
APPENDIX 9 LOCAL NEWS COVERAGE

Chard & Ilminster News

Low turnout for road plans exhibition

AMBITIOUS plans to dual the A358 and A303 are finally on display in Ilminster today (Friday, May 11) - but few people have so far turned up to see them.

As reported in the News, community leaders were upset that unlike South Petherton and Ashill, Ilminster had not received a roadshow on the multimillion pound Highways Agency scheme.

But visitors were a scarcity when the plans to dual the A303 from South Petherton to Ilminster and the A358 on to Taunton were finally displayed in the Ile Youth Centre at noon today.

One man who did attend in the first hour, Horton resident Geoff Ball, said he was impressed with the scheme.

Mr Ball, 61, said: "I travel to Taunton quite regularly and this will cut down congestion, especially through Henlade.

"Three roundabouts just outside Ilminster does seem a bit excessive but I don't know what other alternative there is."

The scheme is not scheduled to begin until 2014 and Mr Ball said: "Once you see all the plans seven years does seem a long way off."

Highways Agency project leader Stephen Coe told the News the Southfields roundabout, outside Ilminster, could be redesigned for the scheme, just days after a serious accident there.

Mr Coe said: "Given the amount of traffic that's expected, the roundabout does seem on the large side. We will probably scale it down.

"There are suggestions it should be a signal junction instead but we have not looked at that yet."

Several lorries have overturned at Southfields in recent years and Mr Coe said: "If there are a certain number of accidents at a given place it can be designated an accident black spot and we can take steps to make it safer.

"We also do regular reviews of all junctions on the A303. This scheme is not coming for several years and if we decide there is a problem at the roundabout now, we will look at it."

5:18pm Friday 11th May 2007

By Matthew Colledge

Somerset County Gazette

A358 exhibition

AN exhibition by the Highways Agency will give more information about the proposals for dualling sections of the A358 and A303 in Somerset.

The exhibition will be held at Ile Youth Centre, Frog Lane, Ilminster between 12noon-7pm on Friday, May 11.

5:16pm Wednesday 9th May 2007

By Laura Thorpe

[Back](#)

Somerset County Gazette

Unacceptable level of consultation

AT the County Council's Scrutiny Committee last Tuesday, I listened to Hazel Prior-Sankey, Somerset County Council's Transport portfolio holder, bemoan and bewail at what she perceived as the Highways Agency's unacceptable level of consultation with regard to their proposed upgrading of the A358. Remember that this is despite the fact that the Highways Agency had been in regular contact with her Officers prior to the start of the public consultation.

Imagine my astonishment, when at the same meeting, this same portfolio holder who only minutes previously had been rigorously preaching the cause of consultation sought to defend Somerset County Council's woeful lack of consultation over their proposals for a new Park-and-Ride at Cambria Farm, Henlade and the placing of traffic lights within 300metres of the M5 roundabout.

At least the Highways Agency have made it clear that their proposal is not set in stone and that all comments will be examined and considered before a final plan is drawn up. But Somerset County Council has given no such undertaking with the Park-and-Ride. Indeed, it seems that rather than consulting over site selection they are determined instead to the promotion of their own favourite site.

It appears that Somerset County Council's agenda is, and always has been, to place a Park-and-Ride at Cambria Farm come what may. I can only emphasise that their failure to identify a Park-and-Ride site by first testing detailed traffic assessments at more than just the one location will result in an escalation of the current traffic problem through Henlade, potential major congestion on the M5 roundabout, queues on the motorway slip roads as well as a detrimental effect on traffic trying to exit Taunton itself.

All this because of Somerset County Council's intransigence and their failure to properly explore the options. It would be all too easy to sit back and let them get on with it in the knowledge that we would be able to say "I told you so!" when this scenario becomes a reality. But they have a responsibility to the local community and to the community of Taunton as a whole to ensure that this scheme is properly examined and tested through consultation.

MIKE MARSHALL Chairman Ruishton & Thornfalcon Parish Council

3:40pm Friday 4th May 2007

By Gazette Correspondent

[Back](#)



Public to be shown route changes

A public exhibition is to be staged to show proposed changes to parts of the A358 and A303 in Somerset.

It follows a decision by the Secretary of State for Transport in November 2004 which should lead to improved safety and journey times for drivers.

The A303 Ilminster Bypass will be dualled as will the A358 from Ilminster to the M5 near Taunton.

