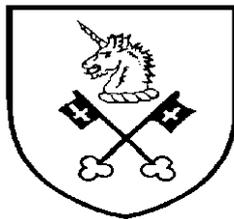


# *Prestbury Parish Council*



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Mr Andrew Ross & Mr. Paul Griffiths,  
Cheshire East Council,  
Strategic Highways and Transportation,  
Poynton RR, Floor 6,  
Delamere House,  
Delamere Street,  
Crewe, CW11 2LL.

Monday, July 28th, 2014

Dear Mr. Ross and Mr. Griffiths,

## **1st CONSULTATION ON POYNTON RELIEF ROAD AND A523 IMPROVEMENTS**

Prestbury Parish Council have many issues connected with the questionnaire devised for the first official consultation on the Poynton Relief Road and 'improvements' to the A523 and with the dearth of detailed data for the A523 proposals.

Our first issue is that the survey does not offer respondents the option of ticking a box to say that they are unconvinced an unequivocal case has yet been made for building an entirely new road, especially as this new road would provide almost immeasurable time-savings. This option ought to have been offered in view of the fact that:

- There is a lack of information about the cumulative traffic, environmental and social impacts of building all the SEMMMS roads (including the A6 Stockport North-South Bypass) and all the roads and road 'improvements' identified in the Cheshire East Local Plan and by the 'Engine of the North' which would make up a 30-mile strategic route between the M60 and the M6 that would pass through Prestbury
- The environmental assessments published with the consultation are inadequate. The one produced for the Poynton Relief Road covers only areas up to 250 metres either side of the proposed 'green' and 'blue' routes and admits that there is much information yet to collect, eg. in relation to badgers, and the one for the A523 to the south of it, by its own admission, is only a very early iteration of an environmental study and does not, for instance, take into account the likely environmental consequences if the A523 'Improvements' should, in the event, turn into an off-line solution
- The environmental report, such as it is, for the A523 through Prestbury states that air quality would not worsen because there would be no increase in traffic, a statement that defies comprehension when the A523 would become connected to the M56 at Manchester Airport via the A6 to Manchester Airport Relief Road and, once the A6 Stockport North-South Bypass were built, would also be connected to the M60 at Bredbury
- The economic information released to date does not constitute a full, robust business case or a wider economic appraisal
- No health impact assessment has yet been published
- The thrust for pursuing the Poynton Relief Road comes from the SEMMMS final report which was founded on very high traffic projections that have not materialised

- With a couple of exceptions, the public transport recommendations in the SEMMMS final report have not been carried out first to see what impact they would have had and yet these included a dramatically improved Macclesfield-Manchester train service (every 20 minutes) which was specifically aimed at trying to encourage the high car-owning population of South East Manchester and North East Cheshire to more often use the train to travel into and out of Manchester.

Prestbury Parish Council's 'take' on the questionnaire issued with this consultation (below) highlights why, in our opinion, the present survey exercise is a poor one. The majority of respondents to a survey of this type approach the questions at face value and do not have the experience or knowledge-base to appreciate many of the points we make.

The questionnaire begins by asking if respondents are in favour or not of the Poynton Relief Road proposals.

**Question 1** assumes the case has been made - and accepted - for a 'relief road'. Therefore, the only key point remaining to establish is whether respondents are happy or not with the options offered. In fact, since the case was made for a Poynton Bypass in the SEMMMS final report in 2001, traffic growth has flattened out and even begun to decline in many places. In addition, an award-winning new traffic system has been introduced in the centre of Poynton which has led to traffic flowing more freely through it. This, in itself, demonstrates that providing additional road space is not necessarily the appropriate answer to traffic problems. Also, a crucial finding from an origin and destination exercise conducted for the SEMMMS study appears to have been forgotten about and this was that 60% of the traffic in Poynton is locally generated. This traffic will not be helped by a bypass/ relief road.

**Question two** asks respondents to indicate a preference for the 'green' route or the 'blue' route or to say they have 'no preference' for either. However, by ticking 'no preference' a respondent is assumed to have agreed with the concept that there is a need for a road but they are merely saying they do not mind which of the two routes is chosen. There should have been an option offered which allowed respondents to indicate that they were unconvinced any off-line route was the right option.

**Question three** merely offers respondents the option of adding some 'flesh' to the option they have chosen in question two.

Under the heading of Question 3, Prestbury Parish Council would like to flag up our concern that both alignment options for the Poynton Relief Road (PRR) create many opportunities for infill development, within the former British Aerospace site and outside it. Although the entirety of the PRR and the A523 to the south of it are in Green Belt, this will not offer automatic protection at a time when the Green Belt boundaries are being revised as part of the Local Plan process. In any event, the smaller site allocations have yet to be revealed.

