



# COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

15<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2018

AGENDA ITEM (8)

HIGHWAYS ENGLAND CONSULTATION ON THE A417 'MISSING LINK'

<b>Accountable Member</b>	Councillor Mark Annett Leader of the Council
<b>Accountable Officer</b>	Nigel Adams Head of Paid Service 01285 623000 nigel.adams@cotswold.gov.uk

<b>Purpose of Report</b>	To consider the Council's response to the current consultation on the A417 'Missing Link'
<b>Recommendation(s)</b>	<p>(a) That Cabinet resolves that this Council fully supports Option 30 as the better of the routes consulted upon;</p> <p>(b) that the Council submits a full response to Highways England, commenting in detail on the landscape, environmental, traffic, social and technical issues;</p> <p>(c) that Cabinet delegates responsibility to the Head of Paid Service, in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member(s), to finalise the Council's response.</p>
<b>Reason(s) for Recommendation(s)</b>	<p>This Council has long sought a resolution to the A417 'Missing Link', and has worked with partners to achieve this. The progress on this matter is most welcome.</p> <p>Given the importance of this bottleneck on the strategic road network, and the sensitivity of the location, it merits the best identified solution that balances these factors.</p> <p>The timing of the consultation has allowed this paper to be brought before Cabinet to consider the direction of the Council's response. However, full consideration of the details behind the consultation may require some further comment from this Council. A delegation to the Head of Paid Service will allow any such points of detail to be picked up.</p>

<b>Ward(s) Affected</b>	This is a nationally significant infrastructure project, and affects the whole district. However, the missing link straddles the district boundary with Tewkesbury Borough, with the works proposed in Cotswold District taking place within Ermin ward.
<b>Key Decision</b>	Yes
<b>Recommendation to Council</b>	No

<b>Financial Implications</b>	Time taken to comment on these current proposals, and to participate within the NSIP approval process. Longer term, the impact of such a significant scheme could have financial implications for the Council in terms of additional demand on some services, and the impact on staff travel.
<b>Legal and Human Rights Implications</b>	None
<b>Environmental and Sustainability Implications</b>	There are significant environmental and landscape considerations that have to be taken into account by this project, which inform this Council's response.
<b>Human Resource Implications</b>	None at this stage. While the main project will be determined by PINS, there could be associated planning applications, environmental health work, licensing, primarily associated with the construction phase.
<b>Key Risks</b>	There are no direct risks to this Council other than reputational, given its role as a key local stakeholder. The Council has previously set out its position, supporting a solution to Missing Link, so there would be some reputational impact should the current project impetus be lost. Conversely, should a poor solution be implemented, or landscape and environmental considerations not be adequately reflected in the project design and implementation, there could be some limited reputational harm.
<b>Equalities Analysis</b>	No effect on protected groups identified.

<b>Related Decisions</b>	The Council has previously resolved to work in partnership to address the Missing Link, most recently in December 2013, when it supported the inclusion of the Brown Route in Highways England's scheme development programme. Other decisions include the Corporate Strategy (Council, 23 <sup>rd</sup> February, 2016), and the decision in 2008 to create an Air Quality Management Area (Cabinet, 7 <sup>th</sup> April 2008). The importance of this issue is reflected in the submitted Local Plan, and in the extant Local Plan, adopted in 2006.
<b>Background Documents</b>	Available from: <a href="https://highwaysengland.citizenspace.com/he/a417-missing-link/">https://highwaysengland.citizenspace.com/he/a417-missing-link/</a>
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>Appendix 'A'</b> - Scheme brochure

<b>Performance Management Follow Up</b>	Implement Cabinet decision(s)
<b>Options for Joint Working</b>	This will be a response specifically from Cotswold District Council.

## **Background Information**

1. As of 15<sup>th</sup> February 2018, a public consultation has been opened by Highways England on their proposals to improve the A417 'Missing Link', a three mile stretch of single lane carriageway between the Brockworth bypass and Cowley Roundabout. This stretch of road has been recognised as one of the hot spots to be tackled in the Department of Transport's Road Investment Strategy 2015 - 2020.
2. Locally, this pinch point has been recognised as an issue from the mid-1990s, when the A417 was upgraded to dual carriageway. Because the traffic flow is restricted to a single carriageway, exacerbated by steep gradients, this causes congestion and delays. This in turn causes additional pollution, to the extent that this Council designated the Air Balloon roundabout site an Air Quality Management Area in 2008. This stretch of road is also recognised as being dangerous. For the single carriageway section of the A417, the Missing Link, the most recent available 5-year period of accident data is from 19/11/2011 to 18/11/2016. Over this period there were 57 collisions, 4 were fatal, 11 were serious and 42 were slight in severity.
3. This Council, along with Gloucestershire County Council and the Cotswolds MP, Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown and other partners, has been seeking an improvement since. As a result of this campaign, in December 2014 the government announced that it would develop a scheme.
4. Under its priority to champion issues which are important to local people and that will enable them to benefit from good health and well-being, the Council has recognised the importance of the Missing Link, and has committed to work with partners to ensure that proposed improvements are implemented.
5. That said, a further priority of the Council is to conserve and enhance the natural, built and historic environment. The Missing Link has been unresolved for such a long time because of the engineering and environmental challenges of the topography and the sensitivity of the landscape and environment, and these factors must be adequately addressed for any solution to be acceptable.

