

Information for Media (February 2009)

**A46 Newark to Widmerpool improvements.  
The wrong scheme for Stragglethorpe junction  
- Why build an unnecessary huge embankment?**

The residents of Cropwell Bishop, Cotgrave and the villages in the Vale of Belvoir are disappointed and dismayed that the Highways Agency is to construct a huge embankment to carry the A46 traffic at Stragglethorpe. It forms part of the A46 improvement scheme between Newark and Widmerpool which the government has rushed forward to commence construction in Spring 2009 as part of their attempt to boost our flagging economy.

Whilst people in the area are generally pleased to see the A46 being dualled to reduce delays and increase driver comfort and safety, they do not want to see the traffic put on top of this embankment which will be over 1 km in length at heights up to 9.5m. It will be a major eyesore on the landscape and its continuous moving traffic will be a disastrous environmental intrusion into the area (Please see pictures). The drone of additional traffic noise will carry across to the villages of Cropwell Bishop, Cropwell Butler and Cotgrave.

Cropwell Bishop Parish Council along with Rushcliffe Borough Council supported by Rt. Hon. Kenneth Clarke MP and County Councillor, Richard Butler, and Borough Councillor Gordon Moore, have fought a campaign to keep the A46 close to ground level through the junction. Lower profile schemes with much reduced earthworks were outlined by Cllr John Greenwood, a Chartered Civil Engineer. Unfortunately the Highways Agency 'ECI' contractor, Balfour Beatty and their designers Scott Wilson have refused to take the suggested, environmentally acceptable alternative schemes forward.

The Highways Agency's own landscape advice (Advice Note HA55/92) that scheme alignment should follow the local landform was ignored by the scheme designers. Natural England, who are statutory advisers to the government on landscape matters, and their consultants, the Transport Research Laboratory, also advised against the scale of the scheme proposals because of their impact on landscape character and other adverse environmental impacts. The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) are horrified at the idea of the unnecessary large embankment at Stragglethorpe and also the unnecessary large amount of land taken by the scheme at the next junction to the north at Saxondale where the A46 crosses the A52.

The alternative options were discussed at the public inquiry held in Summer 2007. The Inspector, Mr Colin Tyrrell permitted a fair hearing of the issues but, when the decision report was eventually published in December 2008, he decided in favour of the HA scheme even though many of the statements made by the HA, on which his decision was based, could be regarded as somewhat misleading. (Please see Poster)

Scheme costs have risen from £87m in 2004 when the ECI contract was awarded to Balfour Beatty to around £350m today. The scheme had seemed to be on hold

because central government was looking for large amounts of funding from the regional budget. However as the recession worsened, money was made available and the Department for Transport decided with undue haste to accept the Inspector's decision and to commence construction of the whole A46 improvement scheme this Spring (2009).

### **Meeting with HA and Scheme Contractor**

Orders for the purchase of land for the scheme were made on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2009 and there is now a 6 week period in which they can be challenged in the High Court. As a final attempt to review engineering design decisions, the Cropwell Bishop Parish Council (Chairman Alan Wilson), County Councillor (Richard Butler) and Borough Councillor (Gordon Moore) met with the Highways Agency project manager, Geoff Bethel, the Balfour Beatty Operations Director, Paul Neal and Scott Wilson design leader, Ian Wildgoose at Cropwell Bishop Old School on the morning of Wednesday 4th February 2009.

The concerns about the proposed HA scheme at Stragglethorpe with its long, high embankment were described by Cllr John Greenwood, and more environmentally acceptable, 'low profile' alternatives with reduced loss of green belt land were again suggested for both Stragglethorpe and Saxondale junctions .

The HA/Contractor/Designer team sympathised and understood the Councillors' views (which reflected the views of local residents, Natural England, CPRE, the Grantham Canal Partnership and others who do not want to see the A46 traffic on top of an 'unnecessary' environmentally intrusive, embankment) but were adamant that the HA scheme being taken forward to construction in the Spring was the right one 'because it had been confirmed by the Public Inquiry Inspector' (Mr Colin Tyrrell).

Taking note of the Councillors' concerns the HA and Scott Wilson design team did agree to explore ways of reducing the 9.5m height of the Stragglethorpe embankment as the detailed design is developed but were not optimistic that much reduction could be achieved.

### **Comments/Quotes:-**

As a Chartered Civil Engineer and University lecturer, John Greenwood takes great pride in showing students the achievements of the engineering profession. Unfortunately this scheme is used only as an example of engineering 'out of scale' with the local environment, escalating costs under the ECI form of contract, and a tendency to blindly follow highway standards and design rules rather than develop innovative solutions to take advantage of local conditions to reduce the scale of the scheme.