Cheshire East Council states, on the Poynton Relief Road consultation page on its website (under 'Funding'), that "Potential private sector funding" is seen as helping to pay for the Poynton Relief Road. This could well mean development along the route. If it does, Prestbury Parish Council would be very opposed to such a move. The Green Belt between the Greater Manchester conurbation and the settlements in the north east of Cheshire East is already under threat from another SEMMMS road, the A6 to Manchester Airport Road, the building of over 800 houses in the Stockport part of the former Woodford Aerodrome and proposals to establish a new settlement at Handforth East as described in Cheshire East Local Plan Submission Version. (N.B. We note Stockport MBC's trenchant opposition to the Handforth East development proposal due to Green Belt impacts). We fear there is a real danger that the fragile Green Belt in this area will collapse and settlements in North East Cheshire will gradually become part of the amorphous mass of Greater Manchester.

It is also justified to pick up on many points that the multi-faceted question 4 raises.

**Question 4**, sub question one, asks respondents how they rate potential economic benefits. As already stated, no full business case or wider economic appraisal on the PRR and A523 improvements has been published. Nonetheless, the question implies there would be economic benefits. This, despite the government having accepted in the 1990s the findings of the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment (SACTRA) that there is no automatic connection between building new transport infrastructure and economic benefit in a mature economy such as that which exists in the U.K. SACTRA's report, 'Transport and the Economy', showed that there can be economic downsides to building new roads.

The second sub question asks if improved/ more reliable journey times are important or not. The answer to this question is already known. In survey after survey conducted by a whole host of bodies ranging from the Department for Transport to Passenger Focus, the priority of the travelling public is always the reliability of travelling times. Without fail, the travelling public indicate they are less concerned about small travel time savings than they are about the reliability of their journey. They simply want a clear idea of how long a journey is likely to take so that they can plan their day around it.

The third sub-question asks respondents to rate how important they consider improved air quality to be and also traffic-related pollutants. It would be a fair assumption to make that most respondents will rate these issues to be of some importance. But it is worth making the point that air quality and traffic-related pollutants are complex issues. Whilst the areas immediately around any roads temporarily relieved of some traffic would experience better air quality, certainly in the short term, new areas that previously had no air quality issues would suddenly experience them as a result of new roads built in previously 'virgin' territory. But there is also the issue of airborne pollution. The prevailing wind is from west to east and therefore airborne emissions created by the PRR and the A6 to Manchester Airport Relief Road (A6 MARR) would drift eastwards across Poynton.

The fourth sub-question asks for opinions on reduced traffic congestion in Poynton. A reduction in traffic in the centre is almost certainly a plus point that would result in the short term. However, it remains to be seen how long that would last, how much traffic would use the existing roads to access the new strategic route and how much induced traffic it would create. There is much evidence of bypassed towns (such as Newbury) benefitting for a few years only and then finding themselves in a situation where both the original town and the bypass are full up of traffic. This happens because the new highway space attracts new traffic movements that did not exist before the new road did and the town suffers from that traffic accessing and egressing the new road. In addition, infill development along the new road create a whole series of new traffic movements.

The fifth sub-question asks for a rating on reduced accidents and improved road safety. Obviously a hugely important issue but not necessarily one for which the answer is a new road. The answer might be improved junctions and/or a series of 'smart' measures which, cumulatively, have the desired impact.

The sixth sub-question is very similar to the fourth but specifically related to 'through' traffic and the seventh sub-question is about traffic on minor roads. Respondents are asked if they would like to see less through traffic and less rat-running on minor roads and to rate the importance of these issues. The answers to these apparently simplistic questions is fairly predictable but no data is provided to explain what the impacts would be if the A6 Stockport North-South Bypass is built, ie. the remaining part of the SEMMMS roads. The Stockport North-South Bypass would connect the PRR and the A6 MARR to the M60 at junction 25 at Bredbury. As a result, it also very predictable that there would be increased traffic movements to access the Poynton Bypass (and the A6 MARR) in order to enter the motorway network at the M60. Yet no traffic modelling information is provided to explain what the impacts would be – on Poynton or Adlington or Prestbury.

The eighth and final sub-point of question 4 invites respondents to specify a factor or factors for themselves in relation to the PRR proposals. In response to this, Prestbury Parish Council would appeal for data on the full impacts of all the relevant road building proposals to be revealed, ie. the cumulative impacts of building all the SEMMMS roads to the north and the impacts of building the Macclesfield south west distributor road and the Congleton Relief Road to the south, along with the other road improvements proposed.

**Question 5** lists six specific factors relating to design and asks for a rating on them, ie. visual and landscape quality, consideration for the environment/ wildlife, consideration of archaeological/ heritage sites, pedestrian facilities, cycling facilities and public rights of way. It also asks if there are ‘other’ factors.

