

Notes from Oxford to Cambridge Expressway 'Western Parishes' meeting, 8th March 2019 in Seacourt Hall, Botley

Meeting arranged by North Hinksey Parish Council in conjunction with Sunningwell Parishioners Against Damage to the Environment (SPADE).

Chairman: Cllr David Kay (Chairman North Hinksey Parish Council)

Speakers: Colin Thomas (SPADE)

Cllr. Chris Church (No Expressway Alliance and North Hinksey Parish Councillor)

Other attendees included 2 further SPADE representatives and Parish Council representatives attending from Cumnor, Fyfield and Tubney, Gosford and Water Eaton, Marcham, Radley, South Hinksey, and Sunningwell Parish Councils.

- (1) Presentation given by Colin Thomas circulated with these notes to all attendees and other invitees. Some key points included the following:
- Although the road itself would have a major impact on any areas it passes through there would be a wider impact across surrounding areas resulting from additional housing and infrastructure.
 - The development arc is what is driving the agenda, and elements such as additional housing will fund the road construction. The 1 million additional houses and where they will be placed is at the core of the process, not a strategic approach aimed at improving the regional road network.
 - The B1 and B3 corridors are quite vague, but hidden in appendix G page 11 of the Highways England (HE) Corridor Assessment Report (CAR) are text descriptions which give a clearer idea of routes they appear to be thinking about in detail. This text and indicative maps are in the presentation.
 - Concerns about low levels of public awareness (of the process, the housing, the routes and the overall impact), the promotion of corridor B1 by the Expressway Action Group (EAG), and elements of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) (despite the CPRE Oxfordshire official policy being outright opposition to the Expressway as a whole), and the lack of an equally cohesive approach by the 'Western Parishes' which would be impacted on by routes in corridor B1, and in some cases also by routes in corridor B3.
 - SPADE is a member of the No Expressway Alliance, and is totally opposed to the Expressway in principle and the concept of the development arc as a whole, it is not trying to promote other alternative routes.
- (2) Presentation on No Expressway Alliance (NEA) by Chris Church:
- NEA is also strongly opposed to the Expressway scheme, whichever routes might be proposed, and feels that it has not been properly justified, or the potential negative impacts fully investigated, particularly

from an environmental perspective, which aligns NEA strongly with environmental groups such as Friends of the Earth and the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT).

- Given the number of major road projects that do get cancelled the Expressway is not a 'done deal' and political or economic changes could potentially lead to it being shelved. Publicising the negative impacts of the proposed scheme and making it 'toxic' for politicians to be seen to be supporting it are elements of the campaign.
- NEA is a campaigning organisation that provides a way for various individual organisations, including Parish Councils to combine forces and act in a cohesive manner. It does not take away the ability of any Parish Council that joins to also act independently on a very local basis in direct support of its parishioners.
- Joining NEA is free of charge (see <https://www.noexpresswayalliance.org/>) and a number of Parish Councils (including North Hinksey and Sunningwell) have already done so.
- NEA would like Parish Councils to send them a copy of any details about potential local impacts that they send to HE (see also (3) below).
- NEA are looking to set up Area Representatives, and the position for West of Oxford has yet to be filled. Interested individuals should contact them directly to volunteer.

(3) The Highways England position and the overall process:

- See the HE website at <https://highwaysengland.co.uk/projects/oxford-to-cambridge-expressway/> for details including the downloadable document 'The preferred corridor' which summarises the current position. This was handed out at the drop in sessions arranged for Parish Councils in late 2018.
- Although HE presented their position at the drop in events and may have discussed local impacts with Parish Council representatives that does not mean that all of those details will have been officially noted and will be used in assessing various routes. To make sure that they are taken into account Parish Councils should submit detailed descriptions, maps, photographs / videos and other appropriate information relating particularly to social infrastructure, areas of environmental sensitivity / value etc. to HE via the e-mail address oxfordtocambridgeexpressway@highwaysengland.co.uk These should cover the whole of the parish, not just in the immediate vicinity of 'obvious' routes such as along the A34 and A420.
- As stated at the drop-in events HE are currently assessing a number of potential routes within corridors B1 and B3 with the aim of reducing that to 6 or so that will be put forward for public consultation 'in the Autumn'. Until that time HE staff including Matt Stafford will not attend meetings or other events where the public are present, including Parish Council meetings (statement by Jan Simpson, Expressway Head of Communications). They might still be persuaded to attend a meeting solely consisting of Parish Council representatives, such as this gathering, however.

(4) Other points arising during the meeting:

- It was noted that the EAG are well funded and have been in operation for a considerable time, with strong links to the local media and a well set up website expressing a strong and consistent message, which is no longer opposing the Expressway as long as it doesn't pass through their area of concern. NEA is not in the same position financially but would hope to carry out a similar role in terms of providing a unified voice for Parish Councils to the west of Oxford. Unlike EAG it will be opposing the Expressway as a whole, not trying to promote alternative routes.
- The potential impacts of the Expressway on the various individual Parish Councils would vary widely as for some it would primarily be the physical damage resulting from the road itself (e.g. widening the A34 through pinch points such as Botley), and for others it would be the additional housing and subsidiary infrastructure that would have the greatest effect.
- The question was raised as to whether the Expressway could possibly take traffic away from Oxford Ring Road by following the B3 corridor.
- It was noted that the individual Councillors present at this meeting might change following local elections in May, so it would be advisable to move relatively quickly to establish an effective action plan. With the route choices being announced in the Autumn this is another reason for not delaying any decisions.

(5) Concluding thoughts on issues that individual Parish Councils might wish to consider:

- How can this issue be publicised locally to improve public awareness of the project and potential impacts? This might include use of Parish Council websites and Facebook, Parish Council newsletters, Annual Parish Meetings, Parish Magazines etc.
- What are the opinions of local residents and businesses? Possibly carry out surveys / polls or hold public meetings.
- Taking into account the above, what is your Parish Council's official position in terms of opposing the Expressway? Also, would it consider joining the NEA?
- If opposing the Expressway as a whole (the NEA/SPADE approach, also already officially supported by some Parish Councils including North Hinksey and Sunningwell) what do you think the message from a grouping of Western Parishes should be focussing on?
- What local information needs to be sent by your Parish Council to HE for them to consider when assessing detailed routes (see (3) above)?

(6) Next meeting:

- It was agreed that a follow up meeting would be helpful once attendees have had a chance to report back to their Council and consider the matters discussed in this meeting.
- North Hinksey Parish are happy to arrange and host this follow up meeting, which it was agreed should take place before Easter, as local elections will occur shortly after that. Possible dates of Wednesday 10th

or Thursday 11th April were put forward at the meeting which would ensure that there would be a Council meeting held in each Parish between now and the meeting date. David Kay to set up a doodle poll to identify which date would be preferable (link to poll <https://doodle.com/poll/e6yd6w84b2qm2mfq>).

- A formal invitation will be sent out once the date and time (probably around 7pm again) have been finalised.