

Notes of Public Meeting held on 9th November 2016 to consider A428 Improvement Scheme

There were 63 residents present including Great Gransden Parish Councillors and the ward's district and county councillors.

The meeting was chaired by Andrew Pett, vice chairman of Great Gransden Parish Council. Members of the Project Team had been invited to provide background information and updates as well as canvassing local opinion during this early stage in identifying options. Andrew Pett introduced Olivia Fava-Verde, Senior Communications and Engagement Consultant, Andrew Kelly Project Manager (Highways England) and Ian Cook Project Manager (Jacobs).

Olivia explained how the team had been asked to attend today following the first forum meeting in the summer. The purpose of the consultation is to try to build on and understand residents' views.

By way of background, Dave Masters explained that he looks after a number of projects in this region. £2 billion has been earmarked for this region. The Oxford to Cambridge link is a separate project. The Road Investment Strategy (RIS) announced the A428 improvement near St Neots, linking the A421 Milton Keynes with the existing dual carriage way section of the A428 to Cambridge, creating an Expressway link. Details of the boundary study area were shown with the consultation starting in Feb 2017. The A428 improvement scheme will not start until the A14 is completed.

Andrew Kelly spoke of the huge challenges including the Black Cat roundabout on a flood plain, the river Ouse, air quality and accessibility issues on the A428. Also, the planned expansion at St Neots, Cambourne, Bourn Airfield bringing another 10,000 homes. There is also the Eltisley and Cambridge junctions, A1, Oxford to Cambridge route and the A428 Black Cat roundabout.

He explained the 7 stages the project goes through. We are currently at stage 1, assessing the environmental issues of the options. There will be 3 or 4 options presented for consultation and at stage 4, some 18 months from now, the statutory process will start.

The public will have a say on the options in early 2017. 3 or 4 options will be presented over a 6/8week period to include roadshows, exhibitions etc and the projects team will access the feedback. In February 2017 more detail will be available.

Olivia clarified that there will be a formal consultation process and during the 6-8 week period there will be an opportunity to view the options and make comments. We are at the early stages and the projects team is keen to hear from residents and stakeholders through the forums and these meetings to obtain feedback. Residents' local knowledge and concerns will influence the scheme design and the team wants to build relationships to ensure transparency. 7 forums have been set up covering different aspects and including 80/85 organisations and representatives to view updates and make comments. The first forum was in July and the next will be in November. These include Members Forums (MPs and councils), Parish Forums (parish reps which have been separated out into different forums – Caxton Gibbet, Black Cat, St Neots, Cambourne etc), Economic Forums (local authorities, economic interests), Any Road Users (Road Haulage Assoc'n, cyclists, pedestrians & equestrians). The Parish Forums include a different range of areas. Community

consultations – the team needs to obtain the views of residents and individuals as effectively as possible, tapping into local knowledge.

The exhibition events will provide available information to view, helping the projects team to understand areas of interest and concerns.

During the first forum meeting, representatives were asked to write comments about routes which provided a lot of feedback including:

- Noise and air quality;
- Flood risk;
- Soil contamination;
- Drainage;
- Traffic movement;
- Rat runs;
- How traffic modelling works;
- Consideration of everything going on in the area (Ox-Cam study);
- Need for more info and detail.

The projects team needs to make sure that the info they provide is robust.

Following the presentation, Andrew Pett opened up questions from the floor.

Questions included:

Q: What is the overall budget for the region?

A: The budget is indicative. More money can come from central government and the scheme can be phased. The cheapest option is not necessarily the one we will go with – we will choose the route that answers the questions from the users.

Q: How will farmers move grain across the A428?

A: The Express way will provide no junctions, but there will be a number of crossing points, regular bridges.

Q: Private access on and off the A428 – will we get bridges?

A: One solution is off line dualling. Once we have an option, we will talk to landowners. Express way is a dual carriage way with limited entrances and exits.

Q: During the work, where will all the traffic go?

A: Every effort will be made to take this into account - diversion will include new A14. Modelling, we will take the rat runs into account and engage the public. One villager commented that there are already 400 vehicles and huge lorries using the village in a 2-hour period.

Q: Is it true that there are 3 ideas for routes.

