



**A246 MERROW
PROPOSED GAP CLOSURE**

**SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL
LOCAL COMMITTEE (GUILDFORD)**

28th SEPTEMBER 2006

KEY ISSUE

This report considers whether or not amendments should be made to the proposed central reservation gap closure at Henchley Gate as a result of receipt of two objections following advertisement of the proposal.

SUMMARY

The objections are concerned at the potential loss of equestrian facilities as a result of the planning condition imposed on the park and ride / golf course development. The report considers three options and concludes that a gate to provide access to the roundabout on its northern side would be the best solution.

Report by

SENIOR LOCAL TRANSPORTATION
MANAGER

Surrey Atlas Ref.

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GUILDFORD B.C. WARD(S)

MERROW
CLANDON & HORSLEYS

COUNTY ELECTORAL DIVISION(S)

GUILDFORD SOUTH-EAST
SHERE

OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to agree

- (i) that the offer of the landowner to provide a gate on the northern side of the roundabout to provide equestrian access to the roundabout be accepted as an acceptable temporary solution, pending possible permanent provision of a fourth arm to the roundabout,

and/or

- (ii) that in the event of recommendation (i) proving problematic, that an exemption to the proposed traffic regulation order be made allowing the gap to be used by equestrians and pedestrians, but not by vehicles.

INTRODUCTION

- 1 Construction of the new roundabout at Merrow which will provide access to the Park and Ride car park and golf course is now well advanced and programmed for substantial completion next month.
- 2 One of many conditions imposed by Guildford Borough Council as Planning Authority on the grant of planning permission was that "Prior to the commencement of development the existing vehicular access and egress to Clandon Park from the eastbound carriageway of the A25/A246 Epsom Road shall be permanently closed and so maintained to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority". This was imposed on the advice of SCC officers to prevent right turning (or U-turning) manoeuvres taking place on a high speed dual carriageway, thereby contributing to improved standards of road safety.
- 3 At the time this condition was imposed, it was anticipated that the roundabout would have a fourth, northern arm serving the Clandon House site, and that the Henschley Gate access would therefore be redundant. In the event a planning application for various changes within the Clandon House site has been delayed, and its outcome is not known. There is therefore no commitment at this stage by the applicant to the construction of the fourth arm. Accordingly SCC will shortly be making a planning application seeking the retention of the Henschley Gate access but on a 'left in, left out' basis only, i.e. with the central reservation gap closed for road safety reasons.
- 4 The central reservation gap has been closed during the construction period using a temporary traffic order for which officers have delegated powers. This brought to light the fact that a number of horse riders with horses in livery at the stables cross the A246 at this point and ride across the land on the south side of the road towards Newlands Corner. There are no public footpaths or bridleways in the area; it is understood that this usage takes place with the permission of the landowner.

- 5 The proposed permanent Traffic Regulation Order prohibiting the use of the central reservation gap has recently been advertised. Two objections have been received, from the Open Spaces Society and the British Horse Society.
- 6 The reasons given for these objections and officers' comments thereon are set out below:

Open Space Society

- (a) The gap has been used for many years by the landowner and his tenants
- (b) When Epsom Road was dualled the gap was maintained
- (c) Horse crossing signs are in place

Comment: Agreed

- (d) There has been no change in the traffic pattern, nor will there be when the park and ride site is open
- (e) Westbound traffic speeds will reduce when the roundabout is complete, while eastbound speeds will not change
- (f) The new roundabout will reduce the traffic flow and speed at the crossing point

Comment: These assertions are speculative. The existence of the park and ride site may affect traffic patterns. There is no reason to believe that traffic flows at the crossing point will reduce. Equally the presence of the roundabout may mean that drivers are less likely to expect to find horses crossing the road at what would amount to a second junction in close proximity.

- (g) There have been no equestrian accidents at this point

Comment: This is not so. The accident records since 1996 have been checked; there have been two accidents in the vicinity of the gap, both involving horses. In one case an eastbound vehicle slowed down due to the presence of horses emerging from the gate, and was struck by another eastbound vehicle. In the other, a horse being ridden in the field to the south of the road threw its rider and bolted onto the road where it was struck by a westbound vehicle.

- (h) The alternative route, via Clandon crossroads, will be an undue burden on equestrians and pedestrians. There are no facilities (e.g. verges) for horseriders on this road, and the diversion will add approximately 1 mile to journeys.

Comment: Agreed. It has never been intended that equestrians should be diverted via Clandon Crossroads.

- (i) The closure of the gap to vehicles is understandable

Comment: Noted.

- (j) There are pedestrian and equestrian crossings on trunk roads (e.g. A3) and major roads (e.g. A31)

Comment: This is true, but is probably only the case where statutory rights exist. No such rights exist at Merrow.

