photo 1 is the Semington Brook looking in the direction of the canal.

Photo 2 is Semington Brook looking towards Row Lane.

Photo 3 is looking across the fields in the direction of the canal, Park Lane swing bridge and the BRAG site would be to the left of the photograph.

Photo 4 is looking across the fields in the direction of Row Lane

Photo 1



Photo 2



Photo 3



Photo 4

