

# **Proposed A350 Melksham Bypass**

## **Public consultation report**

The consultation had 1,018 online responses and more than 175 letters and e-mail submissions.

**Wiltshire Council**

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# Introduction

The A350 Melksham Bypass was one of the nine projects identified as priorities by the Western Gateway Strategic Transport Body, which recognised the regional importance of the A350 as a north-south route.

The importance of the A350 to the local economy has long been recognised by Wiltshire Council. The section of the road through Beanacre and Melksham has been a concern for many years. It has sections with 30mph speed limits passing through residential areas, with several busy junctions providing access to Melksham town centre, retail and commercial sites, the A365 Bath Road and A3102.

The A350 at Melksham is one of the busiest major roads in Wiltshire, with daily traffic volumes generally above 35,000 vehicles per day, and heavy goods vehicles accounting for around 8% of all vehicles.

Funding has been received from the Department of Transport (DfT) to develop a Large Local Major improvement scheme for the A350 at Melksham and to prepare an Outline Business Case (OBC) for a scheme.

## Transport objectives

The transport objectives of the scheme were confirmed by the Council's Cabinet on 13 October 2020 and are to:

- (i) Reduce journey times and delays and improve journey reliability on the A350 through Melksham and Beanacre, improving local and regional north-south connectivity, and supporting future housing and employment growth in the A350 corridor.
- (ii) Reduce journey times and delays on and improve journey reliability on the following routes through Melksham and Beanacre:
  - A350 South – A3102
  - A365 West – A365 East
  - A350 South – A365 West
- (iii) Provide enhanced opportunities for walking and cycling between Melksham town centre and the rail station / Bath Road, and along the existing A350 corridor within Melksham and Beanacre, which will help reduce the impact of transport on the environment and support local economic activity.
- (iv) Reduce personal injury accident rates and severity for the A350 and Melksham as a whole, to make the corridor safer and more resilient.
- (v) Reduce the volume of traffic, including HGVs, passing along the current A350 route in northern Melksham and Beanacre to reduce severance, whilst avoiding negative impacts on other existing or potential residential areas.

## Public consultation

The first stage in the scheme development included undertaking a non-statutory consultation on a long list of options. This provided the opportunity for the public, town and parish councils, Area Board and others to comment on the scheme and the options. Other organisations, including the Environment Agency, Natural England, Highways England, were also invited to comment as part of the consultation.

Because the COVID-19 pandemic prevented face to face consultation events, it was primarily an online consultation, although the opportunity was also provided to submit written comments. The consultation was launched at the Melksham Area Board on 4 November 2020. An initial online presentation was given to Seend Parish Council on 27 October 2020 and to Melksham Town Council on 23 November 2020.

While it was not possible to hold an exhibition at the library or town hall as would normally be the case, the use of social media, television and radio coverage, and the increase in the use of online consultations have helped. An extension to the consultation period end from the end of November to 17 January 2021 was made in view of the pandemic limitations, and to ensure that the local paper would be operating again so that it could report on the consultation and encourage participation.

The options being consulted on were:

- Workplace parking levy (Option 1)
- Road user pricing (Option 2)
- Heavy goods vehicle restrictions (Option 3)
- Rail service improvements (Option 4)
- Bus service improvements (Option 5)
- Walking and cycling improvements (Option 6)
- Improvements to the existing A350 (Options 7a, 7b and 7c)
- Short bypass to the west and east (Options 8a, 9a, 9b, 9c, 10a and 10b)
- Long bypasses to the west and east (Options 8b, 10c and 10d)

This was the initial consultation on the potential options for the scheme, and it was considered important that the widest range of options should be consulted on at this preliminary stage, even though the emerging assessment work indicated that some were going to be more successful than others at meeting the transport objectives.

