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Mott MacDonald accused of ‘ineptitude’ over A27 expansion plans



WSCC leader Louise Goldsmith addressing last night's at times heated meeting

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HAVE YOUR SAY

A senior county councillor has accused Mott MacDonald of ‘ineptitude’ over its handling of the A27 plans for Chichester.

Cllr Jeremy Hunt, West Sussex county councillor for Chichester North, also said the consultants, along with Highways England ‘had not been that bright’.



Jeremy Hunt, WSCC councillor for Chichester North

His comments came at a packed meeting where campaigners voiced their anger over the continued secrecy of the six options proposed, two of which include a new northern bypass through Lavant.

Highways England is still refusing to release any official details of the options, despite repeated requests from the *Observer* and *Spirit FM* as part of a joint campaign for transparency.

And it emerged last night that a number of councillors, and members of the public, had seen route maps for the proposed northern bypass.

Responding to claims from Chichester Deserves Better campaigners that West Sussex County Council (WSSCC) was withholding information, cllr Hunt told the South Chichester CLC meeting: “Unfortunately this has all been brought about by Mott MacDonald’s inept handling of this as consultants.



The packed South Chichester CLC meeting at County Hall

“You all think we know more than we do, and I can assure you that we don’t.”

He said: “I have heard a lot of conspiracy theories of why this (northern) route has suddenly come on.

“I would like to say that if you think Highways England and Mott MacDonald are clever enough to have some subterfuge, then I think you are giving them more credit than they deserve. They are not that bright.”

Cllr Hunt nailed his colours to the mast by saying he would oppose any northern bypass.

He said: “It’s not a great surprise why they’ve picked this one up (the northern route), because obviously the southern route has huge problem with the upgrade of it, with the traffic flow over two to three years while it’s being done.

“But there are huge problems with it... if we do a northern route, yes it’s wonderful at the moment for the people living south, but within five or ten years that road would be chock-a-block.”

A number of people spoke out against any northern bypass, which had previously been dismissed as an option by Highways England in 2005.

Mike Tucker from Chichester Deserves Better said: “A northern bypass would be a silver bullet to a whole new world of massive housing expansion and cause the total transformation of the landscape.”

Another young member of the audience spoke out to accuse the county council of withholding information from the public, saying: “I think you have a much greater idea about the six options being proposed than you’re letting on.”

WSSC leader Louise Goldsmith responded by saying: “There are councillors in this room who have seen provisional maps, but none of us have seen the finances.

“And they are not our maps. I know that people have great suspicion and concern.

“The plans that are being put forward are the property and ownership of Highways England. It is a national project, and when they have done their final consultation they will come to us, which will trigger our response.

“There is a meeting on January 25, where some councillors will be shown what it going on. My understanding is that there will be no particular one route at that stage.

“There will then be a public consultation in March, and I hope everyone goes and asks the questions they want answers to.

“When we have all the information we will then be able to come out and give our response.”

Cllr Goldsmith agreed that the proposed six-week consultation in the Spring was not long enough and said she would make a request to Highways England to extend it.

Another member of the audience asked for cllr Pieter Montyn’s stance after being an ‘active campaigner for a northern route’ previously.

“That was ten years ago when I hadn’t been elected to anything and I was free to do what I felt I wanted to do,” cllr Montyn said.

“Since I was elected to district and then county in 2005, the situation has been very different for me. The moment I was elected I never campaigned or spoken out again.”

UKIP councillor Sandra James promised that as the opposition group, they would scrutinise the council’s official response.

The meeting also heard Mike Hall, district councillor for Lavant, warn: “I’ve met with Lord March and I’ve looked at the maps.

“His big events like the Festival of Speed at Goodwood would be wiped out, and they produce an enormous amount of revenue, which needs to be taken into account whatever the decision.”

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