

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

1 June 2021

Agenda Item 8 – A350 Melksham Bypass Consultation Report

Statement and Question from Janet Giles

**To Councillor Dr Mark McClelland, Cabinet Member for Transport,
Waste, Street Scene and Flooding**

Question – (21-82)

How can the council rely on accurate traffic count data rather than anecdotal report to establish the need for a bypass when 2017 figures are flawed and a current count would be invalid courtesy of covid, the clean air act for Bath and specifically a busy but temporary vaccination centre at Spencer Sports Centre close to the Aldi/ Macdonald site.

Response

The pandemic clearly affected traffic volumes significantly in early 2020, and it would not be sensible to carry out further traffic counts at the moment. However, the Council does continually monitor traffic flows, and increases are being seen on the network as economic activity starts to recover.

As the scheme is developed further there will be more detailed traffic modelling carried out, based on updated traffic counts where appropriate and using Department of Transport and local growth predictions as they become available. This information, which will be publicly available, will show how the assessments were carried out, and will provide more detailed information on the changes to traffic flows with the scheme that should address the comments you make in your statement.

It is important to have good quality traffic information in order to ensure the scheme is designed to accommodate future traffic growth.

Statement

In their report of 2017 Atkins noted a traffic volume of 20,000 vehicles per day using the A350 at some point between Beanacre and Littleton. WC public consultation pack P5 has increased this figure to 35,000.

Both figures are unreliable as they are taken from traffic counts some 4 years old and rely solely on auto axle and number recognition counts which have then been remodelled by significant % in some cases. There is no roadside survey undertaken nor household survey of journeys to accurately define origination and destination of journeys made. All

counts were taken pre the improvement to Farmers Roundabout which has greatly improved traffic flow.

Assuming 35,000 vehicles then 40% is designated through traffic viz 14,000. Of these 25% have an origin north of Beanacre and a destination south of Littleton roundabout with A361 (or vice versa) viz 3,500 vehicles. HGVs are shown as 7/9% of traffic making **280** lorries per day travelling N/S or S/N on the existing A350. This is probably in excess as I believe the 33,000 count only applies to the distance between Farmers Roundabout and Bath Road junction and the increase is caused by traffic approaching from north and wanting to exit to Bath Road needing to travel this distance twice and U turn at the Farmers. So the figures then become 2,000 > 3,500 : and **160 HGVs as through traffic!**

Of the 15,000 vehicles not travelling N/S/N there is no indication of the onward direction viz E or W. if an eastern bypass were selected traffic travelling from or to the west would still need to use the existing bypass.

No mention has been made in these figures of proposed and encouraged employment growth using the industrial estates on Hampton Park and Bowerhill Industrial and which would force HGVs and commercial vehicles on to the existing A350 at the Milk Churn roundabout into Portal Road.

In Atkins report of 2017 2.16 it is stated that there were NO delays at Beanacre. In addition traffic flow times (pre Farmers Roundabout improvements) were between 27 and 29mph average.

The journey times shown are slightly disingenuous. The free flow time of 5'40" was taken during the night which means post midnight. Any time in excess of this figure has been deemed a delay so at peak times there is a delay of 3 minutes but there is also a "delay" for all time period 7am to 7pm because of the base line time.

This is seriously misleading as are the overall vehicle figures and question the need for any additional road building. As much of the existing traffic will continue to use the existing A350 the best value for money option overall would be to dual the existing road from Farmers Roundabout to Littleton roundabout.

Finally would WC stop referring to A350 traffic passing through Melksham centre. King St and Bank St and High St are town centre and the existing A350 bypass already successfully bypasses the town centre.

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Agenda Item 5 – Public Participation and Questions from Councillors

Questions from Ken McCall – Member of Campaign for a Better Trowbridge

**To Councillor Dr Mark McClelland, Cabinet Member for Transport, Waste, Street Scene and Flooding; and
Councillor Nick Botterill, Cabinet Member for Development Control, Strategic Planning and Climate Change**

Question 1 – (21-83)

Will Wiltshire Council now confirm that the construction of Ashton Park and the A350 Yarnbrook - West Ashton relief road has been indefinitely postponed because Persimmon Homes no longer considers the project commercially viable?

Response

Ashton Park is identified in the Wiltshire Core Strategy as a strategically important site for the delivery of housing and employment land. The Council is continuing to work with the applicants to seek to grant planning permission for a scheme that will meet the objectives set out in the WCS.

Question 2 – (21-84)

The Ashton Park urban extension to Trowbridge was a strategic housing allocation to Wiltshire Council's Local Plan. If it cannot be built in the foreseeable future, how does the council propose to deliver the 2,500 homes it was expected to contribute to the five-year housing supply?

