

25th March 2019



On the 14th March Highways England made its preferred route announcement for the A417 missing link. We were pleased to see that Highways England reiterated their commitment to the jointly agreed Vision for a landscape led solution, which is crucially important for the Cotswolds AONB landscape.

We agree that any scheme should not only conserve but also enhance the landscape in line with the Government's 25-year Environment Plan, the concepts of natural capital and net environment gain and the legal duty that all public bodies have in respect of the AONB.

The Board has worked with Highways England on a number of aspects of this scheme, including its Vision and Objectives. The recently released summary highlights potential alternatives for how the A436 joins the A417, which the Board suggested should be investigated. Highways England's feedback to date highlights that both alternatives are better from an economic and environmental perspective than the original proposals.

There is no doubt that the Cotswolds Conservation Board more than any other party fully understands our landscape and the overall long-term environmental opportunities that a scheme could offer and the major challenges it still presents. As we understand it, these include:

- the cutting through the escarpment; approximately 1.37 km long, up to 28 metres deep and requiring significant retaining walls for around 700 metres;
- the 5 lane highway plus 2 or 3 lanes of access roads at/above the Air Balloon;
- the challenges of disposing of large quantities of surplus spoil from cuttings;
- the need to safeguard aquifers, water quality and respect the challenging geology;
- the need to enhance landscape, wildlife and heritage settings;
- the need to enhance the experience of those wanting to explore the area on foot, horse or bike e.g. the Cotswold Way National Trail.

There is much yet to be addressed to ensure that the agreed landscape-led vision is delivered and that it decisively outweighs the serious environmental harm inevitably at risk from building a major highway to modern standards through such a sensitive area. Ahead of the formal consultation in the summer the Conservation Board will continue to work in partnership and offer further suggestions to Highways England to enable them to achieve an exemplary road scheme in a nationally designated landscape.

Yours sincerely,

E. Eyre
Chairman

Conserving, enhancing, understanding and enjoying the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

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