

Notes from the A361/A39 Public Meeting Held at Glastonbury Town Hall on Thursday, 7th June 2018.

The A361/A39 Public Meeting was called for by Town Councillors Lindsay MacDougall and Jon Cousins at Glastonbury's Annual Town Meeting (17th April 2018), where residents raised concerns about the Town Council's 'Road Consultation', which was conducted in March 2018.

The context:

The Government is consulting on a proposed national Major Roads Network.

To resolve the problems of heavy traffic on the A361/A39, Wells MP, James Heapey, is recommending a new 'East-West' road (or upgrade) across Somerset, which – if and when built – would form part of this new Network.

Glastonbury Town Council's recent 'Road Consultation' survey asked whether the community wanted a relief road, without a clear majority in favour.

The focus of the public meeting was: for residents, councillors, and others from along the A361/A39 to share their views and foster a better understanding of the issues; to express their views on the Town Council's consultation, the proposed bypass and the development required to fund such an undertaking; to discuss possible alternative routes/solutions; the protection of the countryside; the impact on health and well-being.

The meeting:

Over 250 people attended. The majority were from Glastonbury, but the crowd also included residents from Ashcott, Walton, Street, West Pennard, Pilton, Compton Dundon, Keinton Mandeville, Coxley, Wells (St Cuthbert's Out) and Cheddar – as well as landowners who might be affected by future bypass schemes. Ten Glastonbury Town Councillors were also present, together with representatives from all Parish Councils along the route and environmental groups.

The meeting opened at 7:10 pm. Cllr. Jon Cousins introduced the format of the evening, which loosely followed the structure of a 'Partners And Communities Together' (PACT) meeting*.

Anyone who wished to speak to the meeting was able to register their interest at the start of the meeting, and each was given an equal amount of time to express their thoughts, concerns, and views.

After each speaker the floor was open for comments – also for a limited period of time.

* PACT process: At any point, whether someone was speaking to the meeting, or commenting from the floor – issues/items raised were added to a 'list of priorities' which were recorded on a flip chart placed at the front of the hall for all to see; establishing a set of priorities the meeting felt were important to take forward.

As Town Councillors, he, together with Cllr. Lindsay MacDougall, would take the results from the meeting back to Glastonbury Town Council; and do their best to lobby any other relevant or appropriate group or organisation (County Council; MP; Department for Transport).

Cllr. Cousins explained that the results of the meeting would be made public, so that any other group or individual can use the information/results to take action, lobby, support a campaign.

Cllr. Lindsay MacDougall was the first to speak and acknowledged the activity of Glastonbury Town Council's A361 Committee, who have been working on the issues for many months. Her introduction was enhanced by a visual display showing the aggravated problems along Glastonbury's Chilkwell Street and other limiting locations such as the low railway bridge at Lydford-on-Fosse.

She said, "Speaking personally, and I know I also represent the views of most of the people I have spoken to, I don't believe it is necessary to build a new road to improve East-West road links across Somerset, as there are a variety of routes that are already used when there are roadworks in Chilkwell Street. I would really like to see all freight put on the railways, but we are a way away from that. So we are asking, why is the A361 chosen as the designated county freight route? It is illegally narrow at the pinch point where pedestrians turn off the A361 to go up the Tor. HGVs are regularly seen using the pavement there in order to pass each other. There are other routes that are currently used when there are roadworks in Chilkwell Street. Although it is controversial to even speak about other routes, I think it is worth doing, because there are clearly problems with all of these routes when it comes to diverting the traffic/ HGVs."

Cllr. MacDougall continued by describing the routes used:

