

# **A244 THAMES CROSSING WALTON ON THAMES**

## **Public Inquiry**

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL (NEW THAMES ROAD BRIDGE, WALTON) SCHEME 2004  
SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL (A244) THAMES CROSSING WALTON ON THAMES  
(OATLANDS DRIVE) WALTON TO WALTON LANE ( SHEPPERTON)) (CLASSIFIED ROAD)  
(SIDE ROADS) ORDER 2004  
SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL (A244) THAMES CROSSING WALTON ON THAMES  
COMPULSORY PURCHASE ORDER 2004

## **PROOF OF EVIDENCE**

**16 / 1 / 1**

**Statement of Objection submitted by  
Portmore Park and District Residents Association**

**Miles Macleod (Chair, PP&DRA)**

# 1 Introduction

- 1.1 My name is Miles Macleod. I have lived in Weybridge since 1991.
- 1.2 I chair Portmore Park and District Residents Association (PP&DRA), and am presenting this evidence on behalf of the PP&DRA committee.
- 1.3 PP&DRA is an association of residents interested in local heritage, quality of life and community. Our association is not politically affiliated.
- 1.4 Most local residents who have spoken with the committee about the Walton Bridge plans are opposed to the scheme. In an almost unanimous show of hands at our AGMs in 2004 and 2005, around sixty people expressed their opposition to the plans for the current scheme, particularly the cloverleaf junction.

## 2 Overview of PP&DRA objections

- 2.1 We welcome a new bridge, but it must be a scheme that fits in with the local environment, preserves riverside amenity and avoids unnecessary damage.
- 2.2 PP&DRA objects to the proposed bridge and junction scheme, and the compulsory purchase of land, on the following grounds:
- 2.3 **Flawed consultation and process:** The SCC consultation was fundamentally flawed, had little initial publicity in Weybridge, and has delivered invalid findings.
- 2.4 **Environmental damage and loss of amenity:** The proposed bridge and junction would cause irreversible local environmental damage and loss of riverside amenity at Cowey Sale. This open space beside the Thames is highly valued by residents and visitors. The 'exchange land' is not at all equivalent.

2.5 **Junction design and traffic flow:** The proposed additional slip-road threatens to invite additional rat run traffic along Walton Lane (Weybridge), into narrow traffic-calmed residential roads.

### **3 Flawed consultation and process**

3.1 We would expect a consultation to inform, invite debate, and use the findings to generate the best solution. In contrast, SCC first generated a preferred traffic engineering solution, then promoted it in an exhibition, and subsequently via leaflets.

#### **3.2 Advance publicity?**

3.2.1 The SCC exhibition of bridge and junction designs in March 2003 received little publicity in Weybridge. Many residents, including most of our committee, were unaware of it.

3.2.2 We are told there were notices in the local press, but the most visible publicity was via signs on the bridge approach roads, which attracted passing motorists.

#### **3.3 Skewed sample?**

3.3.1 Who responded? We have seen no data on how many of the 1523 questionnaire responses were from local residents, who use the Cowey Sale riverside open space, and how many from motorists who commute via Walton Lane and the A244.

#### **3.4 Biased presentation?**

3.4.1 Personally, I saw the exhibition sign while driving along Walton Lane, and stopped to look. The exhibition 'showcased' (SCC's word) a series of nice looking pictures of bridge and junction designs. It was a beauty parade of engineering solutions, presented appealingly. I was guided around by someone enthusiastic

and personable, who answered my questions, and nodded when I said something positive.

3.4.2 After ten minutes, my preference was for the tied arch design, with the cloverleaf junction that would get rid of the Walton Lane queue for Walton Bridge. The ‘beam and slab’ design sounded drab, some others seemed bizarre. The exhibition people were very keen for me to complete the questionnaire immediately, but I persuaded them to let me take one away.

3.4.3 On later reflection I began to consider the actual scale of the bridge and junction, and its impact on the local environment. And my views changed. Ideally I wanted a more elegant version of the beam and slab design, with a small and simple junction – something that fits in with the local environment.

3.4.4 The exhibition had not made the environment implications of the different designs clear, yet had asked visitors to state their preferences there and then.

3.4.5 SCC has subsequently used the results to claim ‘overwhelming’ popular support for their design.

## **4 Environmental damage and loss of amenity**

4.1 The SCC design would have a severe negative impact on the local environment. It would dominate this historic part of the Thames, and permanently change its character.

4.2 The tied arch bridge would be 23.5 metres (77 feet) high, drastically larger than any previous bridge, visually intrusive and quite out of keeping with its surroundings.

4.3 The landscape around the proposed cloverleaf junction would be “dramatically and irreversibly changed”.

#### **4.4 Cherished riverside land**

4.4.1 This area of Cowey Sale, around Walton Bridge, is cherished as safe, green, riverside open space.

4.4.2 On summer weekends, thousands of people use this space. On other days, hundreds of people use it. Elderly people drive there and park, families enjoy the riverside, children cycle and play.

