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'Eye-watering' childcare costs in the spotlight

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Bypass: the first nail in coffin?

Joe Stack and Sam Morton
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The deferral of major improvements to the A27 has been hailed as a 'triumph' for people living nearby.

The government has announced works have been pushed back to the period 2025 to 2030, as part of broader-scale changes to transport policy in response to financial pressures created by the war in Ukraine and Covid-19.

In a written ministerial statement, Transport Secretary Mark Harper said the delay was intended

to provide the extra time needed to accommodate environmental design changes. He assured residents the scheme was set to continue.

Campaign groups welcomed the news, hailing it as 'a triumph for common sense' and calling it the 'first big nail' in the scheme's coffin.

Arundel & South Downs MP Andrew Griffith said he was 'disappointed' by the delay, while OneArundel, a bypass support group, said the 'slip-page' was not unexpected, adding: "It's just an acceptance of financial reality as the final environmental issues are addressed and the necessary design changes worked out."

Special report: page 4



Missing cat is home – after five years!

A cat has been reunited with its owners almost five years after going missing.

When Chaos vanished, his owners Darren and Gemma Hudson were devastated.

He had been bought as a present for Darren's birthday and the pair quickly became best friends – until Chaos went missing exactly six years later to the day.

Gemma said: "Chaos was a member of our family and we loved him dearly. It was extremely painful when he didn't come home."

The pair searched for months, scouring nearby fields and lay-bys, and appealing for help online. They had given up hope and believed the pet would never be back – until they received an unexpected call.

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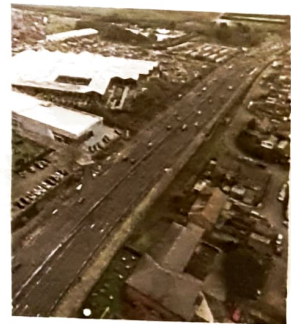
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Charge-point plan is off

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Improved A259 open

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Special report

'First big nail in coffin' for A27 bypass plans?

The deferral of major improvements to the A27 at Crossbush has been hailed as a 'triumph' for people living nearby.

Last week, the government announced works had been pushed back into 'Roads Investment Strategy 3', which covers 2025 to 2030, as part of broader-scale changes to transport policy in response to financial pressures created by the war in Ukraine and Covid-19.

In a written ministerial statement, Transport Secretary Mark Harper said the delay was intended to provide the extra time needed to accommodate environmental design changes. He assured residents the scheme was set to continue.

Arundel & South Downs MP Andrew Griffith said he was 'disappointed' by the delay, adding: "I will continue to support improvements to alleviate the congestion and rat-running, which impacts many rural communities, and for our county's roads to be made safer."

The work at Crossbush is part of a wider set of schemes for the A27 bypass, plans for which were changed considerably late last year, and is intended to allow for better traffic flow, increased capacity and reduced congestion in the area.

Sally Ward, a campaigner for Walberton Friends & Neighbours, welcomed the news.

She said: "It's a triumph for common sense and a huge relief for the residents of Walberton, Binsted Tortington and Fontwell.

"We would like to thank the hundreds of residents who have come out in rain and shine to protest about the destruction and cost of the bypass over the last two years.

"The reason for the push-forward into 2025-2030 tranche given by the government cited environmental and scoping issues, which we have campaigned on tirelessly over the last two years, as well as the need to listen



A number of peaceful protests have been held as campaigners voiced their concerns over safety and the environmental impact of a bypass



Plans for an A27 Arundel bypass have proved controversial

to stakeholders.

"We feel it is inevitable that this scheme will eventually be cancelled completely and this delay into the next round of road improvement schemes is the first big nail in its coffin.

"There are huge questions to ask on the enormous amounts of money National Highways have wasted attempting such a multi-flawed scheme in the face of common sense.

"This scheme was always fundamentally flawed, both in its cobbled-together, piecemeal planning, destruction of the countryside and the redirection of local traffic through Walberton and Fontwell.

"In a time of climate emergency the government should be investing in sustainable active travel. For example, building a pedestrian/bike route to Ford station for the people

of Arundel and improving bus access to Chichester and beyond for the people of surrounding villages.

"In the meantime, it's a major reprieve for those of us worried about the quality of life in our villages and the protection of local flora and fauna, including rare bats.

"Our residents' fears of being flattened by cars avoiding the bypass and where are no pavements in our narrow village lanes can be put to one side for now.

"We are not putting our feet up yet and still support a viable alternative, thrown out by National Highways – the Arundel Alternative: a shorter, cheaper, easing of pinch-points in and out of Arundel. If and when the Planning Inspectorate get around to looking at the proposals, we hope this alternative will gather their support."

Emma Tristram, of the Arundel Bypass Neighbourhood Committee, said this move was a 'temporary reprieve' for 'much-loved countryside which the by-

pass would have divided' and for the 'rich wildlife habitats and classic setting of Arundel'.

"But it does not go far enough, and the future isn't clear," she added. "Will National Highways still send in their planning application, and will the proposed public inquiry into the 'grey route' still go ahead this summer?"

"It's great news that the historic village of Binsted is not to be split in two by a bypass any time soon. In Binsted, the grey route would have passed 100m from our Grade 2 star listed, 12th century church, and ruined the setting of nine listed buildings and a much loved area of countryside.

"Our dark skies on the edge of the National Park would have disappeared. Several houses in Binsted have already been bought by National Highways – two because of the previous preferred route – which has badly affected our cohesive community.

"The scheme should be cancelled completely, and

net-zero policies properly applied which means road building should be restricted to schemes that don't increase traffic or carbon emissions."

Derek Waller, vice-chairman of OneArundel, a bypass support group, said: "The slippage is not unexpected – it's just an acceptance of financial reality as the final environmental issues are addressed and the necessary design changes worked out.

"We remain optimistic, albeit disappointed."

Mr Waller said the government and National Highways had 'obviously got some design changes to do', adding: "They had a supplementary consultation last year but we haven't seen the responses to that yet.

"We just need to wait for National Highways to make next move. They've talked about environmental issues and design changes, so one would hope they will give us a bit more information. I don't want to take a pessimistic view."