- For vehicles coming south from Bristol on A37, which currently continue down the A37 to Shepton Mallet before taking the A361 at Cannard's Grave: The existing alternative route is to take the A39 to Wells – via Chewton Mendip and Green Ore – commencing at the Rush Hill junction, south of Farrington Gurney.
The problem with this route is the steepness of the gradient and inadequacy of the escape route on the Bristol Hill, outside Wells; especially considering that over the past 20 years, HGV load limits have increased from 38 to 44 tonnes.
- For vehicles coming west from Frome on the A361, which currently continue west on the A361 from Shepton Mallet/Cannard's Grave: An existing alternative route is to follow the A37 south from Shepton Mallet/Cannard's Grave to the A303 at Podimore (and to Bridgwater via the A358 / M5 for quarry lorries).
The problems with this route are (a) the low railway bridge at Lydford-on-Fosse (for the higher HGVs); this would cost in the £millions to lower the road here, rather than the £10's of millions for a new road or bypass; (b) for quarry lorries (who can clear the bridge) coming from the quarries at Frome to Hinkley the distance is 40 miles via the A361/A39 cf. 61 miles via A37/A303/A358; the time is 1hr 18 mins via the A361/A39 cf. 1hr 31 mins A37/A303/A358; also they have a fuel consumption of between 8 and 9½ miles per gallon, and significant 'wear and tear' costs.
- Another existing alternative route for vehicles coming west from Frome on the A361, is to take the A371 from Shepton Mallet via Croscombe.
All agree that this route is equally narrow, unsuitable, and tortuous as the pinch points on the A361 at Whitstone Hill/Park Hill corner in Pilton and Glastonbury's Chilkwell Street.
- Finally, for vehicles coming west from Frome on the A361 towards Bridgwater, an exiting alternative route is to follow the A37 South from Shepton Mallet/Cannard's Grave to Lydford-on-Fosse and then the B3153 via Keinton Mandeville to Reynald's Way crossing the B3151 at Marshall's Elm and progressing to the Piper's Inn at Ashcott.
The problems with this route are (a) the current "*accident black spot*" at the Marshall's Elm crossroads, which would require some alteration to improve its safety, especially as HGVs using the B3151 'Compton Dundon' route to the A303 have collided with residents' houses on several occasions, and the increase in traffic along the Street Ridge would 'impact' on that route; (b) Collard Hill is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and home to the very rare and re-introduced Large Blue butterfly. The Polden Way footpath runs parallel to the Reynald's Way ridge road and is a popular route with walkers.

Cllr. MacDougall also mentioned the Ridge Lane route from the A37 at Cannard's Grave joining the A371 at Dulcote, which was a potential relief road proposed 20 years ago. She concluded that, ultimately, it is accident statistics – and in particular fatalities – that carry a lot of weight when looking at the most appropriate freight route.

The next speaker was Liz Payne, Planning Officer for Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) Somerset. She expressed concerns over the initial Glastonbury Town Council 'Road Consultation' survey, the results of which were very contentious. She was concerned that key stakeholders such as Mendip District Council Planners and the National Trust had not been consulted – asking why the Town Council had not costed the suggested roads and associated development. She emphasized that CPRE believe road building should be the very last resort, and that they are very concerned about any suggestion of a bypass because of the iconic significance and national importance of the Tor; she went on to say that expectations of a solution to the HGV problem were unnecessarily raised by the Town Council through a survey about "*something that should never happen*"; emphasising that the economic benefit of the Tor – an invaluable, national cultural and heritage asset – and the associated tourism to Glastonbury, were priceless.

BG, from Glastonbury, suggested the real point was that heavy traffic was inappropriate for the A361, and should not be sent through Glastonbury in the first place! He reflected that Somerset County Council excluded all alternative solutions when suggested, *except* for when Chilkwell Street was closed due to roadworks, which happens often. He concluded that Chilkwell Street was not fit for purpose as a freight route. "*We need the traffic to go somewhere else*".

In answer to a question from a member of the public, it was explained that a Major Road Network plan for the South-West has potential government funding for the upgrading of 'A' roads to link with motorways.

Cllr. Nina Swift, Chair of Street Parish Council, briefly spoke to express Street's full support for Glastonbury in its attempts to resolve this issue.

Indra Donfranceso, from Glastonbury Friends of the Earth, emphasized the pollution problem at the pinch points along the A361, with more soot/diesel particulates generated and fuel used because of the gear changes required along narrow roads in residential areas. She said the solution needs to be now; not in five or ten years' time, stating: "*re-routing on existing roads is the obvious solution!*"

HW, who lives on a farm in Glastonbury, which is on the proposed Northern bypass route option – suggested that all the comments made within the 'Road Consultation' survey needed to be collated and typed for public viewing. She suggested that more joined-up thinking about traffic and transport should be encouraged, and proposed a traffic and transport working group should be set-up within Glastonbury Town Council. She was in favour of re-routing and alternative solutions, rather than building further new roads.