This is in preference to dualling the A303 across the environmentally sensitive Blackdown Hills.

The Highways Agency's Regional Manager David Wright said: "Six exhibitions were held at four locations in March to start the public consultation, which were attended by over 2,400 people.

"Due to the interest from people in Ilminster we have decided to hold a further exhibition."

The exhibition will be held at Ile Youth Centre, Frog Lane, Ilminster between 1200 BST and 1900 BST on Friday 11 May.

Construction of the scheme is not likely to begin before 2014.

Story from BBC NEWS:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/england/somerset/6624379.stm>

Published: 2007/05/04 12:25:43 GMT

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Chard & Ilminster News

Call for A358/A303 rethink

PLANS to radically change the approach to Ilminster from the A358 should be reconsidered, county council leaders said last week.

At an executive meeting on Wednesday, Somerset County Council also agreed to ask the Highways Agency to reconsider a planned junction on the A303 at South Petherton.

Both road works form part of a £352million Agency scheme to dual the A303 from South Petherton to Ilminster and the A358 on to Taunton.

Under the current scheme, drivers coming to Ilminster from the A358 Taunton direction would face three roundabouts before arriving in the town.

Michael Fry-Foley, vice-president of Ilminster Chamber of Commerce, welcomed the council's call for a rethink.

"We said to the Highways Agency it would be an advantage to have a single, large roundabout which would be less visually intrusive and would offer better access for vehicles," he said.

"The slight increase in travel time would be negligible and it sounds like the county council has picked up the same points we raised."

The council wants the Agency to consider a simpler junction at the Southfields roundabout, just outside Ilminster, and wants the proposed A358 junction at Ashill to be moved.

It will also ask for a complete rethink of plans for the Hayes End junction of the A303 at South Petherton.

Local people are concerned about how walkers and cyclists will access the village while those living in the nearby hamlet, Watergore, fear a planned dual carriageway will encroach on their homes.

The council will submit its formal response to the Agency on May 18.

THERE will be a display of the Highways Agency plans at the Ile Youth Centre, in Ilminster, on May 11, from 12-7pm.

11:50am Monday 30th April 2007

By Matthew Colledge

[Back](#)

Chard & Ilminster News

Council to respond to dualling plans

SOMERSET County Council is due to consider its response on Wednesday to multimillion pound plans to dual the A358 between Ilminster and Taunton.

The council's executive will debate details of the £352million Highways Agency scheme before submitting a final response on May 18.

The council backs the dualling, which it says will promote Somerset, support businesses, cut traffic congestion and improve road safety and air quality.

But it is expected to ask the Agency to reconsider the route alignment and keep the council closely involved in the development to protect Somerset's interests.

It will also call on the Agency to provide more facilities for cyclists, pedestrians and horse riders, and will demand more noise reduction measures and request an alternative junction to the M5 at Taunton.

Somerset County Council's group manager for strategic planning, Mike O'Dowd-Jones, said: "We will continue to work with the Highways Agency until an acceptable conclusion is reached on the detailed designs.

"We will also continue to ensure that the Agency considers the views and needs of local communities, and that the design of the scheme delivers on important issues, such as congestion, safety, environmental protection and value for money."

The Conservative opposition at County Hall has also called for the council to write to the Government in protest at its decision to embargo proposals for the A358, meaning officers knew of the plans before councillors.

The dualling plans, which would also affect the A303 between Ilminster and South Petherton, have been the subject of public displays since the beginning of March.

2:48pm Monday 23rd April 2007

By Matthew Colledge

[Back](#)

Somerset County Gazette

Dualling plans "increase ill health" says councillor

CONTENTIOUS plans to dual the A358 between Taunton M5 and Ilminster A303 will increase traffic fumes and exacerbate and increase ill health amongst children, according to one councillor.

Taunton Deane's Halcon ward councillor Tim Slattery said he was "appalled" to read about the proposed plans and believes attempts have been made to suppress democratic debate on the subject.

Cllr Slattery said: "This motorway extension will increase traffic levels, thus increasing air pollution which will have a detrimental effect on the community, local schools and green spaces."

He said he would be fighting for the retention of the Blackbrook Sports Centre and the surrounding playing fields, which are earmarked to be bulldozed in the current plans.

Cllr Slattery said: "The motorway extension development is likely to have an environmental impact of major significance. This would mainly be attributable to significant impacts on the local community and internationally protected species in the Blackbrook habitat."

