

## **Melksham Town Council's Response to the second Non-Statutory Consultation by Wiltshire Council on the A350 Melksham Bypass**

Melksham Town Council has considered its response to the second non-statutory consultation by Wiltshire Council on the A350 Melksham Bypass proposal at two meetings of the Town Council: firstly at a meeting of the Economic Development and Planning Committee on 26 July and secondly at a meeting of Full Council on 9 August.

Consideration has also been given to correspondence received from members of the public via email since the agenda for the most recent meeting was published on 3 August. However, of the correspondence received, only one piece relates to a Melksham Town resident, the remainder has come from residents of Melksham Without Parish Council. Correspondence from residents is included in Appendix 1.

The proposed bypass route "10c" does not pass through the Melksham Town parish, but is mostly in Melksham Without, and we commend that parish on their hard work and thorough consultation and input. The proposed bypass route - or any changes to road structure or designation along the North-South corridor WILL have a major impact on Melksham Town, as would going further without changing the current setup.

Melksham Town Council has seen Melksham Without Parish Council's response to the second consultation and supports the contention made by them as follows:

'The general consensus of the public opinion is that they are doubtful of the justification for this scheme and feel that more up to date evidence is required. This is particularly as some evidence was collated pre-Covid and before improvements to 'Farmers' Roundabout. In the main, the residents feel that the Covid pandemic not only affected the results of surveys undertaken during 2020 and 2021 during the lockdown periods, but more importantly, that post-Covid there will be a widescale change in the way people conduct their daily life. That there has been a sea change and the previous working patterns of so many will change for good, and not return to pre-Covid levels in months and years to come. The shift to "working from home", the use of technology instead of meeting in person, the preference to not commute daily and to have a more flexible working pattern will be here to stay, and therefore there is a general feeling that new evidence needs to be obtained to justify the requirement for the Melksham A350 Bypass in the light of the changing world. The parish council is aware that this project is not just about a bypass for Beanacre, or even for the wider Melksham area, but as part of the much bigger Western Gateway Strategic Transport Plan<sup>2</sup> but nevertheless, feels that the justification for the scheme does need to be looked at again in the post Covid climate and against the wider priorities of Wiltshire Council and the Government as they move to zero carbon emission targets over the coming years.'

As part of its response to the consultation, Melksham Town Council wishes to address the pros and cons of the proposed route, 10c, as it sees them. The response will then address ideas for mitigation to alleviate perceived local issues and suggest ideas for additional community benefits that could be achieved as part of the works.

## **Pros of a bypass for Melksham:**

### Traffic

1. Traffic congestion to the north of the town by McDonalds will be reduced.
2. HGV traffic to the north and south of Melksham will be diverted to the bypass.
3. A reduction in traffic and noise along the current route of the A350 through north Melksham and past housing in the closes off Hazelwood Road and Longford Road.
4. There will be a reduction in the volume and type of traffic through the town centre.
5. The speed and efficiency of traffic flow through the town for local transport will be improved.
6. Shorter journeys from the A350 north of Melksham to and from the east of Melksham, moving traffic away from both the A3102 traffic centre and Woodrow Road (to Lacock) onto new routes.
7. Eastern Way will be truly bypassed.
8. The use of Woodrow Road and the Lacock Road as 'shortcuts' to Lacock will be reduced.
9. The bypass will provide an additional crossing over the River Avon.
10. The proposed roundabout at the Lacock junction of the bypass will remove what is currently a dangerous junction with the A350.
11. The increased HGV traffic along the A350 as a result of the possibly permanent closure of Cleveland Bridge in Bath will be mitigated by the bypass.
12. Route 10c can be made future-proof. It is already a full bypass and is a high quality road.

### Businesses

13. Once Bank Street and Lowbourn are no longer main transit routes through Melksham, town centre improvements for both business and leisure purposes can be considered.
14. New opportunities are bound to be presented as a result of the bypass, although these are unknown at present.