## **The approval process**

6. This scheme is classed as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) under the Planning Act 2008. As such, Highways England is required to make an application for a Development Consent Order (DCO) to gain authorisation to construct the scheme. To obtain this order, Highways England will submit an application to the Planning Inspectorate. The application must set out the design of the new road, the effect on other roads and the land needed for the scheme. All schemes of national significance are legally required to go through extensive consultation before an application is submitted. Cotswold District Council will be an Interested Party to these proceedings.
7. This current consultation is classed as the Options Consultation, where Highways England outlines the options and describes the likely effects and benefits on the local area for each option. Highways England will take into account all the feedback received and use this to prepare a consultation report, which will be made available online and at various information points.
8. The consultation report will inform the decision on the preferred route. Subsequently, prior to the application for the Development Consent Order, Highways England will hold a second consultation to elicit views on more refined proposals.

## **Development of options, and the current proposals**

9. The consultation documentation provides substantial detail on the process followed to develop the evidence, identify possible routes and narrow these down to options currently open for consultation. This is summarised below.

10. About eighteen months ago, the first stage in the project inception was the creation of a vision and objectives. It is worth noting how central the consideration of landscape and environmental issues was at this stage.

The scheme's vision: a landscape-led highways improvement scheme

We want to create a landscape-led highways improvement scheme that will deliver a safe and resilient free-flowing road while conserving and enhancing the special character of the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty; reconnecting landscape and ecology; bringing about landscape, wildlife and heritage benefits, including enhanced visitors' enjoyment of the area; improving local communities' quality of life; and contributing to the health of the economy and local businesses.

Objectives for the scheme

- **Transport and safety:** to reduce delays, create a free-flowing road network and improve safety along this stretch of the A417
- **Environment and heritage:** to reduce the impact on the landscape, natural and historic environment of the Cotswolds and, where possible, enhance the surrounding environment
- **Community and access:** to reduce queuing traffic and pollution, improve access for local people to the strategic road network and support residents and visitors' enjoyment to the countryside
- **Economic growth:** to help boost growth and prosperity by making journeys more reliable and improving connectivity.

11. Once the vision and objectives were established, Highways England and their consultants started to establish possible routes, using four sources initially:

- a review of historic work completed by Gloucestershire County Council and the then Highways Agency
- outputs from initial scoping work carried out by Highways England to see if any viable solutions could be developed
- outputs from a workshop carried out with stakeholders, including representatives from environmental and economic groups, and local authorities
- the refinement of alternative routes by the project team.

12. This work identified 30 possible route options, including surface and part-tunnelled routes. These were assessed in engineering terms to identify options which improved on the quality of the existing road and could be realistically delivered. If a route had bends that were too sharp or slopes that were steeper than the existing A417 at Crickley Hill, it was discounted.

13. As a result of this test, 10 of the initial 30 route options were discounted and 20 moved on to the third stage, where they were assessed against a series of five factors, which are part of a Department for Transport approved assessment method. These factors are:

- **Strategic** - assessing what each option is trying to achieve and how it will address the problem
- **Economic** - reviewing each option's economic, environmental and social impact
- **Managerial** - assessing the deliverability of a route in terms of construction and management throughout its lifespan
- **Financial** - assessing the cost to build and affordability of each option
- **Commercial** - assessing the value for money, or benefit to cost ratio, of each option.

14. This method, however, did not allow for the scheme's 'landscape-led' vision and objectives to be taken into account. This method was adapted to rank each option and score it against how strongly it meets the vision, objectives and factors above. As a result of this assessment, five options were taken forward for further assessment work. These were Options 3, 21, 24, 29 and 30

15. In November 2017, the Department for Transport allocated a cost range for the scheme of £250 million - £500 million. The methodology employed at Step 3 suggested that the tunnel options (Options 3, 21, 24 and 29) would bring greater benefits, but would not offer value for money. The surface option (Option 30) was the most affordable of the five options.

15. As a result of this, other surface options were assessed to see if there were any other more affordable options that may be deliverable within the scheme's cost allocation. Option 12, the Brown Route previously promoted by local partners to encourage a solution to the Missing Link, was considered to meet the scheme's objectives and affordability criteria.