Response

See response to question 1 above.

Question 3 – (21-85)

In the absence of the priority schemes in its spatial planning and transport policies, will the council now abandon its outdated preference for building large housing estates in the open countryside and develop brown-field sites such as the former Bowyers site instead?

Response

The former Bowyers site is privately owned and no proposals for its redevelopment have been put before the Council in the form of a planning application that can be considered. The timing of any submission of a planning application for the redevelopment of the site is a matter for the current owners.

The Wiltshire Core Strategy allows for both brownfield and greenfield sites to come forward to meet the housing requirement in the plan. It is not possible to rely only on brownfield sites and these may have higher development costs that reduce the ability to deliver essential affordable housing.

Question 4 – (21-86)

What is the reason for not developing the Bowyers site? Wiltshire Council should bid as soon as possible for Homes Infrastructure Fund (HIF) for this site because the Government are keen to fund urban renewal by using the HIF.

Response

See answer to question 3 above.

Question 5 – (21-87)

Will the council accept that it wouldn't then need to enlarge the A350 to take the extra traffic from car-dependent estates and could therefore invest tens of millions of pounds in a transport interchange at Trowbridge railway station and greatly improved bus services to take traffic off the congested and polluted roads of the county town?

Response

Development of Major Road Network schemes in Melksham, Salisbury, around Chippenham and at M4 Junction 17, have been endorsed by Department for Transport as necessary and appropriate to

- Reduce congestion
- Support economic growth and rebalancing
- Support housing delivery
- Support all road users (including cyclists, pedestrians and disabled people) and
- Support the Strategic Road Network

There have been no recent planning applications for the Bowyers site, however earlier submissions have acknowledged the clear opportunities for related improvements to Trowbridge Railway Station – those opportunities will continue to be pursued as and when proposals for the Bowyers site re-emerge.

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Agenda Item 5 – Public Participation and Questions from Councillors

Questions from Melanie Boyle

To Councillor Dr Mark McClelland, Cabinet Member for Transport, Waste, Street Scene and Flooding

Question 1 – (21-88)

How can Chippenham residents get involved so we get the best travel solutions that work for pedestrians, cyclists, public transport users and essential car journeys? Our historic market town with many narrow roads and listed buildings does not fit with the generic model currently being used for so called improvements that are not working for any of the above modes of travel, putting lives at risk as ambulances cannot get through the gridlock caused by the so called improvements, causing excessive emissions and lower air quality. I have attached some photos.

- Station Hill Traffic Lights - Faresaver buses threatening to stop services to the train station due to the delays caused by the roundabout being changed to permanent new traffic lights. Pedestrians walking out in front of traffic as not willing to wait the 3 minutes for the lights and with the island taken away this is more dangerous than before. Cycle lanes suddenly appear and disappear on dangerous routes when there are off road safer routes and a closed road for vehicles to allow cyclists and pedestrians a safe route next to the dangerous new route.





- Hathaway Retail Park - roundabout removed, cars queued back into residential areas, 2 sets of lights on green at the same time crossing each others path so traffic cannot flow and causing lots of near misses. There are no sensors on the traffic lights so at quiet times traffic is just sat there for no reason.



- College crossing - safe crossing for students removed so they have to cross either Sadlers Mead or Cocklebury Road without a crossing and moved past the junction to the unused new car park next to the 5 existing car parks.



- Bristol Road cycle lane - put down and then taken up afterwards when consulted on, again parallel to an existing off road cycle path.
- Old Road - cycle and pedestrian icons just painted on a narrow road with a loading bay. See photo of a typical dangerous day.



The above can easily be resolved by changing to pedestrian use only for the new traffic lights and painting in the roundabouts. Going forward we need local involvement and an innovative approach using our fantastic 403 off road cycle route.

Response

The Council is very pleased to encourage involvement from residents and other stakeholders. The Council's Planning Portal is available for interested parties to share their thoughts and concerns on matters that require planning permission, and Area Boards facilitate their own local Community Area Transport Groups (CATGs) which provide a regular forum for discussion on transport matters.

Question 2 – (21-89)

As we come out of lockdown is it possible for Wiltshire Council to do a campaign to get the number of cars in households/number of car journeys reduced and make the most of the Bus Back Better funding available? With working at home continuing for many, added to combining errands to reduce the number of trips, car sharing, walking, cycling, taxi, bus and train use. Some households can have 4 cars with children driving, car sharing could mean they save money on purchase cost, MOT, tax, insurance, breakdown, repairs etc that could go towards disposable income or house deposits etc, this would be a step towards addressing the climate emergency?