### Environmental

15. The diversion of traffic away from the town will reduce air pollution in the town centre, improving air quality.
16. The proposed bridge at Lower Woodrow will support the National Cycle Network Route and aid access to existing bridleways and footpaths.

### Residents

17. The proposed bypass is some distance from a lot of existing housing development improving air quality and reducing noise pollution.
18. The proposed route will enable safer access to Melksham Oak School.

## General

19. Route 10c is the least worst route!

## Cons of a bypass for Melksham:

### Traffic

20. The route needs to be sustainable in the longterm.
21. Will the bypass still be needed in 20/30 years' time?
22. As approximately 50% of journeys are less than five miles in distance, will people use the bypass?
23. Traffic may just be split between two A roads – HGVs on the bypass and more local traffic on the 'old' A road.
24. Further investigation is needed regarding the 'right' route.
25. Traffic may continue to use other routes to cross the town to access the bypass eg Sandridge Road, meaning that traffic flow on these roads may not decrease.
26. Further analysis of traffic flows is needed.
27. There seems to have been a lack of consideration of public transport routes, including walking and cycling routes and the integration of these into the proposed bypass route.

### Businesses

28. People may be deterred from coming to Melksham – they may simply use the bypass.
29. Certain businesses which may rely on passing traffic to some degree may be adversely affected in terms of trade eg Subway, Leekes, McDonalds.
30. The proposed route will result in the compulsory purchase of land or the severing of existing farms.
31. An Agricultural Impact Assessment hasn't yet been carried out.

### Environmental

- 32. Melksham Town Council cannot emphasise strongly enough its responsibility to the environment and wildlife habitats which will be impacted by the construction of the bypass.**
33. The destruction of green fields, grassland, trees, hedgerows cannot be overlooked.
34. Access to the Kennet and Avon Canal will be bisected by the bypass.
35. Byways, bridleways and cycleways will have to be rerouted. It has even been proposed that some are closed. The following have also been brought to your attention by Melksham Without Parish Council:
  - The disconnect (circuitous diversion) between MELW66 and LACO36
  - Severance of MELW48 which is the access to Hack Farm, Lower Woodrow.
  - The treatment of Prater's Lane Bridleway 40.

- The total closure of MELW24.
- The total closure of MELW35 between Bowerhill Lane and Carnation Lane cutting off residents of Carnation Lane from Bowerhill. Consideration needs to be given to how these residents will access Bowerhill, such as the provision of a footpath. New kissing gates have been installed with Area Board & Parish Council (Melksham Without & Seend) funding in recent years on this section, working with the West Wiltshire Ramblers Association
- The closure and diversion of MELW45/SEEN17 preventing direct access to Giles Wood except via a dog-leg half way to the picnic area using SEEN13.
- Diversion of MELW42 to use a pedestrian crossing at the roundabout junction. There is a concern this will be dangerous, reminiscent of the highly dangerous Western Way crossing at Townsend Farm over the A350 which the Parish Council have sought enhancements to in order to improve pedestrian safety; and is now subject to further safety improvements by Wiltshire Council with “Re allocation of Road space” funding.

36. Has the carbon footprint of the proposed route been investigated?

37. Environmental Impact Assessments haven't yet been carried out.

#### Residents

38. More communication and consultation with residents should have been undertaken.

39. There is a lack of clarity about how the decision was made to put forward just one option for the bypass.

40. One option is not a 'shortlist'.

41. Residents need easy access to all the information required to enable them to make an informed decision.

42. Concern has been expressed that bypass route 10c provides a balloon of land that would be a natural building area. Although reassurance has been provided that housing is outside the scope of this consultation, Wiltshire Council graphics show projected housing growth in Trowbridge, Westbury and Warminster as part of their justification for the bypass.