17. To understand the opportunities and impacts of each of these six options, the following issues were assessed:

- Traffic impact
- Road safety
- Environmental impact and opportunities.
- Social impact
- Value for money and cost analysis.

18. The result of this process was that while tunnelled options have the greatest benefits, only Option 30 offers a positive financial return on investment, Option 12 is also within the allocated cost range for the scheme of £250 million to £500 million (this scheme offered the lowest benefits, but set against the lowest cost). The table below compares the routes assessed at this stage, with the consultation options in bold. These two routes are therefore those currently being taken forward for consultation, with Option 30 being the proposed solution.

	Option 3 (Tunnel)	<b>Option 12 (Surface)</b>	Option 21 (Tunnel)	Option 24 (Tunnel)	Option 29 (Tunnel)	<b>Option 30 (Surface)</b>
Most likely cost (in millions)	£875	<b>£465</b>	£1,625	£1,210	£1,240	<b>£485</b>
Return on investment*	79 pence	<b>68 pence</b>	47 pence	54 pence	56 pence	<b>£1.04</b>
Value for money rating	Poor	<b>Poor</b>	Poor	Poor	Poor	<b>Low</b>

*\* For every £1 spent improving this stretch of road, this is the amount the taxpayer would expect to get back, over a 60 year period, from 2024 -2083*

19. These two options are described in more detail below, and both feature in a visualisation on the Highways England consultation website, at:

<https://highwaysengland.citizenspace.com/he/a417-missing-link/>

#### Option 12

A four mile surface route reusing sections of the existing A417 on Crickley Hill and Birdlip. New sections of road will be built at Nettleton and Emma's Grove. This option would include three new junctions – one at Cowley roundabout, one on the existing A417 close to the B4070 junction at Birdlip and one to the north of Barrow Wake. There would be three lanes of carriageway going up Crickley Hill and two lanes coming down.

### Option 30

A 3.4-mile surface route following the alignment of the existing A417 at Crickley Hill with less of a slope. A new section of road will be built through Shab Hill to the east of the existing A417, re-joining the existing road near Cowley roundabout – both the Air Balloon and Cowley roundabouts would be removed. Option 30 would include two new junctions – one at Shab Hill and one on the existing A417 close to Barrow Wake with a link road in-between. There would be three lanes of carriageway going up Crickley Hill and two lanes coming down.

### **Points for consideration within the Council's response**

20. It is important to acknowledge that any scheme will have negative impacts on the landscape and the environment. The two surface routes, 12 and 30, and the tunnelled options 3, 24, and 29 have been assessed as having a Large Adverse impact on the landscape and Option 21 would result in a Moderate Adverse impact. The purpose of the sifting process, and this current consultation, is to identify a solution that balances its impact with a financially viable solution. On that basis, Option 30 is the optimum solution presented for consultation.

21. The consultation poses specific questions to consultees. These are laid out below, with issues to consider identified. Following Cabinet's decision, a full response will be prepared.

#### **Question 1. To what extent do you agree with our proposed Option 30?**

- Option 30 is the better of the two routes presented for consultation
- The current route up the escarpment, within the natural valley, is effectively the only reasonable surface option to gain the top of the escarpment
- Traffic will be further from Birdlip, and many of the more isolated dwellings currently affected by the A417, reducing impact on our communities.
- We would appreciate reassurance that this route is capable of taking the current load and modelled traffic growth, to ensure that this project does not offer a 'fix' to the A417 at cost to the A436.
- Highways England's Environment Strategy seeks to not only avoid or minimise harm, but ultimately to improve the environment. We would welcome further detail on the following:
  - how this route could best tackle the current severance between Crickley Hill and Barrow Wake, for ecology, landscape and non-motorised users
  - how the existing route will be downgraded where it is superseded
  - The options to try to offset urbanising effect
- We would appreciate representation by this authority on the project steering group.

#### **Question 2. Do you have any comments to make in relation to Option 12? We will take these in to consideration as we develop the scheme.**

- Given how low this option scores in the benefits against the other options taken through step three, this no longer appears a reasonable alternative to the preferred scheme.

#### **Question 3. As part of identifying route options, we've assessed over 30 options, including 6 as part of our further appraisal work. Do you have any comments on any of the other options included in the assessment?**

- The idea of a tunnel has a long history, and not taking a tunnel forward as an option means its proponents may not feel it has had a fair and full hearing. Should the anticipated costs of route 30 and its associated mitigation escalate, tunnelled options should not be ruled out.

**Question 4. Is there anything further you would like us to consider in relation to improving the A417 Missing Link?**

- The impact of the construction – this will cause delays and expense to road users, and impact on local communities.
- The role of this council in minimising the impact on our residents, and realising economic opportunities arising from the investment (for example in potentially providing opportunities for local food businesses to service the construction staff).
- Impact on agriculture, in terms of severance of land, and therefore impact on viability of a farm business.

(END)