## Public consultation documents

The public consultation documents and supporting information were available to view on the council's website and can still be seen at:

[www.wiltshire.gov.uk/highways-a350-melksham-bypass](http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/highways-a350-melksham-bypass)

The webpage provided a short introduction to the scheme and links to the 'Melksham Bypass Information Pack', which described the background to the scheme and set out the scheme preparation process, indicating that the scheme was at a very early stage of its development and would be the subject of further informal and formal consultation should it proceed.

It was stated that the aims of the non-statutory consultation was to:

- successfully engage with stakeholders affected by or interested in the scheme;
- engage with potentially affected land owners;
- encourage involvement from stakeholders and build strong open relationships;
- raise awareness of the scheme and understanding for the need to improve the A350;
- inform about the option assessment process;
- understand stakeholder concerns, issues and suggestions;
- receive feedback on the options to allow us to develop the scheme further; and
- prepare for the statutory consultation phases.

The document described the existing situation and why there was considered to be a local need for the scheme, as well as setting out the wider strategic priorities for the Western Gateway Strategic Transport Body. It also described the option assessment criteria to be applied in terms of Strategic, Economic, Financial, Management and Commercial cases.

The emerging findings so far were described, which indicated that the demand management measures (Options 1, 2 and 3) were unlikely to adequately address the key issues and scheme objectives and these options were likely to present challenges around acceptability.

The public transport, walking and cycling measures (options 4, 5 and 6) were unlikely to deliver the scale of impact required against the objectives as options in their own right. However, the assessment identifies that there is potential for these to be considered alongside other road-based options as potential complementary measures.

The emerging findings in connection with improvements to the existing A350 (Options 7a, 7b and 7c) indicated that the scale of impact is expected to be limited by existing speed restrictions and what could feasibly be achieved at some of the

more constrained sections. To overcome these constraints, if feasible, would increase scheme costs. Compared to the likely scale of benefits it is considered that this option would offer a lower overall value for money.

Compared to other road-based options, there would be less direct landscape / visual impact and loss of greenfield land. However, severance issues and noise / air quality on the existing A350 would not be directly addressed.

The emerging findings in connection with the short bypass and full bypass options were also described. The results of the initial sifting of options were provided based on the anticipated impact, and examples of the potential complementary walking and cycling measures were described.

A separate document 'Melksham Bypass information on Options 7 to 10' provided descriptions of the individual route corridors being consulted on and an initial assessment against the strategic, economic, environment, social, financial and management factors.

The webpage also included the legacy documents prepared in connection with the Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC), and list of Frequently Asked Questions.

During the consultation period there was an online questionnaire that could be completed.

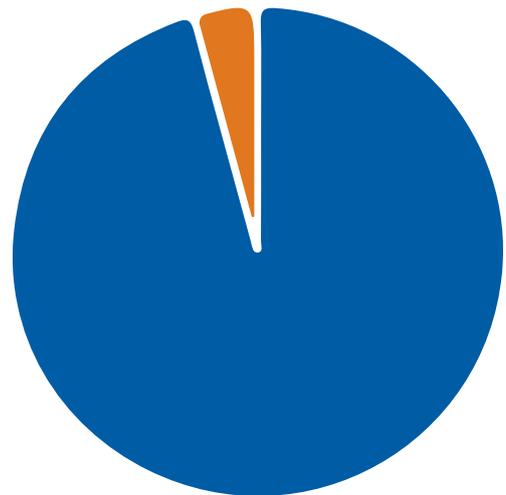
The plan below is an extract from the consultation material showing the various routes under consideration.