- (k) The rights of way improvement plan should address issues like this

Comment: It is highly unlikely that the Rights Of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) would address a matter as detailed as this. Even were it to do so, in considering the proposed gap closure, officers and Members would need to consider not only the ROWIP with its aspirations to improve countryside access, but also the Local Transport Plan with its emphases on sustainable transport, the local economy and road safety.

- (l) In summary, there is no additional risk for equestrians over the existing crossing, and equestrians and pedestrians should therefore be excluded from the closure order.

Comment: This is one option considered below.

British Horse Society

- (m) While there are no rights of way in the vicinity, this crossing has been used by riders for many years

Comment: Agreed

- (n) Without the crossing access to the Wildwood area will be lost

Comment: Not so; the landowner has proposed alternative access options.

- (o) The proposed scheme provides no alternative crossing facility or road margin

Comment: Agreed, as originally proposed. This report puts forward two possible alternative crossing arrangements.

- (p) The embryonic Rights of Way Improvement Plan has identified fragmentation of networks, definitive or otherwise, as a stumbling block to countryside access. The proposal will make this worse.

Comment: See comments under (k) above

OPTIONS

- 7 **(a) Retain the existing scheme; over-rule the objections; proceed with the traffic regulation order as currently drafted**

If it is considered that the interests of road safety are paramount, and that the continued existence of the crossing is prejudicial to safety, then the Committee may overrule the objections, and the Traffic Regulation Order may be made as advertised, without modification to the scheme. This option would have no cost implications and no road safety implications but would disadvantage equestrians who current use the gap.

- 8 **(b) Accept the objections; modify the scheme to provide crossing point; allow exception to traffic order for equestrians**

Secondly the Committee may feel that the continued use of this crossing by equestrians is of greater importance than road safety considerations and/or that there is no great any risk to safety. In this case the Order could be reduced in scope, providing an exemption for equestrians and pedestrians. This would not need to be re-advertised. The central reservation could remain kerbed to prevent vehicles from using the gap, but a small area, equivalent to the current gap, could be informally surfaced with bituminous planings as often used on bridleways. This would have only minor cost implications and would ensure that equestrians continue to enjoy a facility which has existed for some time. It would, however, result in a lost opportunity to reduce the number of accidents at this location.

- 9 **(c) Provide access to the north side of the roundabout as originally intended, but on a temporary basis for equestrians only**

Thirdly, the eventual construction of the fourth arm of the roundabout by the landowner would provide a crossing facility for equestrians by using the roundabout itself. This was the original intention and has been delayed as set out in paragraph 3 above. Faced with the objections to the traffic order, the landowner has offered to provide a gate which would allow equestrians to access the north side of the roundabout, and through which they could use the roundabout to cross the road safely as originally intended. This would have only minor cost implications, would allow equestrians to enjoy a facility which has existed for some time, and would lose none of the intended road safety benefits. This option is therefore recommended as the best way forward.

CONSULTATIONS

- 10 Following receipt of the objections, officers have sought the views of a number of stakeholders as to the way forward.
- 11 The County Council's Rights of Way team have commented that in principle they support the objections, and would wish to see the same degree of countryside access currently enjoyed by equestrians maintained in future.

- 12 GBC planning officers have been consulted as to the acceptability in planning terms of leaving the gap open to equestrians (option b), as opposed to its complete closure. They have confirmed that they have no objection to this.
- 13 The landowner has confirmed that he is prepared to put in a gate where the fourth arm of the roundabout will eventually go to allow horses to get to the south side of the A25 via the roundabout. In his view to allow horses to continue to cross a dual carriageway in the current position would be dangerous.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14 In the event that objections are overruled (option (a)), the project will proceed as currently planned with no financial consequences. If the Committee is minded to allow the use of the crossing by equestrians and pedestrians (option (b)), there will be minor additional costs which can be absorbed in the overall cost of the roundabout. If the committee accepts the officer recommendation of providing a gate on the northern side of the roundabout (option(c)), again there will be minor cost implications which can be absorbed.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 15 This report is concerned with a sustainable transport project which has resulted in the need to make a balanced judgement of the needs of countryside access against those of road safety. It is hope that the recommended option satisfactorily meets the need of both aspects of this.

CONCLUSIONS AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 16 Option (a) while meeting the needs of road safety requires the over-ruling of the objections and would have an effect on countryside accessibility. Option (b) would do the reverse. Option (c), while temporary, would satisfactorily address both aspects. It is hoped that, subject to planning considerations, the construction of a permanent fourth arm of the roundabout would finally resolve this matter. In the event that option (c) were to prove difficult, the Committee is asked to approve option (b) as a fallback position to avoid further delay.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS:	Letters of objection from the Open Spaces Society and the British Horse Society.
