

Oxford to Cambridge Expressway

Decisions for this meeting are at paragraph 15

Introduction

1. The Parish Council agreed that Councillor Pat Jones and Linda Goodhead would attend the inaugural meeting of the Joint Parish Group organised by North Hinksey Parish Council. The meeting was held on the 8 March in Botley.
2. The aim of the meeting was to bring together those Parishes affected by the potential routes within corridor B which runs to the West of Oxford. The precursor to the event was the successful working together of parishes to the south of Oxford in ruling out potential routes affecting their parishes. This group had also changed their stance from anti Expressway to proposing that any potential new road should follow a path to the west of Oxford.
3. The South Hinksey Parish Council discussed this event at its meeting on the 4 March 2019 and agreed that representatives should listen, not express an opinion on the necessity of this national road project, point out the difficulties of a route widening along the current A34 as it passes past Botley and South Hinksey and express the benefits to our parishioners of a by-pass of this section of the A34 (the Oxford ring road).

The Meeting

4. The meeting was well attended despite the short notice. The North Hinksey Parish Clerk took notes but at the point of writing these haven't been circulated. The format was:
 - Introduction from the Chair of North Hinksey Parish Council, David Kay
 - Presentation from Colin Thomas on behalf of SPADE (slides attached on the agenda)
 - Presentation from Chris Church from the No Expressway Alliance (slides will be circulated when received). Chris is also a North Hinksey Parish Councillor.
 - General discussion and next steps.

5. The thrust of both presentations was “anti-expressway”. Both speakers gave the view that a position of “not past or near us but elsewhere” wasn’t sustainable and that the economic case for any new road to Cambridge had not been made. In particular Colin Thomas advised the meeting to stop thinking of this as a road but as a “development arc”.
6. Most of the timetable information given was what we already know from the information presented by the Highways Agency but interestingly Colin Thomas said that whilst the Highways Agency say that no routes within corridor B have been chosen yet for consultation (which is expected to start in the autumn), the very lengthy Strategic Assessment document in its appendix G does give a preferred route. This route is to the west of Oxford.
7. The SPADE presentation effectively concluded that any new road should be able to show “net environmental gain” along its route. In particular it was noted that this new road was said to need to accommodate an additional 1.6 million commuters within 45 minutes of Oxford and Cambridge.
8. The No Expressway Alliance presentation was firmly centred around, no road but more sustainable travel solutions. The speaker was clearly and firmly of the opinion that lobby groups and parishes can stop the development of this road by making supporting it unacceptable.
9. Not all parish representatives spoke in the discussion but it was obvious that most were from more rural parishes whose priorities centred around opposing or reducing new development. The message of considering the potential Expressway as a “development arc” was something they supported.
10. On behalf of South Hinksey we made the following points:
 - We, along with North Hinksey, live or butt up to densely developed areas so traffic, noise and pollution was a problem for us now. The consideration of this as a “development arc” rather than a new road would not represent the views and difficulties a widening of the A34 past us would present to our parishioners
 - If South Hinksey considered what the best solutions to the current A34 difficulties in our parish and the potential

development nationally of a new road that included the A34, then a bypass of Oxford would certainly be high on our list

- Traffic, noise, air quality and access were already a problem for us and we must consider any improvements to these as they are presented.
- A stance of “no development” was unreasonable because even without economic growth more houses are needed. Stances of this sort will simply mean that we are ignored
- Realistically we are unlikely to be able to stop a national infrastructure project particularly with a stance of “absolute no”. We must engage with options as presented. Colin Thomas disagreed with this firmly and said that we could as everything was to play for.

Considerations and what next

11. It is clear that the issues of the majority of parishes around the table will be development rather than road but I don't think we should withdraw on that basis. Attendance will give access to information, discussion, support and joint lobbying opportunities. We were also asked to join the No Expressway Alliance (North Hinksey Parish Council and I think Sunningwell already have). The Chair of North Hinksey outlined that it gave access to information and engagement which was invaluable within a national project such as this. They did however intend to keep, as they are obliged, an independent view so they are able to represent the views of their parishioners.
12. North Hinksey has an Air Quality Action Area so they are able to collect data on the quality of the air with sections of the parish. This is invaluable on a day to day basis but also when considering proposals such as this. Given the closeness of the A34 to our Parish and the inevitable effects on air quality this produces within the residential areas of South Hinksey, this would be helpful to us. I have not explored if this is possible but we may want to do so.
13. Every parish is different and will have its own priorities in representing their parishioners. I think we would find it helpful in considering responses within any groups we join or responding directly to the Highway Agency or consulting/informing residents, what our aims are for our Parish. If the Council agrees then some suggestions (in short) for discussions are:
 - Improve air quality

- Reduce noise pollution
 - Improve access to local roads via car, cycling and walking
 - Improve the Oxford ring road/A34 to reduce accidents and stoppages
 - Separate through and local traffic on the western arc of the Oxford ring road
14. Councillor Linda Goodhead and I did attend the consultation meeting organised by the Highways Agency. We made our points as firmly as possible but we did not as a Council follow this up in writing to the Agency. We should consider doing this so they are not 'lost' within the multitude of verbal responses.
15. Decisions for this meeting are, does the Council:
- a) Agree to be a member of this Joint Parish Group
 - b) Wish to join the No Expressway Alliance
 - c) Explore the possibility of an Air Quality Action Area being established
 - d) Respond formally to the Highways Agency with our views on routes
 - e) Agree aims to centre our comments around and if we do what should these be
 - f) Keep parishioners up to date and how.

Councillor Pat Jones