# Responses to the online consultation

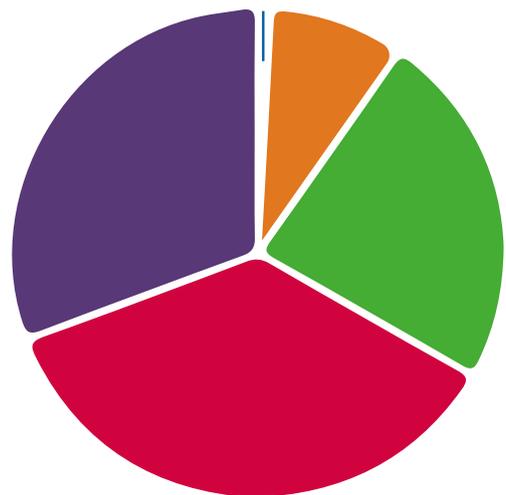
# 1. Are you responding on behalf of yourselves or a business or organisation?

 You	962
 A business or organisation	42



# 2. How old are you?

 Under 18	8
 19-30	85
 31-44	226
 45-59	345
 60+	294



# 3. Where do you live?

 In Melksham	454
 Within 5 miles of Melksham	432
 Elsewhere in Wiltshire	61
 Outside of Wiltshire	15



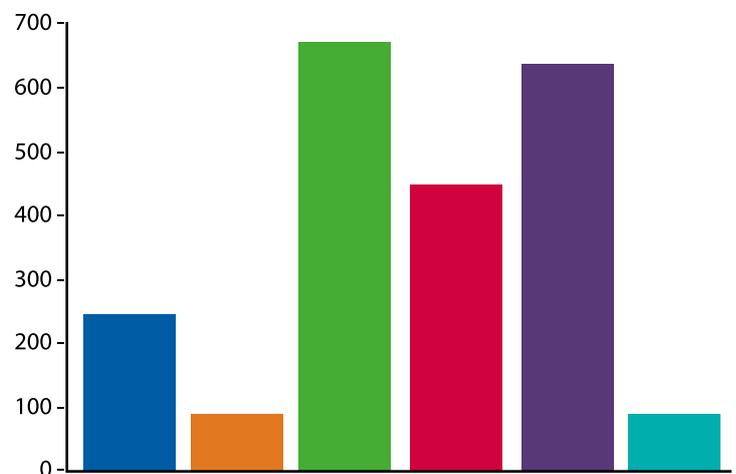
## 4. Where is your business based?

There were 42 responses from businesses with the majority of them being local from Melksham, Bowerhill and adjacent areas:

Location	Number
Bowerhill	12
Melksham	10
Shurnhold	3
Chippenham	2
Lacock	2
Shaw	2
Whitley	2
Atworth	1
Devizes	1
Frome	1
Royal Wootton Bassett	1
Trowbridge	1
Broughton Gifford	1
Other	3

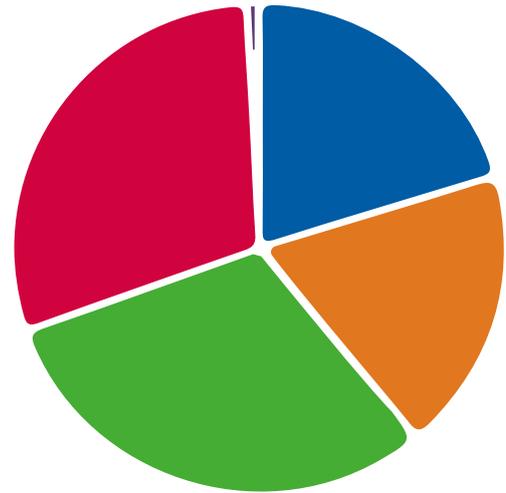
## 5. How do you currently use the A350 through Melksham?