LM, a Glastonbury resident who is a member of the A361 Committee in Glastonbury, said that the suggested Northern bypass route was "*a ghastly idea*", citing that the MP, James Heapey, acknowledged it would mean more development and more traffic, which is unacceptable. She suggested road hauliers would soon be complaining that they could not get through Glastonbury due to the continuous congestion and severe deterioration of the road. She also emphasized the extreme danger of HGVs, including pollution, to the safety of children, pedestrians, and tourists along Chilkwell Street.

There followed a number of comments and suggestions from the floor, including the re-routing of the freight away from the A361; emotive calls for direct action to achieve this; and suggested mediation with road haulage companies. One resident stated that the freight routes were dictated by Somerset County Council 40 years ago; since that time the lorries and traffic have become much heavier.

A Pilton resident spoke from the floor about the traffic chaos caused in the village when the A361 was closed a few years ago, and HGV drivers ignored the re-direction signs. He spoke of the hazardous pinch point at Pilton and noted that Glastonbury Town Council's proposed Northern bypass route would **not** solve this problem, but, in fact, make it worse with an increase in overall traffic flow.

PT, also from Pilton, spoke to the meeting about the "*past, present, and future*" aspects of the problem. He highlighted the 'spiritual nature' of the locality including Pilton, Glastonbury, and Wells, and that it needed to be protected. He observed that visitors come to the area for peace and relaxation; it was "*an enormous tourist resource*" and that any bypass or new roads would be detrimental to this historically important, special landscape – particularly mentioning light pollution: "*no express route should cross our lovely Levels.*" He felt that the building of a new Hinkley Point power station should not be an excuse for new development, and that traffic should be re-routed on existing roads such as the A37 and A303 – reflecting that in 50 years time, technology would have advanced and therefore, today, we must consider where traffic is best placed for the environment and how this will impact on the future.

DB, from Glastonbury, was positive about redirecting freight along the A37, A303 and A358; "*this route is do-able and the public must put their support behind it.*" He felt that the only thing stopping the re-routing from happening was political will. "*Let's re-direct the freight and there will be no need for a bypass.*" He thought it was incredible that the MP was not present.

LS, from Glastonbury, spoke about the children, reminding the meeting that it was *their* future. She reflected on the strong feeling in the room against HGV traffic in Glastonbury and that **no bypass** was required. She mentioned that the next meeting of Somerset County Council would be on Wednesday, 18th July at 10 am, and that Somerset County Councillor John Woodman was responsible for roads and also children's safety in Somerset. His email address is jwoodman@somerset.gov.uk. She also suggested a hashtag #GlastonburySaysNo

There followed much discussion from the floor, including: suggestions for a weight limit on Chilkwell Street, the highlighting of noise pollution as a massive problem, particularly for B&B businesses. Much feeling and emotion was expressed about the special significance of this town. Cllr. Jon Cousins spoke about how the development of the Town Council 'Road Consultation' survey was rushed to be completed by 14th March; there was much criticism of the 'Road Consultation' survey from the floor, and there was a call for the identity of the Councillor who first proposed it.

Others spoke from the floor about the international significance of Glastonbury and the landscape – and the potential of a massive online petition to be raised, with the possibility of asking Glastonbury Festival to promote this through their social media networks. A local landowner said that she had bought some of the railway line north of the Tor and “*no way is anyone having any of it back.*” It was also asked that the Town Council and Councillors should declare any vested interest in the building of a new road or bypass.

There was a suggestion from the floor that part of the solution could be found in some inspiring logistics research, which had been carried out using different sized lorries; optimising multiple deliveries on one vehicle to local areas with smaller roads.

