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South Downs MP should 'think again' over bypass 'fiasco' says CPRE Sussex

CPRE Sussex is urging South Downs MP, Nick Herbert, to change his stance over plans to build a new bypass through the South Downs National Park.

Last month Mr Herbert controversially welcomed Highways England's decision to build the road saying that although he would have 'preferred' another route, the bypass was 'much needed'. He then accused the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) of 'wasting public money' when it announced it was seeking a Judicial Review of the decision. Two weeks later a local resident followed SDNPA's example by launching a second legal challenge.

"We believe that the National Park is right to be raising concerns about how Option 5a was selected," says CPRE Sussex Director, Kia Trainor ". "It is clear that Highways England has not listened to the Park throughout the consultation and there is now growing concern about the way the whole process was conducted."

"Last December The National Park sent a letter to Highways England detailing a number of important concerns over the way that the three options had been put forward, and yet the letter was ignored. Highways England is not above the law and should be following due process so it is right that they are held accountable".

Since then, new evidence has emerged which campaigners say adds further weight to claims that Highways England's public consultation was based on inaccurate and misleading evidence concerning the impact and financial benefits of the route. Campaigners say Highways England added critical information to its web page *after* the announcement was made.

"The Benefit-Cost ratio Highways England now gives for Option 5A is 1.51," says ANBC's, Mike Tristram. "And yet in the consultation they stated that 5A had a BCR of 2.60. So the supposed benefits of the scheme have decreased significantly at the same time as the assessment of the environmental impact has been significantly raised. These two major changes invalidate the consultation."

This evidence is just the latest in a series of flaws which have been exposed in Highways England's paperwork. Last year hundreds of protesters gathered in the village of Binsted for a demonstration against the proposal, claiming that planners had 'airbrushed out' acres of woodland and 'conveniently moved' an important heritage site in its official documents.

"There are some serious questions to be answered about the consultation process," says Kia Trainor. "We feel that in the light of all the evidence now emerging Mr Herbert should think again about supporting this scheme.

"It is very clear that the environmental damage this road would cause far outweighs any possible benefits - we are talking about shaving a few minutes off journey time and we have to look at whether the devastating impact of the road is worth those few minutes."

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