● Business use	243
● School run	92
● Shopping	670
● Commute	449
● Recreation	633
● Other	93



## 6. When do you mainly use the A350 through Melksham?

● Morning peak hrs	460
● Evening peak hrs	427
● Other times on weekdays	695
● Weekends	674
● Other	18

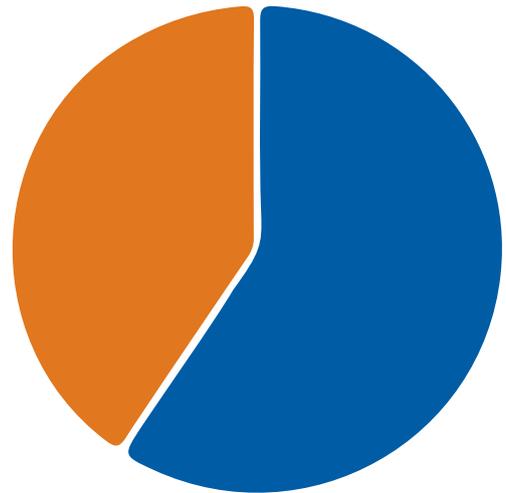


## 7. How concerned are you about the current situation on the A350 in Melksham and Beanacre with regards to:

	Very concerned	Somewhat concerned	Neutral	Somewhat unconcerned	Very unconcerned
Road safety	20.9%	23.3%	23.6%	14.0%	18.2%
Traffic congestion and delays	30.1%	20.1%	18.9%	15.2%	15.6%
Impact of traffic on residential properties	26.6%	21.9%	23.3%	12.2%	16.0%
Landscape and scenery	25.3%	25.1%	22.0%	12.4%	15.1%
Employment and businesses	11.1%	21.4%	35.1%	16.7%	15.8%
Walking and cycling facilities	<b>30.5%</b>	26.1%	22.4%	9.3%	<b>11.6%</b>

## 8. Do you support the need for an improvement to the A350 at Beanacre and Melksham?

● Yes	594
● No	406



## 9. If no, please state why

397 responses

Please refer to appendices for all comments

# 10. Thinking about the options that you would most like to see come forward, please rank in order of preference:

Most preferred    ■ 1   ■ 2   ■ 3   ■ 4   ■ 5   ■ 6   ■ 7    least preferred

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Workplace parking levy	6.5%	5.4%	6.7%	13.1%	10.3%	9.4%	48.7%
2 Road user pricing	6.7%	3.1%	7.1%	11.1%	8.4%	9.6%	54.1%
3 HGV restrictions	27.2%	11.4%	13.6%	14.8%	10.2%	8.0%	14.8%
4 Rail improvements	37.3%	15.2%	15.5%	10.8%	5.8%	4.5%	11.0%
5 Bus improvements	32.3%	17.7%	15.1%	13.3%	6.6%	4.7%	10.4%
6 Walking and cycling improvements	41.2%	16.1%	14.5%	9.5%	7.0%	3.3%	8.6%
7a Improvements / upgrade to existing A350 route	31.0%	10.4%	7.9%	8.4%	5.6%	7.7%	29.1%
7b Improvements / upgrade to existing A350 route	29.9%	11.2%	8.1%	7.3%	6.1%	7.6%	29.8%
7c Improvements / upgrade to existing A350 route	27.8%	9.0%	9.6%	10.2%	5.7%	7.9%	29.8%
8a Short and long; inner and outer western routes	14.9%	9.1%	9.7%	10.0%	6.8%	7.8%	41.7%
8b Short and long; inner and outer western routes	15.9%	8.2%	9.7%	8.2%	6.2%	7.5%	44.3%
9a Short and long; inner and outer western routes	11.9%	6.9%	11.9%	9.1%	8.0%	7.9%	44.4%
9b Short and long; inner and outer western routes	11.0%	6.4%	10.4%	9.8%	8.4%	8.9%	45.3%
9c Short and long; inner and outer western routes	10.8%	6.3%	9.3%	9.9%	8.9%	9.4%	45.6%
10a Short and long; inner and outer eastern routes	17.2%	8.5%	6.8%	12.9%	7.4%	7.3%	39.9%