A: There has been some confusion. The 3 options relate to the A1 Strategic Study. There are dozens of options for the A428 which will be whittled down to 3/4/5 to show to the public. As it is an Express way, ideally there will be no junctions.

Q: The map showed the area that could be embraced for the improvement scheme. Will the road go outside this area?

A: Originally we carried out environmental surveys which went way south of the A428. Yes, it is possible that there will be more routes south of the area although the south will cost more and be longer. The outcome will be 4 options.

Q: Over the summer there were ecological surveys and I saw a very detailed map.

A: The ecological surveys go on for 12/18 months. There was an opportunity to start early but at this stage there is no preferred route.

Q: County Councillor Julie Wisson asked if the express way will do away with the Black Cat and Caxton Gibbet roundabouts.

A: It has to be 10 miles long for an Express way.

Q: Concerns were raised about people travelling from St Neots to Cambridge.

A: We have heard concerns and might have to have junctions.

Q: With 10,000 new homes, commuters likely to travel to St Neots rather than Cambridge for rail links, how will they get to St Neots?

A: We are working with Network Rail to ensure we get people to stations. A lot of traffic from Cambourne we know goes to St Neots.

Q: District Councillor Barbara Boddington asked if the existing local road is left, it will help local traffic?

A: We are looking at this.

Q: District Councillor Richard West asked if HDC granted application, will it change the format so the new road will link with the new development?

A: We can only do the design approved so far.

The slide showing the study area was shown again to clarify the key showing the existing junctions, the present A428, the A1, the A421 and the railway line.

Q: We have an active Speedwatch team but is there any way that the projects team can liaise with the police to arrange regular speed checks – currently 400 cars pass through Great Gransden twice daily at rush hour. This can only increase?

A: Yes.

Q: HGVs alternative routes. Will there be signage for HGVs? Little and Great Gransden have narrow roads. Will there be specific HGV routes to avoid the village?

A: Yes, they have their own modelling.

Q: How will you monitor?

A: Use mobile phones. We receive data and can track the number of HGVs.

Q: We can't give feedback if have no information. It will be great if 400/500 cars are off the village but the shortest route is through Abbotsley. Do you have ways of monitoring?

A: There is an A428 website, you can also sign up to updates. You can put information on PC website.

Q: How will the materials to build the road be sourced?

A: It is early days. The A14 is using fill from other works. We are trying to coordinate material to avoid using virgin aggregate. We may be able to set up a temporary plant.

Q: It is a complex decision. What criteria/priorities will the decision be made?

A: Safety, ease of congestion, traffic through quickly, non-motorised users. There are 8 and all are equal. We use a tool called EAST – feed in the data and out comes a solution. Gives a business background as to why we make a choice. Environment comes into it and noise is also a factor.

Q: Environment – what percentage will be replanted?

A: All the planting for the A421 to Black Cat was not completed. We have to make sure it is fully planted.

Q: Where is the traffic coming from and going to? Not just Oxford to Cambridge?

A: The traffic plan is to show the traffic, rat runs. The solutions we bring you we will have looked at it all. The forums will go into more detail. We understand where the traffic is coming from and going to. We use mobile phone data and collate it all.

Q: Not just Felixstowe, if the access points are too far apart, they will rat run?

A: Yes, we have done the survey.

Q: Do you know if the HGVs are using the route because too tall to use the bridge at St Neots?

A: Yes.

Q: The number of options – do you have favourites or are they all equal?

A: There will be 4 options including a preferred option of Highways. We will present 3/4 valid solutions. It will be a genuine consultation. It is not just a tick box exercise.

Q: Forums are for representatives of the village. Are you prepared to add another meeting to put our views again?

A: There will be consultation with a number of events.

Q: Express way so a limited number of junctions – the main function is for long distance traffic through this area?

A: Yes, in an ideal world. From an engineer's point of view have to pick up local traffic.

Q: What you're building is not what we want. The new road will be a second A14.

A: One of the proposals is that we retain the old A428.

Q: Bedford to Cambridge link. Cross over at Sandy, any station at Sandy to Cambridge? Implications on this route is immense.

A: Yes, that is why we need to speak to Network Rail.

The meeting drew to a close at 8.30pm.