And Taunton Deane MP Jeremy Browne is urging the residents of Blackbrook and Holway to make their views known at a public meeting today (Thursday).

Mr Browne said: "The Highways Agency and Taunton Deane Council should not have been working together on this scheme without consulting the local residents who live nearby.

"The A358 is a congested and dangerous road and I believe it should be improved.

"But there are many options that deserve serious consideration.

"Taking the northbound traffic under the M5 would be the least disruptive to the local community. That is said to be impractical, but the roundabout runs under the M5 at Junction 25, which is less than half-a-mile away.

"Other options to be discussed include feeding the new road into Junction 25 or taking the northbound traffic off the M5 slightly earlier and using a bridge that does not require an enormous loop.

Read the full story in this week's Somerset County Gazette

4:16pm Wednesday 28th March 2007

Chard & Ilminster News

A358 plans to go before council

SOMERSET County Council will this month consider multimillion pound plans to dual the A303 and A358 as part of a new strategic route from London to the South West.

At an executive meeting on April 25, the council will consider the social and environmental impact of the proposed route and its junctions before submitting a formal response to the Highways Agency.

The route will also include a new junction of the M5 at Taunton.

Patrick Flaherty, head of physical regeneration at Somerset County Council, said: "We will be taking local residents' views on board as a part of our detailed response to the Highways Agency proposal.

"We continue to work closely with the Highways Agency to ensure that the interests of Somerset are protected through the development of this scheme."

2:29pm Wednesday 28th March 2007

By Matthew Colledge

[Back](#)

Somerset County Gazette

A358 final meeting for Blackbrook residents

DETAILED plans of the proposed Second Strategic Road Route which will link Somerset and the South West to London are to be considered by Somerset County Council Executive at its meeting on the April 25.

Exact details of the route, which runs along the line of the A303 and A358, will include a new junction with the M5 in the Blackbrook area of Taunton and will be considered at the county council executive meeting.

Patrick Flaherty, head of physical regeneration at Somerset County Council, said: "We will be taking local residents' views on board as part of our detailed response to the Highways Agency proposal.

"We continue to work closely with the Highways Agency to ensure the interests of Somerset, its local and business communities are protected through the development of this scheme."

Public meetings have already been held along the proposed route and a final meeting, for residents of the Blackbrook area, is planned for 7pm on Thursday, March 29, at the Blackbrook Pavilion in Taunton.

Plans of the proposal are also available for inspection at County Hall B Block reception in Taunton.

4:15pm Wednesday 28th March 2007

By Laura Thorpe

[Back](#)

Chard & Ilminster News

Businessman's fear over road dualling plans

AN Ilminster man spoke this week of his fear that multimillion pound plans to dual the A358 could devastate his holiday cottage business.

Peter Speke owns three cottages next to where the Highways Agency plans to build junctions on a new dual carriageway between Ilminster and Taunton.

After inspecting the plans at a roadshow in Ashill on Friday, Mr Speke believes the noise and visual impact of the junctions could badly affect his business.

He said: "The Southfields junction, the Ilton to Broadway flyover and the Ashill over bridge will be visible for miles.

"My cottages are at these junctions and it's the height of the junctions that really concerns me.

"The cottages will be badly affected by the view but primarily by the noise."

Mr Speke said he would like the junctions moved or lowered.

He added: "The Highways Agency has said it will consider everything that I have said.

"I think this plan is going to need a tremendous amount of improvement."

Others who attended Friday's roadshow were concerned the new A358, which is not likely to be built for ten years, would have too few junctions.

Marcus Cooksley, of Broadway, said he feared traffic could pile up after accidents with fewer places for motorists to exit the A358.

But psychiatrist Dr Phil De Warren-Penny, who is based at Chard and Yeovil hospitals, said: "I drive about 25,000 miles a year and when I'm on call, being able to get around is very important.

"The new road will make getting around the area much easier, especially during the summer and on Bank Holidays.

"It's horrendous at the moment. Getting to Yeovil at weekends is a nightmare."

Highways Agency project leader Stephen Coe said: "We have arranged to have a few meetings with landowners next week to discuss access and severance.

"I've told people that junctions are not set in stone and we have tried to invite comments.

"It's been pretty busy but most of the comments have been positive."

Mr Coe said most visitors to the roadshow were happy with the proposed layout of the A358 but that there were particular concerns about an increase in traffic through Ashill.

He added: "Some people are saying we have provided a route for local traffic between Ashill and Taunton but not in the other direction from Ashill to Ilminster, which is a fair comment.