The designers insist that to meet drainage standards, the lowest point on the new scheme needs to be 2.5m higher than the existing Stragglethorpe Road (because the water table is high and spot tests indicate a low soil permeability). In reality, as John Greenwood has pointed out, the area drains well and the adjacent canal is dry. There is no history of flooding on the existing road. It should therefore be possible to drain the new road at a similar (low) elevation to the existing one.

Bettina Lange, CPRE. – ‘People have not realised that the term ‘dualling’ implied a major new road over most of the length. Far too much funding is directed to this section of the A46 at the expense of rail and other public transport improvements.’

Rt. Hon. Ken Clarke, MP – ‘An over elaborate design of a scheme that could have been the straightforward provision of a second carriageway over much of the length.’

Peter Stone, Grantham Canal Partnership – ‘The HA scheme will make it more difficult to construct a bridge over the canal at Stragglethorpe Road; The Objectors’ scheme would have provided a bridge for future navigation and a safe crossing of Stragglethorpe Road for towpath users.’

Cllr Chris Keast, Building Surveyor - ‘The large embankment will be a blot on the landscape, a carbuncle, reminiscent of the planning mistakes made in the 1960’s when our urban environment was spoilt by ugly tower blocks and bleak shopping precincts. Our trust in the HA as custodians of the environment for future generations does not seem to be well founded; in fact I would go as far as to say their actions are nothing short of wanton vandalism of the rural landscape.’

Clr Gordon Moore – ‘An unnecessary embankment, spoiling an area of pleasant landscape.’

Cllr Richard Butler – ‘Residents of East Cotgrave, travellers to and from the Vale of Belvoir, and walkers on the canal towpath could see the sight of vehicles on top of the high embankment. There is also concern in Cotgrave, Cropwell Bishop and Cropwell Butler about traffic noise. The vast majority of residents do support the dualling, but it seems unfortunate that the designers are missing an opportunity here.’

Cllr Alan Wilson - ‘This high embankment will be an unfortunate memorial gifted to future generations to come by the professionals entrusted to safeguard our environment.’

Cllr Peter Walters – ‘We will need to negotiate two difficult roundabouts and a tunnel to cross the new A46 - Horrendous for the pedestrians and cyclists; A bridge over the A46 for local traffic would be far preferable.’

Janice Bradley, Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust - ‘This proposed embankment would result in unnecessary further loss of habitats, combined with greater noise and disturbance to local wildlife and people than a lower level junction scheme. We maintain our view, however, that the overall dualling scheme is unnecessary and will contribute significantly to increased carbon emissions from higher traffic levels, higher vehicle speeds and more HGVs, contrary to Government policy on global warming.’

Elizabeth Newman, Natural England. - 'While Natural England recognises there is clearly a need for this road to be updated we are not satisfied, based on the most recent evidence, that the need for the scheme sufficiently outweighs the environmental damage that will be caused by the proposed scale of design.'

Cllr John Greenwood – 'It makes sense to accelerate the A46 improvements between Newark and Bingham where villages need to be bypassed. However, the HA and its Contractor should carefully reconsider their responsibilities to the environment, communities and regional transportation plans before proceeding to construction of the intrusive, expensive schemes at Stragglethorpe and Saxondale.'

### **Conclusions:-**

The general feeling amongst Councillors and residents of the area is that this scheme, with its unnecessary detrimental effect on the environment, brings no credit to the engineers involved. It brings no credit to the Public Inquiry system where a single inspector can, based on erroneous and misleading information, reject alternatives which would be more acceptable to the local communities and better suit the local environment. (There is no mechanism available for objectors to appeal against that decision - A High Court challenge is only permitted if the correct procedures were not followed at the Inquiry). It brings no credit to the Government and Secretaries of State for Transport and Communities who blindly accept the huge expenditure without considering whether savings might be made on this scheme to permit other important regional transportation and community schemes to be taken forward.

Jacki Grice, Clerk  
Cropwell Bishop Parish Council, The Old School, Fern Road, Cropwell Bishop,  
NG12 3BU (Tel 0115 989 4656)  
11<sup>th</sup> February 2009.

Encl. Poster summarising main issues at Stragglethorpe

Further technical details available from John Greenwood [john.greenwood@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:john.greenwood@ntu.ac.uk)  
tel 0115 848 2045, or 0115 989 9798.