AB, resident of Glastonbury's Bere Lane for 20 years, spoke of the significant increase in size and volume of traffic. Changes included heavy traffic coming through at night; increased pollution/volume of particulates, and significant road damage; the road surface deteriorating daily. He asked how the issues could get increased publicity, and suggested national press. “*We need to convince Somerset County Council to re-route the traffic, but not to put it on someone else.*”

AF, from Glastonbury, spoke passionately about how her grandchildren live on Chilkwell Street, but – because of the volume of traffic – it was too dangerous for them to use their front door on to the road. She spoke about the impact of noise and vibration from HGVs on her home, even though it is behind other houses; further away from Chilkwell Street. As a Chalice Well volunteer she sees “*traffic mayhem*” on Chilkwell Street on a daily basis, describing how the road is seriously pot-holed and how “*waterworks and services are continually breaking down.*” She reflected that the community did not need to wait for fatalities to happen.

PR, from Glastonbury, a data research scientist, said the Town Council 'Road Consultation' survey was seriously flawed and biased to make it look like a new road was the only option. He observed that some households did not receive the 'Road Consultation' questionnaires, and that 'proper data' was needed – he suggested, therefore, the published results of the survey should be retracted and a new consultation undertaken with professional support. He said, “*If I presented this as a document in my job I would be fired.*”

SB, from Glastonbury, who lives at the pinch point on Chilkwell Street, thanked the Town Council for asking her point of view via the 'Road Consultation' survey, admitting that she selected the Northern 'Route A' in response to the questions. However, she told the meeting that after listening to the views expressed she had changed her mind! She said she wanted to support local farmers and local food lifestyles, so that less supermarket lorries would be necessary, and she advocated more vehicle sharing and holistic traffic solutions.

A speaker from the floor advocated direct action to persuade Somerset County Council to re-route HGVs and remove the freight route designation from the A361. He also suggested a legal challenge should be made on the width of the road at the pinch point on Chilkwell Street, and made a call-out for any help from the public with this. He felt it would be useful, to start a petition to present to Somerset County Council, and suggested the idea of UNESCO World Heritage site status for Glastonbury.

DT, from Compton Dundon, observed that the meeting had heard some powerful personal testimonies. He pointed out that the situation locally reflected the 'bigger picture', with asthma increasing by 20% nationally in the last five years alone. He suggested that the government's latest idea of sub-motorways across the country was going to create shock and outrage elsewhere in the UK. He felt that the whole economic model of continual development and growth needed to be looked at; the idea of the 'god of economic growth' needed to be questioned. He suggested that true 'sustainable development' required a change of thinking at

government, regional, and local levels. “*We cannot continue as we are; for example, 75% of insects have been lost, and there has been a crash in biodiversity. Climate catastrophe is evident and we need to change the way we do economics.*”

SL from Glastonbury spoke of how he walks to the Tor every day along the pavement of Chilkwell Street, and observed the impact of the vehicles on this narrow stretch of road. He suggested that most local people don't want a bypass, and they don't want HGVs coming through Glastonbury either. He called for Somerset County Council to be lobbied and expressed his disappointment that there were no Somerset County Councillors present.

PC from West Pennard advocated a toll on HGVs through Glastonbury of perhaps £200 to solve the problem.

Cllr. Jim Reeves, from Coxley; Chair of the Parish Council of St. Cuthbert's Out, Wells, advocated liaising between the A361 committee of Glastonbury and the A371 committee of Wells, and all local authorities and relevant sub-committees in the area, so that they can work together on a common solution.

JB, from Glastonbury, said that it was good to see people coming together to do something about things. He suggested that Somerset County Council should be lobbied, particularly on traffic lights and traffic calming measures to make the A361 a less attractive route. He said that during Glastonbury Festival they are able to remove HGVs from the area: “*the load is shared around.*” He suggested that the ‘Road Consultation’ survey was a rush-job to get a solution through in order to serve the career interests of the Wells MP.

Several landowners again spoke against selling their land on the flood plain for a new road. It was noted that that Wells MP, James Heappey, did not reply to some letters. There was a call from the floor for transparency in the Town Council as to who suggested undertaking the survey. There was also a call for a case study for transport in the local area, including speed and safety surveys in liaison with the Highways Authority. An amusing poem about the issues by a Glastonbury poet was read out and appreciated by all.