"That's one of the most useful things that's come out of it and we ought to look at it."

Blob - TELL us what you think - comment below or spark a debate on our new online interactive forum, at www.chardandilminsternews.co.uk.

4:47pm Tuesday 27th March 2007

By Matthew Colledge

[Back](#)

'Flyover war' escalates

By LAURA THORPE

laura.thorpe@countygazette.co.uk

CONTROVERSIAL plans over the potential dualling of the A358 between Taunton M5 and Ilminster A303 have led to a war of party politics.

Hundreds of residents are incensed at proposals for a giant flyover carrying thousands of vehicles past their homes every day.

The proposed 20-metre high loop is due to be built by 2014 on playing fields at the Blackbrook Pavilion.

And now councillors at Taunton Deane Council and Somerset County Council are fighting to win the backing of the public with flyers and consultations surrounding the project.

LibDem members of the district council have produced their own flyer which claims: 'Chiefs at Taunton Deane knew about this scheme since last October. John Williams, the Conservative leader, also knew the proposals affected the Blackbrook Sports Field.'

But the Conservative members have hit back with their own leaflets in the Killams and Mounthfield area of Taunton claiming that 'LibDems set out to deceive and are economical with the truth over Blackbrook

Highways Agency proposals for Blackbrook 'loop' spark a fierce debate among political parties

Junction proposals.

John Williams, leader of Taunton Deane Council, told the *County Gazette*: "The Highways Agency briefed the council in strict confidence in September or October. Some time after that, I was notified that proposals impacted facilities at Blackbrook. That was it - I only knew in confidence and had to wait until the public consultation like everyone else."

Cliff Williams said he was pleased with the amount of information the Highways Authority had delivered to councillors and residents.

But LibDems believe they were not informed sufficiently about the plans.

Taunton's LibDem MP Jeremy Browne said: "The Highways Agency has been severely negligent in failing to inform councillors of their proposals. I am also very unhappy I was not given any information about their plans. The A358 is a dangerous and congested road and there is rightly all-party support for it to be improved."

"What is unacceptable is for the Highways Agency to proceed with a low-cost scheme which takes no account of local opinions. I am concerned about the quality of life of people living in Blackbrook."

"There should be full and genuine consultation with residents and councillors before any decisions are taken."

Meanwhile, the Conservative Parliamentary spokesman for Taunton, Mark Formosa, also stepped into the fray this week, calling the flyover proposals 'barney'.

He said: "It makes no sense to me for the Government to try to build a new road on a very well used and socially valuable green space like the Blackbrook playing fields."

"As I understand the situation, it should be possible to deal with the traffic flow issues arising from the forthcoming dualling of the A358 by way of works at the existing Junction 25 of the M5."

"I am, therefore, putting my services at the disposal of Blackbrook and Holway residents

who can then take advantage of my ability to reach and influence those in Government who are responsible for major highways planning."

Mr Formosa is inviting residents to meet him to discuss their concerns at his weekly Taunton surgeries held at the Conservative constituency office at 20A Staplegrove Road on Thursday mornings, or at his Wellington weekly surgeries on Tuesday mornings in Wellington Community Centre.

A spokesman for Taunton Deane Council said: "The A358 is over capacity at Henlade and around the M5 Junction 25, causing problems of congestion, noise, poor air quality and community severance."

"For these reasons, Taunton Deane Council supports in principle the Highways Agency proposals to upgrade the A358 route to dual carriageway between the M5 at Taunton and the A303 at Ilminster."

"Taunton Deane councillors were first alerted to the proposals at the start of the consultation on March 1, 2007."

"A report in response to the proposals is currently being prepared by Forward Plan Officers and will be presented to councillors and interested members of the public at the Strategic Planning, Transportation and Economic Development Review Panel on Wednesday, April 11."

"The council's formal response to the consultation will be submitted by the deadline of Friday, May 18."

The public are encouraged to get involved. Meetings about the plans will be held at Ruishton Village Hall on Saturday, March 24, between 10am and 4pm; Blackbrook Sports Centre at 7pm on Thursday, March 29; Taunton Deane Council's Strategic Planning Panel at 6.15pm on April 11; David Hall, South Pertherton on Friday, March 9, 10am-8pm and Saturday, March 10, 10am-3pm; and at Ashill Village Hall, on Friday March 23, from 10am-5pm.

