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24th March 2017

Dear Sirs

### A303 SPARKFORD TO ILCHESTER DUALLING

We are grateful for the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the proposals for widening the A303 from Sparkford to Ilchester and we would like to begin with the following **general statement**:

We feel that this consultation is fundamentally flawed. We are presented with a choice between two options, both of which will cause environmental damage and will, in our opinion, do little to lessen traffic problems in the long term. In addition to this, we consider that both options will fail to provide benefit to local communities and business. CPRE's new report [“The End of the Road”](#) provides compelling evidence that road-building is not delivering the congestion relief promised or the boost to local economies hoped for, while the environmental impacts are worse than feared. Our report found that:

- of 25 road schemes justified on the basis that they would benefit the local economy, only five had any evidence of any economic effects
- The effect of road schemes in generating traffic means that they also cause substantial increases in carbon emissions

“The End of the Road” proves that we need to reset roads policy - and also the pattern of car-dependent development that ensues - to reduce the need to travel by car and make road building the option of last resort.

The National Audit Office, has cast further doubt on the feasibility and value for money of these works in their recent report, “Progress with the Road Investment Strategy”. The NAO has so far identified 16 projects which present a risk to value for money, including the

The Somerset Branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England exists to promote the beauty, tranquility and diversity of rural England by encouraging the sustainable use of land and other natural resources in town and country.

A303, and has insisted that Highways England must review their portfolio of road enhancement projects to improve value for money.

**We would also like to make the following, specific points:**

- Option 2 is completely unacceptable to CPRE as it will mean the destruction of an unspoilt valley and would take up approx. 25 hectares of good quality, sensitively managed farmland. The new road would run close to four rural wildlife sites and ancient woodland and would cut through registered parkland in this unpopulated unspoilt valley. It would bisect and disrupt several Public Rights of Way. Option 2 would also dramatically increase levels of noise and light pollution in this tranquil, open landscape.
- Option 1 is also unacceptable to us for the reasons stated earlier. As well as our fundamental objection to the principle of road building, there are many unanswered questions about the proximity of the road to existing homes, how much land will be taken up, what the junction layouts will be - and what, if any, economic impact there will be for this part of Somerset. “Soft” tourism in the form of appreciation of landscape, tranquillity, heritage and culture is an important part of the local economy and is not fully quantified in any of the supporting documents behind the road proposal. The historic, cultural and natural environment plays a key role in the local and wider, regional economy, bringing in valuable business from the UK and abroad, supporting local small enterprises in this rural area as well as the adjacent urban areas such as Yeovil and Sherborne.
- CPRE is aware that some feel that Option 2 is preferable to Option 1 as it will enable the construction work to be carried out without major disruption to motorists. CPRE rejects this approach. We all have a responsibility to think longer term and take some responsibility for how future generations will view the decisions we make. Sparkford Vale has been managed by farmers for generations. Are we really going to destroy this just because we can’t bear the thought of a few minutes extra journey time for a few months?
- From our experience and knowledge of the sub region, and from a careful study of both Google’s congestion maps as well as Highways England’s own figures, the road plays a rather more local role than purely as an end-to-end expressway. The subtle and vital connections into local towns and smaller communities will be irreversibly changed by this proposal yet no appraisal of these has been made as part of the overall planning process.
- In our view the evaluation made of the economic advantages of turning the A303 into an expressway (A303/358/30 Corridor Improvement Programme Economic impact study Feb 2013) is not sufficiently rigorous or inclusive. This study is light on local information and is in considerable disagreement in its final analysis with the more thorough “London to South West and South Wales Multi Modal Study” report carried out by Halcrow Group Ltd for the Government Office for the South West in 2001.
- The figures presented by Highways England at the last of the Taunton consultation meetings, but not made public as yet, predict that the traffic on the road will grow between 25% and 55%. The impact on South Somerset, its landscape and its communities in the light of these predicted figures has not been assessed and not been explained fully to local consultees. We believe that this error must be urgently rectified.

In CPRE Somerset's view, both options are unacceptable but, if there is to be a widening scheme at Sparkford, then Option 1 is very much preferable as it causes less damage to the countryside. Fundamentally, however, we believe that connectivity for the South West could be achieved in far less damaging and intrusive ways. There remains the desire for a robust railway link from Waterloo to Exeter and beyond via Basingstoke. Improved internet services would dramatically improve the business viability of the rural areas of the South West. Any money allocated to this scheme should be spent on repairing potholes, public transport, and harnessing new technology to make more efficient use of existing road space.

We hope you will take our views into account.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Becky Collier", is centered within a light green rectangular background.

Becky Collier - Branch Manager