

Opinion

Margaret Paren, Chair, South Downs National Park Authority

A27 bypass: It is not too late to find the right solution

Making difficult decisions is never easy as I'm sure Nick Herbert will understand.

On issues that really impact a community, facts and opinion become mingled and emotions run high.

With full awareness of the complexity of the issue, last week the South Downs National Park Authority met to consider the announcement by Highways

England of its preferred route, 5a, for the Arundel Bypass.

Having heard from public speakers, considered expert legal opinion and discussing in detail, the difficult decision was taken to commence proceedings for a judicial review.

As I said at the time, this decision was not taken lightly. However, as a special

purpose local authority and an independent body (and not a 'quango' as erroneously reported) it is incumbent on the National Park Authority to consider how we should achieve our statutory purposes.

To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area.

To promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park by the public.

It is these statutory purposes, set by Government in legislation, that must govern our work and inform all of our decisions. It is these statutory purposes that provided a compelling

case for us to commence proceedings when we believe on the evidence available to us, that Highways England have not followed the correct procedure, which was to set out, to the same level of detail, for all options both inside and outside the National Park. In our view this led to them discounting options outside of the National Park too early

in the process. Moreover, they have not provided any detail on mitigation and compensation for damage done to the National Park.

It is not too late for Highways England to get it right and find a solution that delivers benefit to the people of Arundel without damaging the cherished South Downs National Park.