Further information can be found on the Highways Agency Site: www.highways.gov.uk/roads/projects/14075.aspx

THE COUNCIL CLARIFIES:

A SPOKESMAN for Taunton Deane Council said: "The council would like the opportunity to clarify the situation on the current consultation taking place on the dualling of the A358 between Taunton M5 and Ilminster A303 with particular reference to the Blackbrook Playing Fields."

Taunton Deane Council does not want to lose any facilities and wants a scheme that is more suited for the community.

THE FACTS:

• Taunton Deane Council is currently putting together the council's response to the Highways Agency consultation. The Highways Agency is responsible for the proposals.

• Before the consultation commenced a handful of officers at both Taunton Deane and the county council were invited to a confidential meeting by the Highways Agency to discuss the proposals and the consultation process. The Leader of Taunton Deane Borough Council and District Councillors were not party to this process.

• The Highways Agency will factor all costs, including the potential land owner reimbursements along the route, and it was at this meeting that it was noted the District Valuer from the Inland Revenue (Valuation Office) has allowed a cost of £2.2m to replace the residents.

This is the type of figure that would have to be reimbursed to the land owner. Taunton Deane Council is the playing fields were lost, it is not money that the council has set aside for replacement fields and again the leader of council had no knowledge of this sum.

• The council is concerned over the environmental impact on the Blackbrook area and also the proposed loss of the playing fields. Both the council and the community officers have already advised the Highways Agency that the loss of the playing fields will likely raise objections from Sport England.

• The response to the proposals is being prepared and will be presented at the Strategic Planning, Transportation & Economic Development Review Panel on Wednesday, April 11. Members of the public are welcome to attend.

• The county council as Highway Authority should lead on this with the Highways Agency. Together ensuring options with less impact on the community and the valuable sports facilities are fully considered during the Highways Agency present consultation process.

• The council urges residents to get involved and voice any concerns with the county council's Transport Portfolio Holder.

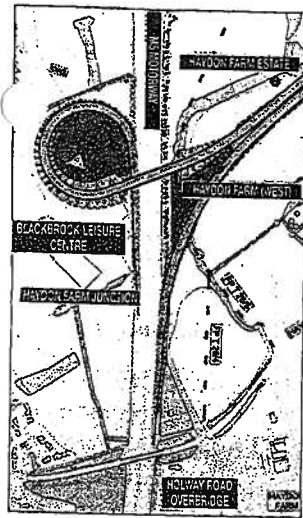
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VIEWS FROM OUR WEBSITE

MANY readers had something to say about this proposal - here are comments left on our website. Go to www.somersetcountygazette.co.uk today for YOUR say.

Richard Groves, Blackbrook: "This proposal will vastly increase the noise levels and will have a significant impact on local resident housing values including my own. On top of this, the disruption to local wildlife and existing leisure facilities are also high. I have grave concerns regarding this proposal."

David Parry, Taunton: "The proposal to place a flyover over Blackbrook playing fields is crazy. This should not be allowed to stand as it would affect the health of residents as well as removing much needed green space. It is not necessary as part of the dual carriageway scheme. Save our playing fields!"

Charlie Roberts, Taunton: "I am really angry that they are planning to build this road on the football pitches as me and my brother play there. My mum and dad won't let us play in the street. They say that they will put the pitches somewhere else but there isn't any green space left near where I live because they have built stuff on it all. They are loop building on kids play areas and then they say we are unfit and overweight and play on the computers all the time, what choice do we have if they keep taking our freedom space away."

Jo & Steve Bird, Taunton: "We are the county hosting the 2012 Olympic games and what do our government agree to - building on a sports centre site, typical. What is more barney is that if this goes ahead we will be getting in our cars to drive our kids to a green space to play, therefore adding to the congestion and pollution problem."

"I am really concerned about this proposal, not only will it mean that here on the Blackbrook estates our green space is being targeted but also about the noise and air pollution that this loop road will bring to our environment."

Aurton Prior-Sankey: "I was horrified to learn of the plan by the Labour Government's Highways Agency to impose a giant flyover on the site of the Blackbrook Sports Centre's playing fields close to homes in Holway and Blackbrook. It was only 12 months ago that the Conservative-controlled Deane Council tried to build on Holway Green. I am not generally given to conspiracy theories but I am beginning to feel that the people of Holway and Blackbrook must have really annoyed the two political parties when they voted 3 to 1 for a Lib Dem to fill a District Council vacancy last May."

