

# Campaigners warn Arundel's A27 plans are also controversial

## Fallout after Chichester A27 improvements were scrapped

Campaigners have warned the government that plans for an Arundel bypass are just as controversial as the ones for Chichester.

The warning comes after Transport Secretary Chris Grayling scrapped the Chichester plans and blamed his decision on 'the withdrawal of support by local councils for the shortlisted options and significant local campaigns'.

The news came just days before the results of the consultation were published - which showed that 47 per cent of respondents voted for 'No Option, while the most popular of the five options was Option 2, which included major junction changes and a southern 'link road'.

In the report by Highways England, it said that 56 per cent of respondents and 50 per cent of the local authorities and parishes supported 'a new offline bypass'.

When dropping the A27 plans for Chichester Mr Grayling said 'the A27 Arundel bypass should proceed as planned'.

But Arundel campaigners have warned the division in the local community in and around Chichester is very likely to be felt in Arundel too and equally as controversial.

One option ('Pink-Blue') was previously cancelled in 2003 due to the unacceptable environmental damage it would cause and another impacts the historic village of Binsted. Both these options cut through parts of the South Downs National Park.

"It's absurd that the Binsted option is still on the table," said Emma Tristram, secretary of the Arundel Bypass Neighbourhood Committee (ABNC), which has been campaigning against the Binsted routes for 30 years.

"The area is a treasure trove of rare and protected wildlife. The village is also well known for its festivals and cultural heritage. On top of which it's by far the most expensive option."

John Henderson, who runs a community website in the neighbouring village of Tortington, says, "Both the Binsted and the 'Pink-Blue' option go through Tortington. Our parish would be sliced in

two. We also have a beautiful twelfth-century church and amazingly wildlife, rich hedges and woodland which are all at risk."

Campaigners say road planners should be giving more consideration to the suggestion, by the Arundel A27 Forum, that the existing route should be widened, and a much shorter new bypass section should be built.

The South Downs Society is urging Highways England to include the Forum's suggestion - a 40mph single carriageway bypass route, closer to the current road - in their public consultation this summer.

"The far-offline options are unacceptably damaging to the National Park," says South Downs Society's Steve Ankers. "Their damage to the park's special qualities includes major impact on key views south from the National Park, and also looking up the valley towards Arundel."

"Arundel people love their countryside," adds Kay Wagland, secretary of ArundelSCATE, one of the member organisations in the South Coast Alliance for Transport and the Environment (SCATE).

"We want to see traffic issues resolved, but not by sacrificing our countryside or losing local business for an unnecessary and costly dual carriageway, which Highways England tells us won't even cut traffic or pollution in the town."

"We support the more effective, wide single carriageway road from the Arun bridge to the Crossbush junction, alongside more sustainable access improvements."

Arundel mayor councillor James Stewart said on behalf of Arundel Town Council: "a bypass is needed for Arundel to eliminate severance, reduce pollution and allow traffic to move past the town freely."

The council's preferred option is the pink-blue route: "It is the shortest route requiring the minimum amount of new road. It does not go through any villages and does not go through ancient woodland," Mr Stewart said.

While this is the council's current view, he confirmed a



new position might be arrived at once options for the A27 are finalised.

Mr Stewart promised that the options would be subject to public consultation to allow residents to have their say.

Meanwhile, CPRE Sussex is calling for a complete re-think on congestion.

"We know building more roads is not the answer to traffic problems," said director of CPRE Sussex, Kia Trainor. "Online and near-online bypass improvements at Arundel, designed to ease flow at moderate speeds where there are pinch-points, would work best as part of a sustainable transport strategy. This would be the least costly approach, both financially and in terms of the environment."

CPRE Sussex's chairman, David Johnson agrees, adding, "Highways England need to rethink their rather grandiose and destructive plans; we can do better for less. The largely online improvement plans coming from community based groups, such as the New Purple

Route, would be a smarter way to mitigate traffic problems."

Julie Upton who looks after Noor Wood, which is directly in the path of the route option through ancient woodland on Tortington Common, says the road would devastate the countryside:

"Woodland owners now manage the woods for conservation," she says. "It would be devastating to lose this now. Our school parties and other educational groups love it. The woodland is full of wildlife."

Arundel and South Downs MP Nick Herbert said he was 'dismayed' by the scrapping of the Chichester scheme but was 'reassured that the Arundel Bypass will proceed as planned'.

He said: "Those who campaigned against the improvements to the A27 southern Chichester bypass have inflicted a massive own-goal on West Sussex. By lobbying for an unfeasible northern bypass, and undermining the process,

they have effectively lost £200 million of infrastructure investment in the area, while road users will continue to face appalling congestion around Chichester.

"I warned that this would happen if the opposition continued and I am very sorry that it has.

"I will do my best to support my colleague Andrew Tyrie in lobbying for the Government to restore the scheme in future, but I'm afraid that we have learned the hard way that negative political manoeuvring has a serious cost."

Meanwhile Chichester MP Andrew Tyrie said the Chichester community had 'lost confidence' in Highways England's A27 improvement options.

He said: "We have to try to persuade the government eventually to return to this. And before we do so, we have to find a solution that can unite the whole community."

"None of Highways England's schemes could achieve this. So they lost the

confidence of the community.

"My constituents needed to feel confident that their access to the A27 and to nearby roads would be improved, and that local traffic would not end up diverted into the centre of Chichester, aggravating existing problems.

"They did not feel confident about either of these. I made these points, and others, vigorously to the Secretary of State on behalf of many constituents.

"But the appalling congestion in and around Chichester will only get worse. And more than £200 million of public investment earmarked for the area will now be spent in other parts of the country or handed back to the Treasury.

"I've been fighting for improvements to the A27 for most of my time as an MP. And I will fight on until we find a solution that works for the whole of my constituency."

Meanwhile, many are asking 'what now?' for Chichester in the wake of the government's decision.