Prestbury Parish Council would rate all of the named factors as ‘very important’ but would rate the following, which are not listed, as equally important: **community severance, noise levels and loss of tranquillity, light pollution and also odour from traffic.**

**Question 6** seeks to identify localised improvements along the A523 London Road between the proposed relief road and the Silk Road to the North of Macclesfield. (Why, we would enquire, is there no question about potential localised improvements in Poynton?) Six junctions are listed. The first two are in Adlington, three are in Prestbury and the last one is on the Prestbury border. The accident statistics (killed and seriously injured) are surprisingly low for all junctions with the exception of the Prestbury Lane one. We therefore recommend that the Prestbury Lane junction with London Road should be a priority for intervention. A study needs to be made of the collisions that have occurred here in order to come up with the most appropriate solution. However, we would comment that any junction improvements on this stretch of the A523 should not be over-engineered to the point that the area loses its rural appearance. Nor should there be any solutions brought forward which are likely to result in infill development.

**Question 7** asks if there are any further locations within the A523 improvement corridor that respondents believe require “improvements”. This is the wrong question because it assumes that ‘improving’ highways is always the right option. Prestbury village actually benefitted from measures which suppressed through traffic when it had a 20-mile-per-hour speed limit imposed and traffic platforms introduced. Recently a very small addition to the 20 mph area has been agreed.

The Parish Council would argue that with so many new roads being considered around the Parish, there should be more protectionist measures within it, including further extensions to the 20 mph limit. Without more protectionist/ traffic calming measures, Prestbury – and particularly its conservation area - could suffer irreparable damage. To this end, we would like to, once more, appeal for a dialogue with Cheshire East Council to discover what interventions might be possible and suitable for the area.

**Question 8** and Questions 10 to 13 inclusive are all personalised questions which the Parish Council as an entity will not be responding to.

**Question 9** invites further comments about the scheme. These are ours:

**Prestbury Parish Council remains to be convinced that the proposed new highways capacity will not generate more traffic movements through the Parish which, in turn, would probably result in poorer air quality. We want to see the traffic modelling for all the SEMMMS roads and for the 30-mile strategic route from the M60 at junction 25 to the M6 at junction 17 as well as a strategic environmental appraisal for the whole concept. We also want to see robust business cases, wider economic assessments, health impact assessments and a full environmental assessment for the wider areas around the A523 between the southern end of the proposed Poynton Bypass and the junction with Flash Lane. We believe it is entirely inappropriate that a consultation should have been mounted on infrastructure ‘improvements’ to the A523 to the south of the proposed Poynton Relief Road before a full and up-to-date environmental appraisal was available**

In respect of our concerns about the 30-mile strategic route, we note the remarks made by Councillor Michael Jones, the Leader of Cheshire East Council, during the discussion on the Congleton Relief Road in the cabinet meeting on May 27th. These confirmed what had already become apparent to us from our reading of various background documents to the Cheshire East Local Plan including the Infrastructure Delivery Plan of March 2014. The notes alongside the 'A523 Poynton-Macclesfield Improvements' say: *"To improve links to the M6 from/ to Macclesfield and take full advantage of SEMMMS/ Poynton Relief Road"* (page 33). This being the case, then there must be an immediate release of all the relevant data for the full strategic intentions cumulatively. This information needs to be released in time for it to be discussed at the examination in public on the Cheshire East Local Plan.

We look forward to receiving the further information we have asked for (in bold above) and to being more involved in the process than we have been to date. We do not regard the minimum amount of contact that there has been so far between the principal authority and ourselves as being acceptable. There was a public meeting late last year which we organised with the assistance of our principal authority councillor. Two senior local authority officers attended and spoke at it. It was arranged to take place after the publication of the Pre-Submission Version of the Local Plan but the publication was delayed at the last moment and therefore the officers revealed very little. Apart from that, we have received promises via our principal authority Councillor, that we would be involved in early discussions about any road plans. This has not happened. The current consultation has arrived, along with the publication of some supporting documents, and we have had no involvement whatsoever. As the first tier of local government, we are resentful about being treated in this manner and look to Cheshire East Council to be more open with us in future.

#### Important footnote

Further to the comments above, it should be noted that Prestbury Parish Council were represented at the pre meeting for the Cheshire East Local Plan examination in public which was held at Macclesfield Town Hall on July 24th. We would like to add that we share the concern expressed by the Planning Inspector, Mr. Stephen Pratt, at that meeting of the way that a number of road schemes have been brought forward. In effect, the principal authority has declared their intention to deliver certain road schemes - notably the Poynton Relief Road and the Congleton Link Road - and then set about proving the case for them. This is not the modus operandi for progressing road schemes set down by the Department for Transport. Their transport appraisal system requires that a number of preliminary steps be followed in the first instance, leading to a list of potential transport interventions (across modes) which is gradually narrowed down. A remaining few potential schemes should be examined in some detail and then, when a final scheme or schemes are decided upon, a robust evidence base should be assembled for them. However, in this case, the PRR and the Congleton Link Road were both pitched into the Local Plan even prior to the first public consultation on either of them. This is a wholly unsatisfactory state of affairs. The inspector who is about to sit in judgement on the Local Plan is clearly of that opinion. This concern expressed by him validates the questioning approach that Prestbury Parish Council has taken to date on the SEMMMS roads and on the strategic route that is in the making between the M60 and the M6.

Yours sincerely,

ARTHUR DICKEN  
Chairman