#### General

43. Grant Shapps' statement on the Transport Decarbonisation Plan published on 14 July 2021 should be taken into account. Its opening paragraph states 'Transport decarbonisation is a dull way of describing something much more exciting and far-reaching. Because transport is not just how you get around. It is something that fundamentally shapes our towns, our cities, our countryside, our living standards, our health, and our whole quality of life.'

It must be noted that some of the pros may result from a bypass in general and not necessarily just from route 10c.

## Ideas for mitigation and community benefits:

If the scheme for the A350 Melksham Bypass goes ahead, Melksham Town Council would like to see the following mitigation and community benefits:

- Appropriate land banking/ 'bunds' are created along the entire length of the proposed route to screen the bypass from adjacent land and reduce noise pollution.
- A 'cutting' is used for the section of bypass between Bowerhill and the canal in order to improve the visual impact of the bypass.
- The creation of 'bunds' adjacent to 'settlements' to mitigate against any noise and light pollution.
- All bridges proposed are 'green bridges' particularly the one from Bowerhill to the canal/picnic area and Giles Wood, in order to provide the feel of the continuation of the open countryside.
- All bridges need to be easily accessible, with shallow ramps either side.
- The creation of wildlife crossings/ underpasses/ bridges to retain the connection between fields.
- Can the bridge over Clackers Brook be built wide-enough to accommodate the likelihood of flooding?
- Can the bridge over Clackers Brook be built with public access?
- The installation of deer fencing to reduce the potential for road traffic accidents involving deer.
- Forestation of the whole area bounded by Portal Way, the canal, the bridleway and Brabazon Way.
- The creation of a nature reserve in this area and also in other suitable areas with the creation of dedicated pedestrian and cycleways from the town centre to these.
- The building of an additional bridge over the bypass to the south of Bowerhill to maintain the loop walk between Locking Close, the canal and Brabazon Way.
- Forestation of as much of the area between the bridleway and the A365 as possible.
- Use of local/ native tree species and hedgerows along the entire length of the bypass to improve biodiversity.
- It was noted in the A350 Melksham Bypass Second Consultation document that provision would be made for a potential footway/cycleway adjacent to some sections of the bypass route, where possible. The Town Council believes that this should be **ALWAYS, not just where possible, and for the whole length of the bypass.**
- The cycleways/ footways should be segmented from the bypass by a clear barrier.
- All cycleways should be incorporated into the existing cycle network.
- An extension/ improvement to the National Cycle Network from Melksham to Lacock should be created.
- Opportunities for relieving traffic in the town centre are mentioned under Complementary Walking and Cycling Measures in the A350 Melksham Bypass Second Consultation document. The Town Council suggests the following:
  - Pedestrian and cycle provision along the current A350 south from Farmers Roundabout to the entrance to Melksham Cemetery, providing safe a

walking route from the Hazelwood Road area, rear of the Campus and potential new canal-side build to the stores and station area.

- The improvement of connectivity between the north of the town and the town centre through the existing subway.
- The creation of access from the railway station behind Spencers Social Club to a new pedestrian crossing across the A350 giving access to Scotland Road and the Riverside Drive area.
- Improvements to pedestrian and cycle access from the outskirts of the town to the town centre and from the town centre to the countryside through the creation of designated cycleways
- The bypass could be used to improve connectivity to the adjacent countryside through the use of laybys with suitable gated access to existing rights of way.
- The maintenance of the existing car park/ layby at the base of Sandridge Hill or the creation of a new car park/ layby to maintain access to popular dog walking routes.
- The smoothing out of the 'bulge' in the bypass adjacent to Redstocks whilst recognising the need to protect the recently discovered archaeological site.
- Tree planting adjacent to Redstocks to mitigate noise pollution.
- Improvement of the proposed bridge at Woodrow.