Response

Government has taken a clear lead in issuing guidance on a number of sustainable transport topics. Affording significantly greater priority for cycling, walking and public transport is at the heart of that agenda, and the Council is responding accordingly.

As well as investment in associated infrastructure, efforts to effect behavior change will also be required, likely to be brought about by targeted marketing and community engagement.

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Questions from Andrew Nicolson – Wiltshire Climate Alliance

**To Councillor Dr Mark McClelland, Cabinet Member for Transport,
Waste, Street Scene and Flooding**

Question 1 – (21-90)

- a. Is it firmly settled Wiltshire Council policy to continue with a programme of upgrades to the A350, or will the new Cabinet consider a genuine review?
- b. And if so, are you prepared to call for independent reports on the carbon impact of increased traffic and reduced modal shift that may result from a series of upgrades, and on whether this kind of programme actually boosts the economy or just makes it more road-transport-intensive?

Response

The improvement of the A350 and other key parts of the road network are expected to continue to be important to ensure the movement of people and goods to support the local economy and our communities. The Local Plan and Local Transport reviews are taking place and these are the appropriate means for the review of the relevant policies.

Question 2 – (21-91)

- a. Would the relevant cabinet members be prepared to see and hear evidence brought forward by Wiltshire Climate Alliance and others, on whether the proposed scale road- building is compatible with aiming for a Carbon-neutral Wiltshire by 2030, and what viable alternative transport investment options there might be for a prosperous, mobile, accessible and sustainable Wiltshire?
- b. And if so, what practical arrangements can you propose for this process?

Response

As mentioned previously the Local Plan and Local Transport Plan reviews would be the appropriate places to contribute to the developing plans. It is likely that a package of measures across the transport modes will be required to meet the carbon target, and these will have to be developed in accordance with government guidance as it becomes available.

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Agenda Item 5 – Public Participation and Councillor Questions

Question from Councillor Gordon King

**To Councillor Nick Botterill, Cabinet Member for Development Control,
Strategic Planning and Climate Change**

Statement

A meeting took place sometime in 2016 between the Associate Director, senior Spatial and Development Control Planners, Highway officers, the Cabinet member for planning and Westbury Area Board Members where viability issues to do with the deliverability of Strategic Site H14 at Westbury (owing to excess infrastructure demands) was discussed. To improve the viability of the site (for development) Area Board Members were asked to acquiesce to:

1. Increasing the number of planned dwellings at H14 from 250 to 300 homes
2. Waive the standard requirement for S106 contribution to Education and Affordable Housing requirement; and in return:
3. The developer would deposit £2m into the bond (then £1m) to construct the bridge and complete the infrastructure link
4. An application to government for a grant to cover the residual costs of designing and building the bridge, would be made.

Since that meeting H14 has progressed to development and is close to completion. £2m has or will be deposited into the bond (the developers contribute) in accordance with the above agreement and the only missing link connecting the infrastructure remains the absence of the Bridge over the railway. I am the only remaining member of that Area Board of 2015/16.

In addition, the delivery of H14 has thrown up safety concerns to do with safe routes to school for children needing to cross the railway line from the Spinnaker Estate (H14). The need for that bridge is pressingly critical.

Question 1 – (21-92)

Can Cabinet please confirm whether or not an application to government has been made, in accordance with the agreement made at the meeting above, or if no application has yet been made provide an explanation why not to myself, as the only remaining member of the Area Board in 2016, the current Area Board.

Response

The meeting in question was between the Unitary Council members for Westbury and Wiltshire Council Officers and was to brief members on the then outstanding planning application for the H14 site. Subsequently, the application was determined by the Strategic Planning Committee who agreed that the developer contributions from the site should be prioritised towards funding the bridge. However, it was made clear at the meeting that the current contributions would not be sufficient to fully fund the bridge and that provision was also dependent on the delivery of land outside of the Council's control (and that of the developer) between the proposed bridge and Mane Way. It would not be possible at this stage to apply for government funding when land outside the control of the Council is required to deliver it. This is a matter that should be addressed through the development of the Wiltshire Local Plan that may be able to create the framework within which the bridge can be delivered.

Question 2 – (21-93)

Will you also provide the Area Board with a commitment to the making of that application to government without further precondition and the timetable for the construction and delivery of the Bridge.

Response

See response to Question 1 above.

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Agenda Item 5 – Public Participation and Questions from Councillors

Question from Margaret Willmot

**To Councillor Dr Mark McClelland, Cabinet Member for Transport,
Waste, Street Scene and Flooding;
Councillor Nick Botterill, Cabinet Member for Development Control,
Strategic Planning and Climate Change**

Statement

It is pleasing to see that the first press release of the new administration on 18/5 said that “the climate emergency will rightly continue to be at the heart of our decision making”.

