

STAPLEGROVE PARISH COUNCIL

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Dear Councillor Woodman,

21th September 2019

North Taunton Development Spine Road

I am sure you are aware of the dismay of the local residents and of Staplegrove Parish Council at the connection points of the above road to the existing highways which have been given outline planning permission and for which Section 106 agreements have now been signed.

The original intention was for the works to start at the western end of the scheme, to make use of the excellent communications that exist there, but this has been ignored by the promoters of the proposal who have substituted the use, for up to five years, of a temporary drop-down road at the east end instead. This has been coupled with a connection point with A358 Staplegrove Road at a location that is full of engineering disadvantages and for which the only justification given by SCC Highways in accepting it has been that 'this was where the promoters wanted it'!

It is to be very much hoped that the provision of the £7.2M government grant to the district council for the early construction of the spine road, to ensure that 'the right infrastructure is provided in the right place at the right time', will enable this matter to be reconsidered so that a more sensible, cheaper and more efficient solution can be adopted by the developers, to the great advantage of all concerned.

I ask for your support in achieving this and would welcome the opportunity of meeting with you to explain in more detail the advantages of adopting the change to the alternative layout proposed. This would be seen as an appropriate consideration by the authority and the developers for the wellbeing of the neighbouring public during the no doubt long drawn-out delivery of the development.

To give you the key elements of the revisions I am suggesting, I list below the engineering and logistic disadvantages of the currently proposed road layout at the west end and then the advantages of the alternative solution.

Disadvantages of the current location of the Promoters Spine Road connection to the A358 being 100m east of Silk Mills junction

- 1 The average ground level adjacent to the A358 is approximately 36.00m, being significantly above the intended carriageway level of 30.00m, resulting in the need for the excavation of a cutting some 6m deep. The width of the spine road, which consists of two exiting traffic lanes and one entry lane plus footways at this point, is 18m, which, with the two side slopes makes the cutting some 42m wide at the top. The volume needed to be excavated to achieve an acceptable gradient for the road slowly reduces until the spine road climbs to ground level at approximately 210m from the A358. This large

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- volume of spoil will have to be transported away for disposal. Because of the ‘cliff edge’ at the A358 the excavation will have to be undertaken by large ‘dragline’ equipment rather than the conventional ‘scrapers’, which will make all aspects of this operation very costly and time consuming.
- 2 Presumably, the intention was for the excavated material to be transported to the drop-down road at the east end and then on to the country lanes to be disposed of.
 - 3 SCC Highways have stated that Staplegrove Road would have to be closed for many weeks during this work, causing widespread delay, disruption and congestion on one of the major routes into Taunton.
 - 4 It is understood that it is intended to synchronise this traffic-light controlled junction with those planned for Silk Mills and Cross Key junctions. It is unlikely that a three-junction design could achieve a successful or efficient solution to effectively control the extensive traffic on these roads and, again, would be costly to install and maintain.
 - 5 It would mean that there would be 6 sets of traffic lights over a length of only some 700m of trunk road.
 - 6 The spine road will undoubtedly become an orbital route round north Taunton, being used by the significant amount of traffic that currently uses Manor Road/Corkscrew Lane. This route through the village will be subject to further traffic reduction methods as part of the development.

Advantages of the current position

There are no engineering advantages from locating the A358 connection in this position.

Cynically, it could be argued that the purpose of this position was to enable the case to be made for the drop-down road to have to be provided for a five year period to enable 250 houses to be built and occupied, in the development’s most attractive location, to fund the construction of the West’s section of the spine road. With the Government grant forthcoming to build the entire spine road then the need for such access should disappear but the argument is now being made that this would remain essential! The original statement made by the promoters was that no road contractor’s plant or staff would make use of the drop-down road but they have now gone back on this.

More cynically, to possibly make the development more attractive to buyers, the location could have been chosen to enable the future possibility of the western end of the spine road being declared as no longer being viable. This would produce a very significant saving for the developer and hence there would be no continuous replacement for Manor Road/Corkscrew Lane and we would end up in the same situation as currently exists at Norton Fitzwarren! However, the receipt of the Government grant should ensure the guaranteed provision of the complete spine road and completion of the full development.

The advantages of the connection to the A358 at Silk Mills junction.

The option anticipated by TDBC Policy TAU 2 was for the construction of the spine road to be commenced at the west end at Silk Mills junction, making use of the excellent road access from the A358.

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With the Government grant, the construction of the west end of the spine road could begin immediately and progress steadily eastwards accessed from a widened and raised short length of Mill Lane. The spine road here would finally be extended to connect directly with Silk Mills junction.

This would provide a four-arm junction with the majority of the additional construction work required being carried out on almost level ground to the north of the present junction and mostly clear of the existing road.

- 1 Excavation and the forming of a cutting up towards Rag Hill would be still be required but this is likely to be limited to a maximum depth of 4.5m at a point where the width of the spine road carriageway and footways was only 10.5m. The cutting would reduce to nil when ground level was reached in both directions over a total length of approximately 230m. This excavation would be undertaken much more efficiently by the use of conventional highway 'scraper' equipment. There would be significantly less spoil to be carted away which would be via the adjacent widened Mill Lane.
- 2 The gradient of the road over this length would be the same as at the current suggested location.
- 3 There would be no need to close Staplegrove Road but, as with all possible connection locations, traffic restrictions would be necessary when the existing Silk Mills roundabout was removed.
- 4 A synchronised traffic light system for the two junctions would be much more straightforward and effective.
- 5 The number of traffic signals would be reduced to 5 over the 700m length.
- 6 Taunton Garden Town would be provided with an appropriate North West Gateway as required in The Vision for Our Garden Town document.

The road should ideally be completed before any house building was started. This would enable it to be constructed more speedily and safely by a single highway contractor working for both the East and West sections without the interruption and interference of housing developers, and there should be no need for any drop-down road.

As stated above the adoption of this revised road layout would be seen and appreciated as a thoughtful consideration for the wellbeing of the local residents and the public travelling on the A358 and I should be grateful if we could meet to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely

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Michael Clark
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Past President of the Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation.

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