

A303 STONEHENGE COMMUNITY FORUM

6 February 2018

BRIEFING NOTES FROM FIRST FORUM HELD ON 1 FEBRUARY 2018:

On Thursday 1 February 2018 we attended the first A303 Stonehenge Community Forum. This is a Highways England initiative to engage with local Parish Councils and other local bodies/groups and will run for the duration of the Amesbury to Berwick Down project. Its purpose is to act as a two-way conduit between Highways England and the local community representatives. The aim is for it to provide up-to-date information about the project to local communities and obtain their feedback into the scheme about local issues and concerns.

Attending the first meeting from Highways England were David Bullock (Project Manager) and Holly Taylor (Communications and Community Engagement Officer). There was also a representative from the project's technical design company AMM (AECOM with partners Mace and Mouchel). A number of local community representatives were asked to introduce themselves and to highlight their key issues – these varied across the board from rat running, damage to the environment and legacy issues. Many had a recurring theme, namely how the project would affect the daily lives of those living and working in the area.

It was made clear that the intent of the forum would be to hold Highways England to account, although it will have no decision-making or financial authority. Draft Terms of Reference were provided. After some discussion, it was agreed to hold the forum bi-monthly at Antrobus House in Amesbury. It was proposed not to generate formal minutes but identify action points as they arise and report on them until closed. Nevertheless a number of matters remain unclear which need to be resolved if the forum is to have the impact that it deserves, including:

1. Identity of its chairman. A majority of the meeting supported the proposal that Holly Taylor of Highways England take the chair. We took the opposite view and stated that the chairman must be independent if the aim is to hold Highways England to account.
2. Methods of linkage with other interested groups such as landowners, National Trust, archaeologists, wildlife bodies, etc. needs to be defined. As the project moves towards its start, and then throughout construction, its complexities are almost guaranteed to throw up a number of problems or concerns. Legacy issues also need to be considered at an early stage. We stated that it was essential that such a forum could be properly set up to act as the conduit to enable such matters to be addressed transparently.
3. Calibre of executive members. We remain concerned that Highways England are not proposing to support the forum with the appropriate calibre of officers able to give it the weight that it deserves if it is to achieve maximum short and long term benefit for affected communities.

It is uncertain how Highways England will respond. The next meeting is to be held before the deadline of April 6 when responses to the Pre-Development Consent Order are required.

Henry Colthurst
Chairman of CPSTV

Carolyn MacDougall
Representing Berwick St James Parish