**The Town Council also request discussions take place directly with the Highway Planners on the comments raised by the Town Council in order to achieve as best an outcome as possible for its residents if the bypass were to go ahead.**

**Finally, the Town Council wishes it to be noted that the results of a straw poll carried out amongst councillors at the meeting of Full Council on 9 August indicated that of 15 councillors, eight are in favour of route 10c being the right route for the bypass at this point in time and seven are against. This suggests that at this early stage in the developmental timescale for the bypass, opinions are still mixed and open to reconsideration.**

## **Appendix One**

### **Residents' Comments on the A350 Bypass Consultation – By Email or Letter**

The Town Council has received several emails from residents, which are collated below for reference. If their location is known, this is shown.

## Resident of Bowerhill

As a Melksham resident I am writing to voice my concerns about, and objections to, the proposed Melksham bypass and its impact on the town and surrounding areas.

### **Northern Melksham:**

It is clear that the northernmost end of the route will be through flood plain and will be raised above ground level by a substantial amount. Given the government's announcement recently that they will no longer permit houses to be built on flood plains this means that the route will be seen and heard for many miles around including Lacock and Beanacre. Given the flooding, it is likely that even forestation will not be possible in the area so it is likely that there will be no mitigation to sound and light pollution or the visual impact.

### **Southern Mellsham:**

It is clear that there is absolutely no consideration for the residents of Bowerhill since the road will pass literally less than 150 meters from houses in Locking Close. Noise and light abatement are completely missing from the current plans and even if they are to be considered it is likely that given the water table that they would have to be built up rather than cut in as suggested.

I call your attention to some key comments from the Wiltshire Council Planner in discussion with Melksham Without Parish Council:

The Clerk asked with regard to the impact on people in Bowerhill how was that measured against environmental impact for instance. Steve felt this was more of a relatively detailed matter which may need to be put to the business case development team at Atkins.

Are we putting the lives and wellbeing of residents in the hands of a third party who may benefit from further consultation during the roads planning and development?

Steve explained there were various benefits when considering a road scheme such as traffic improvements, economic benefit in supporting the local economy and development, journey times, accessibility, and ecological benefits, and suggested that often the focus is placed on the negative impacts. The business case is being developed in accordance with DfT requirements. Steve suggested that the question regarding how and what benefits are considered may be better addressed through reference to the Atkins team.

I think that traffic improvements is a arguable benefit. The residents of Bowerhill will have 60% of through traffic forced upon them. That is of no benefit.

How does the route benefit the local economy? It will ensure that people can get between Chippenham and Trowbridge for leisure and shopping further reducing footfall in Melksham centre. Already we see that the shops are mostly either fast food outlets, hairdressers or charity shops. Circumventing the centre will only exacerbate this spiralling decline.

Journey times are reported to be a couple of minutes better when traversing the town, mostly because the new road will be 60mph, but the data upon which it is based is completely out of date and pre-covid, not to mention that the actual time is negligible. One or two minutes on a 5 mile journey when almost every day it can take up to 30 minutes to traverse the 4 miles through Devizes.

I struggle to understand where we currently have accessibility issues?

What are the ecological benefits of the huge carbon footprint from building the road and allowing unabated increases in traffic? A couple of compensating ponds will not compensate from the carbon and particulate emissions. It will not compensate for the loss of the use of the land for farming and importantly wildlife.

Finally, only someone who has no idea about how these roads impact the wellbeing of residents could say that too much focus is on the negatives. Improvements in journey times in 15 years time by 1-2 minutes is hardly a massive benefit so of course the negatives shine through.

Resident of Bowerhill

This is an impassioned plea for you to vote against the A350 Melksham bypass.

I have lived in Melksham for most of my life and used to play in Clackers Brook, pick wildflowers over the fields and my mother too (now 91) would crawl into the oak that is now enshrined at the Oak School.

We are devastated by the once vibrant town of Melksham, its community, and the countryside that has been lost in the name of progress.

I am a grandmother of 2 young children, who, like me, are passionate about the countryside and wildlife. We often walk the fields around Bowerhill and enjoy the picnic area, Giles Wood. Should a road be built, and the inevitable infill, would change everything and would no longer be the peaceful, tranquil, green haven that it is today.