"P.S. I am still waiting to hear from the Leader of Taunton Deane where it is that he has decided to locate the new homes that were needed so urgently this time last year that he was prepared to sacrifice Holway's public open space that a private developer provides them."

Steve, Taunton: "Today I have heard that our local MP Mr. Browne is very upset about not having a permanent office in Taunton and has rushed up to voice his concerns at Parliament. Whilst I feel this is a very pressing subject, surely the environmental impact of a ring road on a sports field at Blackbrook is more important???? There seems to be a move by all parties to a greater world, why don't all the local councillors and our MP start showing us that they want it, by helping save these football pitches. For the council to release the paper to take photos of the fields only fuels speculation that some sort of deal between Taunton Deane county council and the highway agency has been struck. SAVE OUR GREEN AREAS FOR FUTURE PEOPLE TO ENJOY!"

Andrew, Taunton: "Why are we replacing a valuable sports field with another motorway junction. Going green is about people before cars. This will be a health hazard not only through fumes but the traffic so close to houses. The new five brigade building has been built with double fencing for added security, this junction would give anybody the perfect opportunity to enter this building by driving straight off the slip road and straight through the side wall. There are plenty of places further south that could be used to locate this if it is required. Why do we think most people from the south want to use the A303, if this is the case why not link in Wellington Junction and go from there."

Rachel, Taunton: "I live in Blackbrook not far from where they plan to build loop it will take away playing fields and a sports centre will be affected by this proposal and instead of a pleasant link with the Deane council's Conservatives. No wonder the voters kicked him out of office."

Kevin, Taunton: "We do not need any more roads especially in a place like this that this Government needs to do is sort out the population problem so the roads we have will not be so busy. Cut down on the amount of foreigners coming into the UK and stop chucking money at families for having more children as its one of the worse things you can do to the environment yet they are rewarded for it?"

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Chard & Ilminster News

Have you noticed the lines at Southfields?

I READ that Ilminster traders and civic leaders' are now expressing concern that the proposed new road layout linking the A303 and A358 would encourage motorists to not come into the town.

It would seem to me that many of these people have not had the town's interest at heart in all respects while they have been concentrating their thoughts and criticisms on the Tesco application alone.

They do not appear to have noticed that the Highways Authority have already taken steps to reduce visitors to Ilminster some months ago, inasmuch that they hatched' out the left hand lane at Southfields roundabout, approaching from Yeovil, which only leaves the two lanes, both being signed straight on or right.

These road markings seem to instruct motorists not to turn left into Ilminster, unless they would care to do a complete circuit of the roundabout and then enter the town, i.e. take the sixth exit on a five exit roundabout!

DAVID PINCOMBE, Station Road, Ilminster

4:55pm Monday 19th March 2007

By Letter writer

[Back](#)

Chard & Ilminster News

Consultation for Ilminster motorists

CONCERNED motorists in Ilminster will be able to see controversial dualing plans for the A358 next Friday, MARCH 23.

A consultation event is being held at Ashill village hall from 10am-8pm.

People will be able to review the Highway Agency's plans to dual the A303 from South Petherton to Ilminster and the A358 on to Taunton, and see how it will affect them.

Further consultation is to take place on March 24 at Ruishton village hall from 10am-4pm.

To see picture of the proposed route, or to watch a video flyover of the Ilminster and Ashill junctions, click on the link below.

5:13pm Thursday 15th March 2007

By Joanna Glover

[Back](#)

Chard & Ilminster News

Fury at A303 dualling plans

PEOPLE living near South Petherton were furious today (Friday, March 9) after discovering a new dual carriageway will run past their doorsteps.

Hundreds of people packed the village's David Hall to learn details of the Highway Agency's plans to dual the A303 from South Petherton to Ilminster and the A358 on to Taunton.

While some heralded as progress the £350million scheme - not due to begin until 2014 - residents of Watergore, a hamlet near the Hayes End roundabout outside South Petherton, said it would shatter their property value.

Gordon Allen, aged 70, who has lived in Watergore all his life, said: "I'm not happy about it at all. "It's going to lower the value of my property.

"The dual carriageway is going to be even closer to our houses. We're going to have a new slip road right next to us and we are going to have an embankment outside our homes."

Another Watergore resident said he would lose part of his garden to the development and said he felt residents' views had been neglected.

Highways Agency project leader Stephen Coe said it was necessary to bring the dual carriageway closer to the western side of Watergore because of the uneven alignment of the existing A303.

