

NO NEED TO DESTROY GREENBELT WITH BUSWAY

News released by Howard Kettel, Stapleford Parish Council Chair

An independent report, published today, demonstrates that instead of damaging the greenbelt the South East Cambridge Busway could be routed along a disused railway line. In light of the report, the parish councils of Stapleford and Great Shelford and community groups such as Cambridge Past, Present & Future, are formally calling on the Greater Cambridge Partnership to change track.

The GCP is planning to build a bus-only road through the South Cambridgeshire greenbelt, next to the Gog Magog Hills and exposing Cambridge's green lung to speculative development. The proposed route skirts around the edges of Stapleford and Great Shelford rather than serving the villages.



Uninterrupted views across greenbelt from Magog Down – now the location for GCP's busway

Driven to protect its greenbelt for future generations, Stapleford and Great Shelford Parish Councils, supported by crowdfunding, have commissioned an independent investigation of an alternative route following the disused Haverhill railway line: the 'Shelford Railway Alignment'. The resulting report by specialist consultancy, i-Transport, finds that:

- The Shelford Railway Alignment can meet the specifications required by the GCP. It can be fully segregated, compliant with a future Cambridge Autonomous Metro (CAM), and does not require the large-scale demolition that was given as a reason for excluding this route.
- Using the old railway line would take the alignment through the villages, which would increase passenger numbers compared to a route on the edge of the villages. The economic case for the Cambridge South East Transport Study (CSETS) scheme relies on the community using the new busway. The costs of the CSETS scheme relative to the benefits offers poor value for money, with a benefit-to-cost ratio of less than half that sought by the GCP Board.

- Re-using the former railway would avoid damaging the greenbelt. The exceptional circumstances required to gain planning permission for building in the greenbelt can only be granted if there is not a reasonable alternative.
- There are serious weaknesses in the process used to arrive at the conclusion reached by the GCP, including a lack of assessment transparency, unsubstantiated key decisions and public consultation feedback not properly taken into account.

Stapleford and Great Shelford Parish Councils are now making a formal request to the GCP to pause its CSETS plans and re-appraise the use of the disused railway line as a genuine alternative. Despite consulting on transport options with local politicians, parish councils and the community since 2016, the GCP has never asked for views on re-using part of the former railway line.

Howard Kettel, Chair of Stapleford Parish Council, says that “We owe it to future generations who will live in our village to protect our greenbelt countryside for them to enjoy. We are incredibly grateful to the local community for donating £12,000 towards this effort. i-Transport’s report shows that there is an alternative and we now want to see the political will to look at this option properly, including giving the people of this an area a chance to have their say.”



Long views from Stapleford over valuable arable land and gently rising chalk downs – to be cleaved apart by GCP’s busway

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

What does the GCP want to do?

With funds from central government, the Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) plans to improve travel into Cambridge from the southeast. To reduce travel times and congestion along the northbound A1307, commuters would park at a new 2,000-space Park & Ride near the A11 before transitioning to a bus for onward travel into Cambridge. Buses would travel on a new dedicated road from Babraham to the Cambridge Biomedical Campus, before joining the existing guided busway route to Cambridge Station and thence onto regular roads to the bus station on Drummer Street.

To achieve its goals, the GCP has chosen to route a bus road straight through greenbelt, irreparably damaging valuable farmland, landscapes, habitats and views. This video clip highlights what Stapleford and Great Shelford Parish Councils want to protect:

The Farm Track Stapleford¹: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F_cqfnmgQEA

Contrast this with the video produced by the GCP, which includes a new bridge that would be constructed over the River Granta upstream from Stapleford:

CSET Better Public Transport route flythrough: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=en96LI0ICtw>



A better option is available

A less environmentally damaging alternative route is available along the former rail line between Haverhill and Cambridge, yet the GCP ruled this option out of contention at the initial planning stage following a flawed option appraisal process. When the GCP consulted, it only offered its chosen route and two others, neither of which were CAM-compliant (i.e. capable of being converted into a future Cambridge Autonomous Metro route) and so were never realistic options. In fact,

¹ With thanks to Keith Taylor (www.cambridgeimages.co.uk) for permission to reproduce

consultation even failed to demonstrate conclusive public support for the GCP's chosen route. The alternative route suggested by Stapleford and Great Shelford Parish Councils has never been put forward for public consultation.

In response to mounting pressure from the parish councils, Cambridge Connect and Cambridge Past Present & Future, the GCP instructed its consultants, Mott MacDonald, to review the alternative route. In June 2020, and just days before the GCP Board decided to go ahead with its chosen route, Mott MacDonald reported that the alternative route was unfeasible and did not meet with the GCP's requirement that all schemes must be CAM-compliant.

CAM will cost around £4billion to realise and is still at an early stage of development, with question marks as to whether it will ever be affordable.

Questions were raised about the Mott MacDonald report that were not adequately answered, but the GCP Board refused to reconsider the disused railway and instead gave officers approval to proceed with a bus road through the greenbelt. Stapleford and Great Shelford Parish Councils felt that further work was needed to compare the two options and to give the public a say on them. So, they put forward their own money plus crowdfunded donations to pay for an independent appraisal, selecting specialist transport planning consultancy, i-Transport, to do this. The resulting report establishes the evidence for a viable and feasible alternative to the GCP's greenbelt busway – the Shelford Railway Alignment – which follows the existing travel corridor.

The handful of outcomes presented in this press release are significant and seriously question the credibility of the GCP's decision-making. In light of the report's findings, the parish councils are formally calling on the GCP to press the pause button on the CSET programme and to carry out an independent reappraisal of CSETS, in particular of the route alignment.

Please get in touch

The full i-Transport report is now available to view and download at:

www.staplefordparishcouncil.gov.uk

For further information or to discuss results of i-Transport's investigation in more detail, please contact:

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We look forward to hearing from you.