I am totally against any building of any new roads in Britain let alone here in rural Wiltshire with its all too important food producing farmland.

I have repeatedly asked Wiltshire Council to ask the following questions and I have been met with no response:

In the light of the recent Independent Climate Change Committees report on reducing emissions, saying that the UK is woefully unprepared to meet targets how can this project even be considered?

We are in unprecedented times and we MUST not add to our carbon footprint in any shape, way or form. A 9.3km road will only serve to exacerbate the situation. The scheme had its inception many years ago and we are now in a different world in which the whole scheme is no longer relevant.

The Traffic projections are now totally wrong with more and more people working from home, and in fact is recommended in the CCC report to help reach emissions targets.

We MUST protect our valuable countryside for future generations. In the report it also states that food production in the years to come will be even more important. The proposed road will tear through valuable farmland and completely upset the eco systems that many species are reliant upon.

I totally oppose any road building now or in the future.

It is your duty and responsibility to leave our wonderful environment as intact as possible for future generations. Please I implore you to vote against the Bypass.

I suggest that you read the Independent Climate Change Committees report ahead of your vote.



Resident of Bowerhill

I would like to register my strongest objection to the proposed Melksham Bypass. This new road will pass in close proximity to existing housing, the Wilts & Berks canal and its surrounding environment as well cut through green countryside, floodplains and farms.

This new road will achieve the complete and utter severance of the village of Bowerhill. Bowerhill is already surrounded on 2 sides by the A350 and the A365 with the associated noise and air pollution that comes from those roads. To then decide that the new bypass should then go round the remaining 2 sides of the village is simply unacceptable. The air and noise pollution from vehicles using the road and the lighting pollution that would be needed along the route will impact the residents, canal dwellers and wildlife, not only their health but also the habitats within the area of the road length.

There will be irreversible environmental devastation of flora and fauna along the entire length and wider area - a plethora of bats, otters, deer, foxes, herons, kingfishers, ducks, geese, swans to name a few inhabit the area of the new road. The ancient hedgerows and trees removed by the construction will never be replaced and these are vital habitats, so those ecosystems will be lost forever. There was a very slick video produced that only spoke of the "opportunities" for landscaping. Nothing definite, only opportunities. That's not a positive message to be putting out into the world as we need to know that landscaping is high on the priority list of the road construction.

Large areas of the route are in natural flood plains. These are unique habitats in themselves and will see the need for huge expense to traverse these. The environmental impact on the already flood prone areas surrounding the area will be devastating and will never be replaced.

The loss of access to the local canal, fields, Giles Wood and the River Avon will have adverse effects on the mental health and have a large social impact on people who will be restricted in their freedom of movement. There are many bridleways and pathways that are going to be removed and not replaced. Why is this? Provisions need to be made to compensate for the loss of this access. These all need to be re-instated or replaced by green pathways and not just hope that the people forget that they ever existed.

All traffic modelling figures were taken pre COVID and before the enhancements to the Farmers Roundabout - these all need to be recalculated. Life after COVID is so very different and will remain so as more people work from home or have had the amount of time spent in offices greatly reduced. Is there the actual need for such a bypass? There was a walking survey taken along the canal in January 2021. Why was this taken in January in lockdown? The 60mph speed limit is excessive and the only way that the "benefit" of saving 2-3 minutes on a journey has been achieved. The speed limit will not be adhered to, thus increasing the pollution levels and also the probabilities and severity of accidents.

WC going to be carbon zero by 2030 - this proposed bypass flies in the face of this as there will be a huge carbon footprint created by the construction of the road and by the

Resident of Bowerhill

I am writing to express my concerns about the Melksham bypass. It appears that the route has already been decided on as other options have quickly been dismissed with little review or consultation. However, I feel compelled to express my concerns.