He admitted the route was unlikely to change but said major concerns about the positioning of the slip road might be addressed.

He said: "That is upsetting people but at the moment the junctions are really only indicative.

"We're saying, we think there will be a junction there - what do you think about it?"

But South Petherton resident Jeremy Clifford, 70, welcomed the plans.

He said: "I view it as something we need because the road is very busy, the A358 especially.

"You have to favour progress and it will make the bypass safer.

"My only concern is that parents bring their children to South Petherton from Stratton and there needs to be a safe pedestrian access."

Yeovil MP David Laws, who attended Friday's road show, said: "I welcome

this consultation as it's obvious there are a number of practical concerns.

"This gives us time to lobby for improvements. I now hope the Government pulls its finger out and allocates the money."

Over a hundred people arrived for the first two hours of today's road show, which ran from 10am-8pm. A further consultation will be held at the David Hall tomorrow (Saturday, March 10) from 10am-3pm.

5:50pm Friday 9th March 2007

By Matthew Colledge

[Back](#)

Chard & Ilminster News

End of the road?

ILMINSTER'S future could be damaged by plans to radically alter the town's access to the A358 and A303, it was claimed this week.

A £352million scheme by the Highways Agency to dual the A303 and A358 from South Petherton past Ilminster to Taunton was unveiled at the weekend.

The proposals show motorway-style junctions featuring slip roads and new roundabouts at Southfields and Hayes End, with just two other junctions between Ilminster and Taunton - at Ashill and Thornfalcon.

The Highways Agency says the plans are 'indicative only' but civic leaders in Ilminster are worried that economy-boosting tourist traffic will pass by without stopping.

People living in villages along the route also face awkward trips to major junctions to access the new road.

Ilminster town councillor Mike Henly, who is chairman of the council's planning and highways committee, told the News: "It will mean much more effort is needed to come off the by-pass to get into Ilminster and I can see that be-ing detrimental to the town.

"It's divorcing the main East-West tourist route from Ilminster. It's bad news for the businesses that depend on the tourism trade at a time when we are encouraging Ilminster to be a tourist centre."

Cllr Henly suggested creating an additional access for westbound A303 traffic to the old A303 between Seavington and Whitelackington so motorists could get to Ilminster more easily.

Under the current scheme, traffic leaving the London-bound A358/A303 for Ilminster would have to negotiate three roundabouts to reach Hort Bridge.

Ilminster Chamber of Commerce vice-president Michael Fry-Foley said: "Moves are afoot to increase the tourist potential of Ilminster and this is not helping.

"We are very keen to make sure there is significant signposting to make sure access is clearly delineated.

"The Horlicks site is being set up as a major distribution point but the access to the main road is not being facilitated."

Meanwhile, Ilton resident Dave Amor said: "There is concern about getting between villages and access to the main towns."

Tell us what you think - just fill in the Comment form below.

For more on this issue, click on the links below.

1:41pm Tuesday 6th March 2007

By Alex Cameron

[Back](#)

Chard & Ilminster News

Ilminster 'snubbed' over consultation

COMMUNITY leaders in Ilminster say they have been snubbed by the Highways Agency over consultation events for the A358/A303.

The agency held a consultation event in Taunton at the weekend but anyone from the Ilminster area would have to go to the next events at Ashill, South Petherton and Ruishton to view the roadshow.

Town Mayor Carol Goodall said: "It's not very good at all. Considering the size of Ilminster, I would have said we warrant a consultation event.

"It's also easier for people in villages like Donyatt, the Seavingtons and Whitelackington to come to Ilminster rather than Ashill."

Michael Fry-Foley, the vice-chairman of the Chamber of Commerce, said: "I do feel that Ilminster has been left out - it's annoying that something so important is not being displayed in the town."

Highways Agency spokesman Rob-in Miller said: "Ilminster was the first choice to do one of the consultations but the project team couldn't find a venue that was the right size and available so Ashill was chosen."

Mr Miller also reassured residents that Ilminster would be well signed from the new road.

The other scheduled exhibitions are:

David Hall, South Petherton - Friday, March 9, 10am-8pm and Saturday, March 10, 10am-3pm;

Ashill Village Hall - Friday, March 23, 10am-8pm

Ruishton Village Hall - Saturday, March 24, 10am-4pm.