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10b Short and long; inner and outer eastern routes	<b>16.2%</b>	8.7%	8.1%	7.7%	6.8%	7.6%	<b>44.8%</b>
10c Short and long; inner and outer eastern routes	<b>30.8%</b>	8.1%	4.5%	5.0%	3.6%	5.9%	<b>42.0%</b>
10d – Short and long; inner and outer eastern routes	<b>20.8%</b>	10.3%	4.8%	4.6%	<b>4.0%</b>	<b>4.0%</b>	<b>51.6%</b>

## 11. Why have you chosen your most preferred option?

998 responses

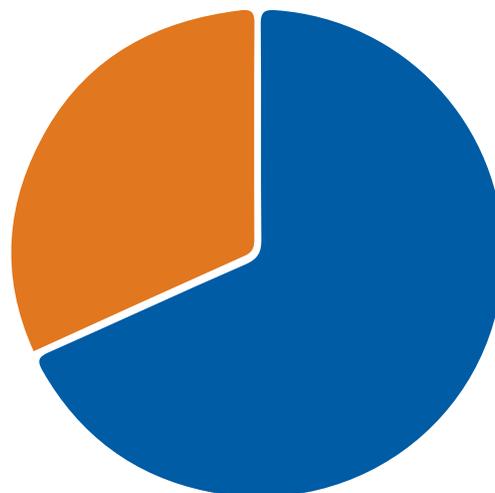
Please refer to appendices for all comments

## 12. Looking at your most preferred option relative to the others, in your opinion, do you agree that your chosen option improves the following?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Road safety	47.9%	33.7%	15.4%	0.9%	2.1%
Traffic congestion and delays	56.1%	29.6%	11.0%	1.1%	2.2%
Impact of traffic on residential properties	52.3%	25.8%	17.3%	2.1%	2.5%
Landscape and scenery	45.3%	22.4%	22.9%	5.6%	3.8%
Employment and businesses	30.4%	34.8%	30.9%	1.6%	2.3%
Walking and cycling facilities	<b>39.3%</b>	26.3%	29.2%	2.2%	<b>3.0%</b>

### 13. Would you like to see more facilities for walking and cycling within Melksham come forward as complementary measures to a potential A350 bypass?

● Yes	682
● No	318



### 14. If yes, what facilities would you like to see?

610 responses

Please refer to appendices for all comments

### 15. Do you have any further comments about these proposals to improve the A350 in Melksham?

678 responses

Please refer to appendices for all comments

## 16. How did you hear about this no-statutory consultation?

855 responses, including...

Facebook

Online and melksham news

Melksham Area Board

Town Council Meeting

Email

Newspaper

# Written and email responses to the consultation

The town and parish councils, and other organisations were consulted on the proposals and a summary of their comments is included below:

## Melksham Town Council

The council's Economic Development Manager reported that the preference of this council is to pursue an eastern bypass route. However, an eastern route which incorporates part of the existing Eastern Way is not desirable as Eastern Way runs through a residential area of the town and is not appropriate for the levels of heavy traffic a bypass would generate. Also incorporating this road as part of the bypass route would involve most children from the town, having to cross the by-pass each day to access the town's Melksham Oak secondary school. This is not desirable.

This council also considers it essential that the consultation results and subsequent development work on the preferred route should be done in partnership with the Neighbourhood Plan Review, The Local Plan Review and the 'Priority for People' work arising from the Movement Working Group – part of the Melksham: 2020-2036 strategic plan. Doing so will ensure the most advantageous outcome for the Melksham community.

## Melksham Without Parish Council

The Clerk to the council advised that Melksham Without Parish Council welcomes the investment in transport infrastructure which reduces congestion through the Melksham Without Parish Council area. However, it considers proposals for a bypass to the western side of town to be unadvisable and inappropriate. The appropriate option would be an eastern proposal which did not have an environmental impact upon the community of Bowerhill.