These priorities are not evident in Wiltshire Council’s Local Plan Transport Review (Jan 2021). Despite that statement that highway schemes will have the lowest priority due to “potential increases in traffic and potential inconsistencies with policies to address Climate Emergency” the review then goes on to propose that the lion’s share of funding is allocated to highways schemes, including the Melksham Bypass. Instead of putting the climate emergency at the heart of this document there is the statement that “more explicit consideration of the carbon reduction agenda”, including policies to reduce the need to travel, will be a “next step”.

Question – (21-94)

Will there now be an urgent reconsideration of Wiltshire Council’s Local Plan Transport Review and a move towards a transport policy which genuinely puts the climate emergency at its heart?

Response

The transport work associated with the Local Plan is not confined to the initial review published in Jan 21.

The initial Transport Review set out forecasts using pre-pandemic transport demand data, and suggested corresponding mitigation measures.

The next stage of work is in the process of being commissioned, and will assess a number of scenarios to determine how best the authority can reduce the necessity for delivering additional road capacity and address the climate emergency.

Development of Major Road Network schemes in Melksham, Salisbury, around Chippenham and at M4 Junction 17, have been endorsed by Department for Transport as necessary and appropriate to

- Reduce congestion
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Agenda Item 7 – Provisional Outturn 2020/21

Question from Susan McGill

To Councillor Pauline Church, Cabinet Member for Finance & Procurement, Commissioning, IT, Digital and Commercialisation

Question – (21-95)

In February 2021, £1m was set aside to cover the cost of the May 2021 elections (<https://bit.ly/3oP5XAS>). From whom/where will the Council (re)cover the cost (widely reported as exceeding £1m) of re-running the election of the Wiltshire Police and Crime Commissioner?

Response

The £1m set aside at budget setting was to cover the costs of running the Unitary elections.

For the Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC) elections, the Cabinet Office provide funding up to a maximum allocation, which we estimate to be around £1.1m for a stand-alone PCC election. The Government have confirmed that funding will also be provided for the PCC re-run on 19 August.

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Agenda Item 7 – Provisional Outturn 2020/21

Question from Susan McGill

To Councillor Pauline Church, Cabinet Member for Finance & Procurement, Commissioning, IT, Digital and Commercialisation

Question – (21-96)

In February 2021 (<https://bit.ly/2Tax4dQ>) Cabinet noted that Hazlewoods remained auditors of the Stone Circle companies, but that the companies intended to serve notice on the Council to end that service. Also in February 2021 (<https://bit.ly/3oP5XAS>), the risk of default on loans to Stone Circle (sic) was estimated to be 25% (potential magnitude £5.8m). Please would you provide me with the current accounts for the Stone Circle group of companies, together with an up to date appraisal of the risks and liabilities that they individually and together represent for the Council, given the uncertainty about their and the Council's auditing arrangements and, therefore, for public oversight.

Response

The production and completion of the Stone Circle companies accounts are their responsibility. They will be audited and then passed to the council as shareholder by September 2021.

The Stone Circle Loan facility was risk assessed as part of the overall risks faced by Wiltshire Council at the time of setting its budget, to understand the level of risk the Council faces across the entire organisation. The risk was assessed at 3% loan default, 25% of this value was then built in as the likely value of risk assessed requirement to be set aside in the Councils General Fund Reserve. A further risk assessment will be carried out as part of the budget setting process for 2022/23 budget.

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Agenda Item 7 – Provisional Outturn 2020/21

Questions from Susan McGill

To Councillor Pauline Church, Cabinet Member for Finance & Procurement, Commissioning, IT, Digital and Commercialisation

Question – (21-97)

In March 2010, Jarvis Construction entered administration (<https://bit.ly/3yxFpIO>). It appears (documentation is sparse) that, as a result, “Monkton Park PFI office [was] in-sourced saving £350,000 per year – first local authority to in-source a PFI” (<https://bit.ly/3hSOI04> [?2011])

- a. What, if any, are the Council’s current liabilities in relation to the Monkton Park PFI?
- b. Was the Council’s and Good Energy’s decision to abandon the Sadlers Mead development in order for Good Energy to occupy part of the Monkton Park offices site influenced by the Council’s ongoing liabilities for the Monkton Park PFI?

Responses

The Council’s current liabilities in relation to Monkton Park are £7.906m (£1.066m Short term liability, £6.840m Long term liability). This is based on principal loan and does not include interest.