Tell us what you think - just fill in the Comment form below

1:36pm Tuesday 6th March 2007

By Alex Cameron

[Back](#)

Chard & Ilminster News

Forgotten hamlet

Businesses in a hamlet near Ilminster could suffer if current plans for the A358 dualling are upheld, according to one businessman.

Plans to dual the A358 between Ilminster and Taunton went on public display last week but have not gone down well with people living and working in Windmill Hill, near Ilminster.

Chris Slow, who owns the Square and Compass pub at Windmill Hill, said: "These proposals have been going on for years, and we finally get the plans through and we have been missed off the map completely.

"There is no provision for a junction here - it is as though we don't exist."

The proposed route would also include dualling the A303 from South Petherton to the Southfields Roundabout, just outside Ilminster.

Chris added: "Everyone around here is laughing about it and up in arms at the same time.

"If there was not an exit at Windmill Hill, not only would it be inconvenient to the people, but the businesses would suffer too.

"We want to be connected to this road properly and not as an afterthought."

David Wright, regional manager for the Highways Agency, said: "The area hasn't been left off the plans.

"The present plans can't go into great depth in every area."

He added: "We are still a long way from finalising where the junctions are going to be.

"What we want is for people to come along to one of the exhibition events in Taunton and see what they think.

"There they can have a look at the plans, talk to people and get involved."

Exhibitions are being held throughout the area as part of the consultation period, which lasts until May 18.

Scheduled exhibitions are: Friday, March 2, 10am-8pm and Saturday, March 3, 10am-4pm, Holiday Inn, Taunton; Friday, March 9, 10am-8pm and Saturday, March 10, 10am-3pm, David Hall, South Petherton; Friday, March 23, 10am-8pm, Village Hall, Ashill; Saturday, March 24, 10am-4pm, Village Hall, Ruishton.

People can go along to one of the events or access copies of the public consultation document at South Somerset District Council - Chard Area Office, Ilminster Library or South Petherton Library.

You can also access the document online by clicking on the link below.

11:57am Sunday 4th March 2007

By Joanna Glover

[Back](#)

Chard & Ilminster News

New M5 junction

The new junction at Haydon Farm, right next to Blackbrook Pavilion sports centre. Land currently used for sports pitches would be turned into a loop for northbound M5 traffic to join the new A358. The Highways Agency has said it would have to find replacement sports pitches. Traffic using the new loop would travel **over** the M5 on a new flyover. Residents of the nearby Holway and Blackbrook housing estates are already voicing their concerns.

9:44am Saturday 3rd March 2007

[Back](#)

Chard&Ilminster News

New Junction 25

The proposed new design of Junction 25. Also shows an area between the present A358 and the proposed new road for the proposed Cambria Farm park and ride (this would be a separate scheme) from the A358 improvement.

9:35am Saturday 3rd March 2007

[Back](#)

Somerset County Gazette

New road plans go on public display

PLANS to convert the A358 between Ilminster and Taunton into a two-lane road both ways go on public display from Friday.

People and relevant organisations will be able to have their say on the proposals, which also include dualling the A303 Ilminster Bypass.

The Highways Agency scheme, which is unlikely to be started for at least seven years, is aimed at improving road safety and journey times for drivers travelling to and from the South-West.

The route into Taunton is regularly jammed with bumper-to-bumper rush hour traffic, particularly in Henlade, where residents also complain they struggle to cross the road.

The Government agreed to the plans between the A303 and the M5 in Taunton in preference to dualling the A303 across the environmentally sensitive Blackdown Hills.

*For more on this story and a list of venues and dates for public meetings, see Thursday's Somerset County Gazette.

9:46am Monday 26th February 2007

By Phil Hill

[Back](#)

Chard & Ilminster News

Push on for A358 road upgrade

PRESSURE is mounting on the Government to deliver on a promise to upgrade the A358 from Ilminster to Taunton.

Supporters of the A358 Missing Link campaign won a major victory last year when the Government backed plans to upgrade the road as part of a plan for better transport links to the South-West.

But now Yeovil MP David Laws is concerned momentum is being lost.

Last week, he met Missing Link campaigners to discuss progress on the scheme.

Mr Laws said: "The dualling of the A358 is needed because it is a major route and at present one of the most congested roads in Somerset.

"Dualling the A358 will allow better transport links to South Somerset from the M5, which will help to fuel business and tourism in the region.

"It is important that the Government now honours its promises and begins work to upgrade this vital stretch of road as soon as possible. "

9:02am Friday 24th March 2006

By News reporter

[Back](#)