The key points were reviewed on the flipchart by Cllr. Lindsay MacDougall, and it was agreed that certain priority issues would be followed up by councillors and environmental groups. An additional comment was made that individuals may apply for weight limits on roads and this had been successfully achieved in the Lake District.

Further actions:

Cllr. Cousins told the meeting that key priorities from the Public Meeting would be proposed as motions for Glastonbury Town Council by Cllr. MacDougall and himself.

District Councillor Nick Cottle (from Glastonbury), agreed to work with Cllr. Cousins and Cllr. MacDougall to create motions for Mendip District Council.

In their absence, Cllr. Cousins also suggested that the two Somerset County Councillors for Glastonbury and Street – Liz Leyshon and Terry Napper – should also use the priorities from the meeting to propose motions for Somerset County Council.

A representative from the Public Meeting agreed to feedback from the Public Meeting to Somerset County Council at their next meeting at County Hall, Taunton, at 10 am on Wednesday, 18th July.

Thanks were given from the floor to the people who arranged the meeting.

The meeting was closed at 9:30 pm.

During the evening, 62 people spoke to the meeting or from the floor.

LIST OF PRIORITY ISSUES RAISED DURING THE MEETING

- The A361 Frome-Ashcott is unsuitable as a designated freight route; HGV traffic needs to go elsewhere
- Call for the removal the designated freight route status from the A361 between Pilton & Glastonbury
- Limit size of trucks using A361
- Call for a weight limit on A361
- Serious damage is being done to the road
- Cracks to buildings – damage to property
- There is an issue with noise pollution being created by the HGVs as they pass by residential homes
- Residents need earplugs at night; call for a HGV curfew
- Quarry lorries can use the A37 instead of the A361

- Call for the Town Council to admit it created a flawed consultation
- The Road Consultation should be fully retracted and re-done professionally
- There is a need for a full consultation, properly developed and undertaken; correctly analysed
- Call for transparency: which Town Councillor initiated the Road Consultation? Who wrote it?
- Call for the declaration of interests of Town Councillors with regard to A361 and proposed bypass routes
- Glastonbury Town Council must collate and publish the detailed comments from residents' responses to 'Road Consultation' survey
- Glastonbury Town Council needs to convene an 'integrated traffic and transport' working group, in addition to the A361 Committee

- Emissions and pollution increases with more gear changes, which occur in the narrow pinch-points, pedestrian crossings, and traffic lights of the residential areas that the A361 passes through; therefore, the existing alternative route of A37/A303/A358 is better suited for the quarry lorries and HGVs under 4.4m high.
- A bypass around Glastonbury would mean more traffic, and the proposed routes (A or B) would not alleviate the problems in Pilton
- New roads will increase in light pollution

- The Town Council, and other Authorities, must acknowledge that the Tor is an international heritage site, and that the economic benefit of the Tor – and the associated tourism – are 'priceless'; therefore, creating a new road on the levels surrounding Glastonbury is unacceptable
- Glastonbury should be respected and acknowledged as an international spiritual centre
- Glastonbury should become a UNESCO World Heritage site to protect & acknowledge it as a sacred site.

- A call for direct action!
- Direct action – holding a regular street party on the road / walking across pedestrian crossing all day!
- Legal challenge to Highways Authority with regard to the width of the road. Is Chilkwell Street in Glastonbury an illegal/unlawful pinch point?
- Research case studies of the legal position of pinch points in other communities (Bruton?)
- Freight companies' best practice is being contravened
- Freight companies should pay directly for improvements required to the road infrastructure
- There should be a toll on Hanson lorries by number plate recognition
- We should start a formal petition to Parliament, perhaps asking Glastonbury Festival to promote this through its networks and social media to mobilise international support
- More publicity needed through press
- One-way traffic system; liaison re. A361 and A371
- Immediate traffic-calming measures
- Lobby Highways authority to do speed surveys
- Research if individuals can apply for weight restrictions on roads

- A representative to be sent to the Somerset County Council meeting at 10 am Wednesday, 18th July.
- Look to the future where we should aim to use HGVs less
- Create hashtag #GlastonburySaysNo
- Notes from Public Meeting to be posted on lightentheloadglastonbury.co.uk website by Friday, 15th June.