4.4.3 As an example, on Saturday 15 October 2005, around 2pm there were around eighty cars in the Cowey Sale car park. There were another thirty cars parked below and around the bridge itself, between Walton Lane and the marina.

4.4.4 This is currently a safe and tranquil area, with a cafe and no speeding traffic. (See pictures in Document 16/1/2)

#### **4.5 Sterile redevelopment**

4.5.1 The proposed scheme would cause a severe loss of amenity – tranquil riverside replaced by sterile urban roadside, slip-road embankments, traffic and concrete.

- The southern slip-road would occupy much of the current amenity area
- The northern slip-road would cover a Site of Nature Conservation Importance
- A stretch of riverside on either side of the bridge would become busy roadway
- Parking areas around the bridge would be lost
- Two huge embankments would dominate the floodplain – 6.2 metres high, compared with the 3.8 metres of the current single embankment

4.5.2 The proposed landscaping and environmental mitigation would create something more like a motorway services than a pleasant accessible riverside.

#### **4.6 Inadequate compensation**

4.6.1 The parcel of 'Exchange Land' being offered to compensate for the compulsory purchase loss is simply **not equivalent**:

- it is not riverside land
- it is remote from the area people want to use.

#### **4.7 Inadequate justification**

4.7.1 The SCC's intention to provide two slip-roads in a greatly enlarged junction with Walton Lane (a minor road) is unjustified. The planners have provided no adequate case for this new graded junction, in terms of quantified benefits attributable to reduced delays, increased safety and overall environmental impact compared with other possible designs.

4.7.2 Government guidance on compact grade-separated junctions (Highways Agency TD 40/94) says that, even if there is a positive cost-benefit analysis, such a junction **will not be acceptable if there are significant environmental problems regarding land take, visual intrusion, loss of existing landscape or ecological effects.**

#### **4.8 Environmental vandalism?**

4.8.1 SCC's environmental impact assessment states that "Cowey Sale's absence of development gives a unique quality within a local context" and "the open land within the floodplain is protected by Greenbelt Policies".

4.8.2 Does that inhibit SCC? It seems not. "The addition of the northern slip-road in particular creates a severe effect" ... "the open nature of Cowey Sale around the viaduct will be lost" ... "the landscape immediately around the slip-roads will have been dramatically and irreversibly changed" (Vol 1 Section 12.4.4).

**4.8.3 These are significant environmental problems regarding land take, visual intrusion, loss of existing landscape AND ecological effects.**

## **5 Junction design and traffic flow**

5.1 Walton Lane (Weybridge) leads into narrow, traffic-calmed residential roads in Weybridge, and past two schools.

5.2 It is already used as a 'rat run' for traffic travelling between M25 J11/Addlestone and Walton Bridge.

### **5.3 Effects of the junction**

5.3.1 Currently rat-running is limited by the slow queue at the bridge end of Walton Lane – an extra ten minutes at peak times.

5.3.2 A cloverleaf junction would facilitate traffic flows into (and out of) Walton Lane. This is a matter of deep concern for many residents, who believe it will encourage heavier use of the rat run through Portmore Park.

5.3.3 Our MP, Mr Phillip Hammond, has been responsive to residents on this matter, expressing his concern at any possible increase in traffic along Walton Lane resulting from the bridge scheme.

## **5.4 SCC predictions**

5.4.1 SCC's traffic modelling predicts there will be no increase in traffic volume along Walton Lane with the cloverleaf junction.

5.4.2 This is completely counter-intuitive. Without a built-in delay at the Walton Lane/A244 junction, the route is a more appealing rat run. And for traffic on Walton Bridge heading towards a long queue waiting to turn right into Oatlands Drive, an immediate turn into Walton Lane would look quicker. We need evidence of the rationale behind the modelling.

## **5.5 SCC inconsistency**

5.5.1 We are also puzzled by another apparent inconsistency. In the SCC planning hearing proceedings, Colin Bentley explicitly said that the limiting factors on traffic flow over the bridge are the junctions to either side (Marshalls roundabout and New Zealand Avenue lights), so a new bridge and Walton Lane junction will not cause increased flow.

5.5.2 Yet the SCC Environmental Statement says "Junction 3 (the kidney-shaped) was taken forward as the preferred option due to its overwhelming [sic] public support and benefits associated with safety and improved traffic flows. However, Junction 3 does have a considerable impact on the environment..." (4.3.8)

## **6 Conclusion**

6.1 The SCC case for this bridge and junction scheme is muddled and unconvincing. The additional link road is damaging and unnecessary. A much less destructive junction can be designed – one which is safe, preserves valued riverside amenity and allows smooth traffic flow along the A244 – combined with a less obtrusive bridge of a quality that does justice to this quite exceptional site.