**24 October 2017**

**Expressway Action Group calls for public inquiry into the Oxford-Cambridge Expressway**

**Oxfordshire’s green belt and countryside is at risk of being concreted over without public consultation or a democratic mandate**

Last week (18.10.17) Highways England revealed that there would be **no public consultation** regarding three potential routes for the planned Oxford to Cambridge Expressway motorway (OxCam) until after one has been selected.  This follows months of refusals to fulfil Freedom of Information Act requests on the topic, and behind the scenes collaboration between Oxfordshire’s Councils and national government organisations on this new motorway and associated new housing developments.

The Expressway Action Group (EAG) is a group of 19 South Oxfordshire parishes representing over 16,000 people across a large area of Oxfordshire. The Group has been trying to find out more about this project and to encourage proper public consultation before any decision is made.

Peter Rutt, Co-ordinator of the EAG) commented, Peter Rutt, “We represent residents in 19 Oxfordshire villages who are extremely concerned that more than ten miles of unspoilt countryside, green belt, and irreplaceable wildlife havens would be destroyed by this new motorway - and all without any proper consultation or democratic mandate.

Most people will have had no idea the proposed Oxford to Cambridge Growth Corridor and its Expressway motorway even existed, or that there was any opportunity to comment on these proposals.

Oxfordshire deserves to be consulted on a project which would massively affect its residents’ quality of living. Without a full public inquiry to examine the environmental, housing and amenity impact of each Expressway route, we could end up with the worst of all outcomes. The thousands of Oxfordshire residents impacted by these huge changes deserve to have their voices heard."

Liberal Democrat County Councillor for Wheatley Division, Dr. Kirsten Johnson added, “This is the most important infrastructure project for our region in a generation, and it is happening behind closed doors without any input from the residents it will affect most. People are just not aware of the huge and adverse impact the Expressway would cause to our environment if a Southern route is selected. We need to have an open debate on the merits of each route.”

South Oxfordshire District Councillor Elizabeth Gillespie responded:

“Upgrading the A34 and the current roads to Cambridge seems the only rational route for a new Expressway, if one is justified at all. It is hard to see what case could be made to go through the Green Belt and countryside South of Oxford instead, with all the environmental damage that would inevitably cause. I fully support the aims of the Expressway Action Group in opposing any such route”.

ENDS

**For further information or comment please contact:**

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**Also available for comment are** *Liberal Democrat County Councillor for Wheatley Division, Dr. Kirsten Johnson and Helen Marshall from* Council for Protection of Rural England (CPRE) T: **01491 612079 or Michael Tyce, CPRE T: 07803989583** *who issued a press release last week* <http://www.cpreoxon.org.uk/news/item/2645-expressway-madness-what-the-district-local-plans-don-t-tell-you>

**Background**

**A map probably accidentally released by the National Infrastructure Commission for their “corridor design competition” (attached) shows the routes on the ground, and has been used by CPRE to show a clear map (attached) of which villages are in the firing line.** <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/oxford-to-cambridge-expressway-strategic-study-stage-3-report>

**The National Infrastructure Commission** has produced reports laying out the opportunities that the scheme will deliver. In their Report published last November and The Highways England Stage 3 Report published in March, a number of routes for the Oxford end of the Expressway were discussed and costed.

As far as Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire was concerned these were: -

1. Upgrading the A34 and Junction 9 of M40, then past Bicester towards Milton Keynes (A43/A421)

2. A new road leaving the A34 near Abingdon then running South of Oxford through 10 miles of

 Green Belt, then North from Wheatley to Bicester then the A421

3. A new road South of Oxford through Thame and Haddenham to Aylesbury.

All routes would then go to Milton Keynes where they would join a common route to Aylesbury.

The first route upgrades an A34 badly in need of upgrading. The second and particularly the third involved a brand-new expressway through Green belt and open countryside.

**The Expressway Action Group and key Arguments**

The EAG formed in August 2017 when a group of South Oxfordshire Parishes (19 to date) realised that there are basically two options for this new Motorway.  Either, the A34 is sorted and enhanced with the £3 billion of government money being made available for this project OR a completely new motorway is built destroying 10 miles of the Green belt, countryside and wildlife havens of South Oxfordshire and the Thame Valley

**The arguments for the Northern Route are compelling**.

- The A34 has to be improved no matter what happens.  However, only the Northern route will sort

 out the A34 problems properly with the full force of central government cash behind it.

- Only the Northern route connects the growth towns of Bicester and Buckingham and Banbury to

 the Expressway

 Only the Northern route links the new Expressway with the new East-West Rail link

- It would be far less invasive than a brand new road and would cost £400 million less. (But money is

 not the only issue as another objective is for 100,000 more houses...)

**A southern route** …

- A southern route would separate the Expressway from the Rail Link and the new stations at Oxford

 Parkway and Bicester.

- The environmental, amenity and wildlife impacts of a Southern route would be

 catastrophic. It would destroy 10 miles of Green belt, causing massive damage to rural lands and

 wildlife and will change the character of the area forever.

- It represents a huge danger to the Thame and Thames Flood Plains and associated rare wildlife

 and their havens

- The proposed Southern routes don’t achieve the aims of the Growth Corridor and ‘Knowledge

 Spine’ at all as they run along its southern edge. This route would produce more commuter-belt

 housing and even more traffic into London and the Southern commuter towns.