As long as I can remember the A350 has passed through Beanacre and, for many years, the concerns of residents have grown stronger. Despite this the community has thrived and many of the houses been sold to people happy to live alongside the road. Indeed road studies indicate that the volume of traffic has not increased greatly. Despite this for many years nothing has been done and any potential improvements to the road have been ignored while housing and shops have been approved. Opportunities to put in new routes before the massive Housebuilding in Melksham have also been ignored. Now, whatever is decided, so many more people are going to be upset and exposed to noise and air pollution.

There seems to be agreement that to cut a 9km tarmac scar through the beautiful and peaceful countryside on the outskirts of Melksham is an acceptable solution to the problem.

The road will cut through Melksham's back garden. Destroying an area of natural beauty. I have lived in Bowerhill for over 30 years and chose to live here as it was out of town and a peaceful natural area to raise a family. The area is free of noise pollution and air pollution. It is a haven for walkers, cyclists and a popular busy canal for holiday makers and fishermen. There are many paths and bridleways and footpaths that attract people from all over Melksham and beyond. Local community groups like the cubs and Scouts use the area. There are also the thriving natural communities of birds, mice, foxes, deer, breeding toads, swans, otters and bats whose habitats are at risk of being destroyed. Once we kill these habitats and beauty spots you can never get them back. The new road will cut across flood plains, woods and through farms cutting them in half or render them useless. The area is beautiful Green belt and yet Wiltshire council seem keen to destroy it all for a road to save a few minutes on a journey. There is sound scientific evidence that if we take no action in the next few years the damage will be irreversible, bringing the collapse of the natural world, bio diversity and social culture. In the last 18 months we have seen the effects of COVID which will change our way of life forever.

There have been some surveys undertaken at various points over the last few years, but you have to question their timing. Some of the road surveys were taken several years ago. Since then COVID has changed our working practices, large numbers will no longer commute to work but work from home reducing road traffic. The survey of the canal path was done in Winter in the middle of Lockdown. This will clearly distort figures. Why not in Summer. Living in Locking close I know the paths through the proposed site are a human Motorway. The Farmers Roundabout changes recently have improved the flow of traffic on the A350. The bypass towards the old Semington road has scope to be made into dual carriageway. Surely this would be a more cost effective answer. Current Chamber of Commerce surveys show that a large number regular business users of the A350 see this link as currently acceptable, therefore surely tweaks to the existing round would improve this at the fraction of the cost.

There has been great strides in the Rail network over the last 10 years, again further developing these as well as bus routes and more Cycleways would also help. But these seem to have been dismissed out of hand, along with enhancements to the existing routes.

There is talk of a business plan and the most cost effective route. However this option is the most expensive it will result in two roads the current A350 and this new structure

Resident of Mills Road

It's hard to say, yes, I understand the conservation problems and the loss of land. But again, is that road necessary certainly it will change Melksham forever.

I was once told the plan was to turn Melksham into one large housing estate joining Chippenham to Trowbridge and from what I see that is what is happening. Already the shops have gone and with the new ideas of online shopping somehow, I think we need a better road system.

Then there's electric cars, lorries, and vans so my road will be quieter, but the future system means more traffic and so can we/I go on living the stage coach life, more or less cut off.

Nice idyllic area worth preserving or not. Well, I am not sure. Yes or no to that road being built or the number of houses. Where do the people come from, where do they work which, all creates more traffic?

So, in 10 years' time, Melksham might be glad to have a bypass with so many changes in our way of life, how it's hard to say. When we moved into Mills Road it was greenbelt, no more houses to be built. Yeah, look at it now, hard to believe and you talk about conservation. Well I'll tell you people could not care less. It's now the motor car, grass, and gravel. I don't see nice gardens or trees. The nice environments have gone, and we are left with vans endless stream of them.

And so, you ask for support to say no. Well I don't drive but I see all the problems and I'm sympathetic yet how do you stop the future. It's a pity about the land however I am pretty certain that plan for Melksham housing will continue and if so, they will need a road, Sadly.