

STOCKBURY PARISH COUNCIL

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A249 Stockbury Roundabout (M2 J5) improvement scheme

Response to consultation from Stockbury Parish Council

Stockbury Parish Council broadly welcomes the intention to improve traffic flows and safety at the roundabout and immediate environs.

The Parish of Stockbury straddles the A249, with South Green to the east and Stockbury village to the west. Access to, and egress from, both is currently via “crossovers” on the dual carriageway that is the A249. We acknowledge that these are dangerous for all road users, and generate a number of accidents, but they are a vital part of the road system for Parishioners and businesses.

We do, however, have serious reservations about the scheme put forward by Highways England on the DfT’s behalf.

The introduction of a flyover will produce a smooth flow of traffic travelling both north and south on the A249 with no natural gaps in the flow at peak times. As the plans currently stand, this would make a dangerous crossing even more dangerous. There is a proposal to limit speeds to 50mph, but this would not reduce the risks posed in crossing a smooth, uninterrupted, flow of traffic.

Whilst acknowledging the need to improve the road infrastructure, the scheme currently being consulted on would, in the view of the Parish Council:

- **Put the lives of Parishioners and visitors / customers at greater risk in accessing Stockbury.**

Access to Stockbury village from the southbound carriageway of the A249 relies on the use of “crossovers”. One of these will be closed under the proposed scheme, leaving just one access point, the use of which will necessitate crossing up to 4 lanes of free flowing traffic. The current crossovers are the site of frequent minor accidents at the moment, even when people can take advantage of the

gaps in traffic flow caused by the current roundabout. A free flow, which will be “nose to tail” during peak periods will render crossing the A249 a potentially lethal experience. As a Parish Council, we cannot support a scheme that may lead to the serious injury or death of Parishioners and visitors to the village.

- **Seriously harm the local economy by making access to the village more dangerous.**

Stockbury is fortunate in that it has attracted and retained a good mixture of business, including farms, an MOT / local garage, a major agricultural equipment supplier, an award winning farm shop and a community owned pub. None of these businesses could be sustained without being patronised by people from outside the village of Stockbury. Nationally, rural economies are struggling to survive but the Stockbury economy is currently thriving against the odds. Without safe access to the village from the main local through route, this economy will be at short term risk and, in the longer term, will collapse.

- **Irreparably harm the community cohesion of the Parish which has significant settlements on both sides of the A249.**

At the heart of the community in Stockbury are the Village Hall and Church. The Village Hall provides a venue for a variety of clubs and activities which draw people in from surrounding villages and beyond and is in daily use. Equally, the Grade 1 listed Church draws its congregation from beyond the confines of the village, particularly for weddings and funerals. Compromising access to both these facilities will be a considerable loss to the extended Stockbury community, again in direct contrast with Government’s stated intentions to improve Community cohesion.

- **Compromise the businesses of independent traders**

Stockbury has a number of independent traders who rely on easy access to, and egress from, the village. Key amongst these are members of the local Gypsy and Traveller community who comprise some 12% of the Parish’s population and rely on travel to find work. As an acknowledged minority group who enjoy some protections in law, it would again seem counter to Government policy if they were to be disproportionately disadvantaged by the scheme as proposed by Highways England

We are sure that it was not the DfT’s intention to kill off a vibrant and thriving community, particularly given the current Government’s commitment to support rural communities, and have attempted to engage Highways England in meaningful discussion to find a solution; sadly, these attempts have proved fruitless.

The Parish Council’s view is that a bridge or underpass should be included in the scheme connecting the south carriageway of the A249 with what will become the sole access point to the village of Stockbury (Church Hill). This would mean that the village could be safely and relatively easily be accessed from the southbound A249 and would

mitigate all of the risks outlined above. This proposal has been put to Highways England both by the Parish Council and by our local MP, Helen Whately, but has been rejected on two grounds:

- The scope of the scheme ends just before the junction that a bridge would replace
- Extending the scheme would cost more and involve taking more land

As a Parish Council, we feel that this is a short sighted view, probably borne of desperation to access funds under RIS 1 and a target driven culture which takes little account of collateral damage to a vibrant community providing “the job is done on time”.

The current junction was built some 50 years ago and designed with the future in mind i.e. it anticipated a national change to driving on the right hand side of the road which was widely expected to happen in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As it turned out, this did not happen and the result was a counter-intuitive junction. Regardless of what turned out to be a wrong judgement, the point is that the future was considered.

We would ask that the DfT again takes a strategic view of road improvements at Junction 5 and invests a relatively minor amount of capital to ensure that the resulting scheme is fit for the next 50 years. Should this investment not be forthcoming, it is inevitable that there will be more fatalities on the A249 which will probably result in the closure of access to Stockbury village entirely on the advice of the Police. Should this happen, a community with 1,000 years of history will be devastated within a few short years.

Stockbury Parish Council