

New access road to Rotherwas Industrial Estate

Herefordshire Council's Planning Committee approved on 21 February 2003 the Council's own planning application for the longer, costlier and more environmentally damaging southern route. Developers are already lining up to build thousands of houses, a shopping centre and a motel on the greenfields land between the existing city boundary and the proposed new road.

CPRE will continue to fight against the building of a road along this southern route. We are seeking Council's opinion on the legality of the Herefordshire Council's actions. The Council still needs to secure government funding for the Rotherwas road. CPRE will continue to lobby both for alternative solutions to the access problems at the Rotherwas industrial estate and for reconsideration of the shorter, cheaper and less environmentally damaging alternative road alongside the existing railway line on the city boundary. This route was recommended by the Council's own consultants as the best option.

The Herefordshire Council's route would require a series of cuttings and embankments scarring Ridge and Dinedor Hills and Green Crize Common. The immediate purpose of the new road would be to get bigger trucks in and out of the Rotherwas factories and to relieve Putson and Lower Bullingham from the estate traffic that currently passes along the Holme Lacy Road. CPRE does not oppose the principle of improved transport access, including by rail, to Rotherwas but believes that the solution must be sensible and environmentally acceptable. The Council's intended route is not.

CPRE has made its opposition to this route clear at two Herefordshire Transport Summits, in letters to the Hereford Times, in a letter to the Secretary of State and most recently to the Planning Committee. Here are the main arguments:

1. The Council's procedures and decision-processes to date have been opaque. Herefordians need to know why the Council is promoting an environmentally confrontational route and how this decision was reached. Probity and open government demand transparent decision-making, both in future and by lifting the veil on discussions to date.
2. The exhaustive 1991 Public Inquiry (into the rejected eastern by-pass) also rejected on environmental grounds the route the Council is now proposing to Rotherwas. The environmental damage from the cuttings and embankments needed to cross this undulating ground remains as unacceptable today as it was 11 years ago.
3. The proposed new road would involve a longer journey for traffic to Rotherwas from Hereford city. Unless the Council plans to prevent smaller vehicles continuing to use the Holme Lacy Road after any new road is built, some of the intended benefit would be lost. If Holme Lacy Road were closed to commercial traffic, might some lorries not be tempted to approach Rotherwas from the Holme Lacy bridge on the Mordiford – Fownhope road, to the detriment of these villages?
4. By spending millions of pounds on this new road the Council will be starving the City of funds for traffic reduction and calming measures, which it needs more urgently, since both measures have to be paid for out of the same financial pot.
5. An obvious suspicion arising from the Council insisting on their environmentally damaging route is that they could be seeking an excuse for housing and other development in the valley between the new road and the railway. Apart from the landscape damage, CPRE doubts the wisdom of extending Hereford to this extent or on this side of the river.
6. Another fear must be that building a new road on the line of the old eastern by-pass proposal would foreclose rational study of other options to reduce Hereford's traffic congestion. Resurrecting the full eastern by-pass proposal would again raise the stormy issue of the Lugg Valley meadows, settled in 1991 decisively in favour of protecting this environmentally sensitive and precious area.
7. The Council's proposed route ignores the recommendation of specialist consultants the Council itself appointed in 2000. The consultants recommended a shorter, cheaper and more direct route closer to the city. Probity and open government demand that this route be subjected to a full and independent Environmental Impact Assessment before any decision on a Rotherwas road can be taken.