

REGULATORY COMMITTEE

12th JUNE 2002

**CHIPPENHAM WITHOUT: ALLINGTON -
PROPOSED ROAD CLOSURE**

Purpose of Report

1. To consider objections to a proposed Traffic Order and to recommend the Order is not implemented.

Background

2. Allington Lane forms part of a class 3 route on the west of Chippenham, from the A4 northwards, across the A420 and to the A350. The plan at **Appendix 1** shows the area. Residents in the Lane had been concerned for a number of years about through traffic using the lane, particularly in the northbound direction to avoid delays in Chippenham on Hungerdown and Hardenhuish Lanes.
3. It had been anticipated that when Stage 1 of Chippenham Bypass (A420 to A350 north) was opened in 1995, and subsequently when Stage 2 opened from A4 to A420 in 1998, the attractiveness of Allington Lane as an alternative route would have diminished. However, the delays at the northern end of the bypass still occurring in the morning peak result in traffic continuing to use the narrow lane.
4. Discussions took place with Members of the Allington Preservation Group on options that could be considered to reduce the through traffic. A Traffic Order prohibiting vehicles except for access is not an effective option, because the Police do not have the resources to adequately enforce such Orders.
5. The introduction of traffic calming measures throughout the length is not a practical option. The features would require street lighting and signing which would be a considerable environmental intrusion into the area. The cost would also be considerable and could not be justified when compared with other requests across the County where in many cases the casualty saving potential would be greater.
6. It was therefore suggested to the Preservation Group that the only option which could be considered was a simple closure at the northern end of the lane. This could, however, only be taken forward to the next stage, if certain conditions were met. These were:-
 - all the residents in the lane being in agreement
 - an agriculture “bypass” being provided on private land adjacent to the closure to enable farmers with fields adjacent to the lane to access those fields without having to use the A350 as the alternative route
 - the Parish Council supporting the scheme

7. The Preservation Group obtained the support of the Parish Council and the residents. They also indicated that the other condition was able to be met, subject to detailed negotiations. Consequently a Traffic Order to prohibit all vehicles (except cycles) at the northern end was advertised. The scheme is shown on the plan at **Appendix 2**.

Objections

8. As a result of the advertisement 12 letters of support and 95 letters of objection have been received. These are listed in **Appendix 3**. The letters of objection are separated into location (the lane, the surrounding area, nearby villages, and areas further afield such as Cirencester and Hertfordshire). The reasons for support or objection are detailed in **Appendix 4**. Full copies of the letters are available in the **Members' Room** and from the Environmental Services Department prior to the meeting.

Detail

9. The lane through Allington, between the A420 and Fowlswick Lane, varies in width but is generally only single lane in width throughout. There are verges in places along the lane but these are often overrun and damaged due to vehicles trying to pass. Posts have been erected at certain places to prevent this damage, particularly where frontagers maintain the verge to a better standard than the County Council. Forward visibility along the lane is restricted at various points due to the horizontal alignment and the proximity of the hedge boundaries to the carriageway.

Consideration

10. The objections basically relate to the difficulties of deliveries to properties, the inconvenience of the alternative route, the right to use the highway, the difficulties the farmers would have accessing the fields, lack of turning space and the dumping of rubbish.
11. Those supporting the closure do so on the grounds of safety for cyclists and pedestrians, the reduction in the erosion of verges, and the resulting improvement in the environment and quality of life for residents.
12. The Parish Council originally supported the scheme in principle as they understood it had the support of the majority of the residents. However, further meetings have been held with the Parish Council to discuss the level of objection, and they have also carried out their own survey of local views. The Parish Council has subsequently reconsidered the matter and has resolved that the lane remains open in line with the wishes of the majority of the local residents. The latest letter from the Parish Council is at **Appendix 5**.

13. The original proposal, following initial discussions between the Preservation Group and the farmer, was for a closure over a length of approximately 300 metres at the northern end, with an agricultural route through the field and farmyard. Meetings were held with the local farmers to clarify their access needs, and it transpired that there was concern about the practicality of a route through the farmyard, particularly if foot and mouth or similar were to occur. Further meetings were held with the owner of the land on which the bypass could be established, to agree the principle of a short bypass in the corner of a field adjacent to the junction at the north end of the lane. This could overcome the concerns of some of the farmers.
14. It is apparent that an agreement could possibly be reached on the details of the bypass but, in view of the level of objections, it was considered inappropriate to pursue the details, involving legal costs to both sides that could be abortive, until Committee considers the matter and a way forward is established.
15. The District Council, in preparing the Conservation Area Statement, had included a proposal that the northern end of the lane be closed to improve the environment of the area and reduce damage to the roadside verges, and improve the route for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders. The final version of the document includes the closure as an option to be considered. A copy of this document is available in the **Members' Room** prior to the meeting.
16. The point was also raised by two objectors that the original “statement of reasons” for the Order was “road safety”, but that subsequent correspondence indicated that “environmental benefits”, as well as road safety, were also a reason. They consider that this nullifies the Order and the proposals should be re-advertised to indicate to the public both reasons, and give them an opportunity to object on revised grounds. This is not considered necessary as objectors are required to state the reasons for their objections in their letter, regardless of the formal statement of reasons.
17. The accident record for the most recent three-year period now shows that no injury accidents have occurred in the lane, although injury accidents have been recorded in previous years. The schemes being treated in the Local Safety Scheme programme this year are those with at least four injury accidents in a three-year period. Consequently it is now difficult to justify pursuing this scheme purely on casualty saving benefits, particularly with this level of objection.
18. The County Council is progressing a scheme to dual the short section of A350 single carriageway immediately to the north of the Malmesbury Road roundabout at Chippenham. The scheme requires the acquisition of land from adjoining owners, and negotiations are currently taking place. However, if agreement cannot be reached, it is proposed to use compulsory purchase powers, and this could require a Public Inquiry to be held. Following consideration of this matter by the Environment Advisory Panel in December 2001, the Cabinet gave approval to the use of compulsory purchase powers for the acquisition of the necessary land. The timing of the scheme depends on the acquisition of the land and whether a Public Inquiry is required, but early implementation would be desirable because of the potential environmental and safety benefits of the scheme. The completion of this scheme should negate the time advantages that some people think is gained by using Allington Lane as a peak hour “rat-run” and consequently reduce the present use of the lane.

19. In view of the level of objection and the revised resolution of the Parish Council, it is considered inappropriate to continue with the proposed closure.
20. An alternative suggestion has been made by a number of people, including Kington St. Michael Parish Council, to close the route at its junction with the A350 north of Plough Crossroads, shown on **Appendix 1**. This is not considered appropriate at this time. The matter could be reviewed after the completion of the A350 improvements at the north end of the bypass.

Conclusions: Options considered

21. Abandon the scheme.
22. Pursue an alternative closure of a lane at the A350 junction.
23. Implement the closure, subject to satisfactory completion of negotiations for a private agricultural bypass to be used by local farmers.

Recommendation

24. That:-
 - (i) The proposed closure be not pursued;
 - (ii) The objectors be informed accordingly.

Reason for Recommendation

25. The level of objection is such that pursuing the present scheme would not be appropriate, and the alternative option should not be considered until the effect of the A350 dualling has been assessed.

RICHARD J. LANDER
Director of Environmental Services

The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this Report:

Letters of objection.

Environmental impact of the Recommendations contained in this Report:

The traffic levels in the lane would likely result in some continued damage to the verges.

