

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC
Wednesday, 14 December 2016

1. QUESTION FROM PROFESSOR POTTER
Re: A30 Improvement

Why does Devon County Council continue to insist that the A30 Improvement Scheme is 'environmentally led' when a wide range of stakeholders submitting to the consultation, including the Blackdown's Partnership, the National Trust and national CPRE, have all strongly criticised the scheme (and particularly the Orange route) on environmental grounds?.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR LEADBETTER

The sensitivity of the Blackdown Hills AONB prompted the County Council to adopt an environmentally led approach to option development. This involved very extensive consideration of the potential implications of the scheme proposals upon the character and special qualities of the AONB. The details relating to this assessment process is documented in the Environmental Assessment Report (EAR). Environmental risks were identified and assessed and, at the same time, a range of environmental bodies, particularly statutory agencies, were identified as 'key stakeholders' and engaged in the scoping of the environmental work.

Extensive desk and field-based studies were started and used to plot a wide range of environmental constraints. That data was used by the project team as the starting point in the selection of potential route alignments and the work was conducted through a series of design meetings, involving a wide range of environmental specialists.

The next stage in option development was to build a comprehensive range of mitigation strategies to avoid or minimise conflicts with environmental interests and to compensate for any unavoidable impacts: this included detailed work to optimise the precise route alignments, which included further refinement following comments received during the extensive Public Consultation process.

Natural England, the Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership, the Environment Agency, Historic England and East Devon District Council have all been closely involved in the process through their role as key stakeholders and their attendance at and input to Value Management workshops. There has been additional engagement with other environmental organisations.

Two of the identified scheme objectives relate specifically to environmental considerations, namely to:

- minimise environmental impacts through exemplary approaches to design and mitigation and adoption of sustainable and innovative solutions; and
- ensure that unavoidable impacts on the character and special qualities of the Blackdown Hills AONB are offset through a significant programme of compensatory measures and the inclusion of opportunities for environmental enhancement in line with AONB Management Plan objectives.

The anticipated extent of environmental impacts are assessed and described in detail through the EAR document. Whilst this environmentally led approach could not avoid all such impacts,

it has addressed them in line with the above objectives and provide a sound basis for the selection of a preferred alignment and consideration against national policy tests.

I would stress that the public consultation responses received from Natural England (the Government's advisors on landscape and ecological issues) and East Devon District Council indicated that they were content with the approach taken by the County Council to the assessment of the environmental impacts and both agreed that the Orange route should be preferred. The Environment Agency, similarly, expressed its preference for the Orange route through the final Value Management Workshop.

2. QUESTION FROM MS CORP

Re: A30 Improvement

Why, when only 23% of the respondents to the A30 consultation opted for the Orange route, can the Council claim a majority support the proposal and the preferred route put forward by Devon Highways"

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR LEADBETTER

Of the responses received during public consultation, 53% agreed the need for the scheme. Of those that disagreed, 56% suggested they did so because they favoured an alternative, such as the A358 scheme or online improvements, which have been discounted.

Of the 53% that agreed there was a need for the scheme, 44% preferred the Orange route and 23% were content with any of the options: by extension therefore 67% of those who agreed the need for a scheme approved the Orange route as the preferred route choice.

Key stakeholders (East Devon District Council, Environment Agency, Natural England and Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership) attended a Value Management workshop in November 2016. The workshop attendees did not object to or comments upon the County Council's conclusions and/or on the recommendation to be made to Cabinet.