It was Good Energy’s decision not to enter into an agreement to lease on the proposed Sadlers Mead development. Without an agreement to lease the development the Council would not proceed with the considerable investment required. Thus the outstanding liabilities in relation to Monkton park were not a consideration.

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Agenda Item 7 – Provisional Outturn 2020/21

Questions from Susan McGill

To Councillor Pauline Church, Cabinet Member for Finance & Procurement, Commissioning, IT, Digital and Commercialisation

Statement

On 16 March 2021, the National Audit Office observed “that councils need strong arrangements to manage finances and secure value for money. External auditors have a key role in providing independent assurance on whether these arrangements are strong enough and recommending any action.” (<https://bit.ly/3vjs7O6>)

There have been problems with the Council’s publication of its accounts since 2018 when it opted in to the Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited’s national scheme for its audits. Since the 2018-2019 accounting period, Ian Howse has been the Engagement Lead between Deloitte and Wiltshire Council. An “unresolved query with the historical balance on the revaluation reserve and capital adjustment account, ... caused a delay in the approval and publication of the 2018/19 Statement of Accounts.” (<https://bit.ly/34hwux8>)

I notice that the “provisional outturn position for services as at 31 March 2021 for the financial year 2020/21” does not mention the outstanding matter of the Council’s accounts 2019-2020, but that “the provisional outturn position for financial year 2020/21 (31 March 2021) for revenue” refers to “certain entries to the accounts [being] dependent on information still being gathered”.

The NAO describes a ‘non-standard’ report (such as those concerning Wiltshire Council’s accounts) as one that the Council must take seriously, and upon which it must act appropriately.

Three years not only predates the COVID-19 epidemic, but is sufficient time for the Council to have “acted appropriately”.

Question – (21-98)

Given the need for assurance to the public that the Council has in place strong arrangements to manage its finances and to secure value for money, please detail the appropriate actions taken by the Council, their time frame, and the objectives together with review dates for finalising and publishing its audited accounts.

Response

All issues relating to the Councils accounts are managed and dealt with through the Audit & Governance Committee.

The Audit & Governance committee has been presented with update reports at every meeting on the progress of the formal processes for the statutory statement of accounts for both 2018/19 and 2019/20. We can confirm that the accounts for 2018/19 were approved at the meeting held on 18 November 2020. Within the reports to the Audit & Governance committee it has been noted that there have been additional delays in completing the audit process and approval of the accounts for 2019/20 due to resourcing capacity and experience from within the council team. At its meeting on 28 April 2021 the Audit & Governance committee were presented with an updated set of accounts, with the audit substantially complete but due to other Auditor commitments it is now expected that the final audited accounts for 2019/20 will be presented to the committee when they meet in 27 July 2021 for final approval.

The reports to the Audit & Governance committee have set out actions taken to date to improve the process, which include the appointment of qualified staff, bringing in additional experienced capacity to help progress outstanding issues and to develop the team and standards of supporting documentation for the audit process. Some training has already been undertaken and a comprehensive improvement plan is under development to address the weaknesses set out by the auditors.

Good progress has been made and it is expected that the accounts for 2020/21 will follow the standard timetable and will be published by the end of July and presented for approval before the deadline of 30 September in line with the regulatory timelines. Work has progressed and we are confident that the 'except for' qualification in connection with 2 historic technical balances that results in a 'non-standard' audit report will be complete and a standard report received for the 2020/21 financial year. This is and remains a significant priority for us.

The provisional outturn for 2020/21 is dependent on information from the collection fund (Council tax and business rates), as a result of the complexity caused by the COVID-19, and is separate from the technical accounting issues being resolved on the Council statement of accounts.

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Agenda Item 8 – A350 Melksham Bypass Consultation Report

Late Question from Charmian Spickernell

**To Councillor Dr Mark McClelland, Cabinet Member for Transport,
Waste, Street Scene and Flooding**

Question 1 (Ref 21-99)

Is there joined up thinking in the Council?

The Climate Team are writing a strategy to reach zero carbon by 2030 and have found that transport is responsible for by far the most carbon emissions.

The Development Team are proposing to drop Alternative Solutions to the Road from further consultation on the proposed Melksham Bypass despite this having been well supported in the preliminary consultation.

As the country heads towards COP 21, can we please be assured that alternative solutions to the road will remain part of the further consultation?

Response

The initial assessment has concluded that the non-road options would not meet the transport objectives in themselves, but they could complement a road option and should be progressed in conjunction with the scheme.

It is proposed to carry out further consultations on walking and cycling improvements in the area, which could be implemented individually or as part of the proposed scheme.

It is likely that a package of measures across the transport modes will be required to meet the carbon target, and these will have to be developed in accordance with government guidance as it becomes available.