## Semington Parish Council

Semington Parish Council requested that the justification for the scheme should be revisited in the post COVID-19 era where working from home is likely to become more established and lead to long-term reductions in traffic volumes. They were concerned that traffic surveys were conducted before the Farmers Roundabout improvement, that increases in costs for the scheme could fall on Wiltshire's council tax payers, and that the scheme appeared to be an attempt to raise the status of the road to 'trunk' strategic importance.

It was suggested that the emerging post COVID situation and the global climate emergency would lead to reduced car traffic and an increase in public transport, walking and cycling which Semington Parish Council would support. The parish council made specific comments on proposed route options as follows:-

### Option 8b

This is the long western bypass option. This route would cross the flood plain from the River Avon and come through farm land to join the A350 south of Bowerhill. It

would need to be raised to prevent flooding and would therefore be very visually intrusive both in the surrounding countryside and from the canal. There is also likely to be significant noise impact on both Semington and Berryfields villages. It is likely that the route would need to be very close to the canal for approximately 1km before joining route 7C, and be relatively close for some distance further west. There would need to be significant protection to the Kennet and Avon Canal with this option to honour the Wiltshire Council core strategy commitment to canals within the county.

Semington would suffer noise impact from the north-west, north and east, rather than just from the east with all other options. Semington Parish Council would request that substantial tree planting be undertaken along the route to screen the noise if this route were selected, even though it would increase the area of land required to accommodate the route.

Where Option 8b crosses the Semington Road south of Berryfields would create a potentially hazardous junction for the national cycle route 403. Option 8b would also create a tempting rat run for vehicles to cut the corner and come through the village rather than go the longer route around three sides. Option 8b would pass very close to the Wiltshire Air Ambulance HQ.

The ongoing restoration of the Wilts & Berks Canal along with the Thames and Severn canals is supported by the Wiltshire Core Strategy as it supports the objective of creating a “Wessex Ring” of operational canals. Wiltshire Council’s Core Strategy with respect to canals includes developing the canal’s recreational and nature conservation potential. Option 8b would cut across the proposed canal regeneration between Semington and Berryfields. If the bypass were built before the canal is restored it would probably prove prohibitively expensive to provide the connecting link to the Kennet and Avon Canal. If built subsequently it would require another bridge not costed in the current proposal. Route 8B will probably require part of Route 7C from the point where it joins the A350 south to the roundabout with the A361.

Semington Parish Council would not be in favour of Option 8b because of the environmental impact and the likelihood of a significant increase in through traffic within the village.

### **Option 7c**

This is the upgrading of the existing A350 to the south of Melksham. This road has been designed to be dual carriageway capable and can be improved without significant impact on the environment, other than an increase in noise. Some additional sound screening would be sought by the parish council if this option is used.

### **Option 10c**

This is the eastern bypass option which skirts Bowerhill and joins the A350 at or to the south of the old railway line. This option does not change the risk of increased through traffic within the village. The environmental impact is believed to be lower

with this option than any of the other long route options. The noise impact will be worst close to the industrial estate of Bowerhill and as such is the least worst option.

This route could be supplemented with the southern part of route 7C if traffic volume justifies it. The route would run roughly parallel to the Kennet and Avon Canal for approximately 2km around the south eastern extent of Bowerhill. There would need to be significant protection to the Kennet and Avon Canal with this option to honour the Wiltshire Council core strategy commitment to canals within the county.

### **Option 10d**

This is the long eastern bypass route which continues south to join the A361 at a point between the Strand and the Littleton roundabout junction with the A350. This option will have a significant environmental impact on the Littleton area, with additional crossings of the canal and Semington Brook required. Where the A350 and the A361 are shared would probably require improvement with this stretch of highway. The A361 bend near The Strand public house is already an accident black spot, increasing traffic along this stretch of the road may lead to an increase in accidents along this route.

The Semington brook area around Littleton is a particular wildlife haven with otters, water voles, buzzard, red kite and ravens seen this year. The route would pass close to listed buildings. Semington Parish Council would object to this route based on the environmental impact on both Semington Brook and canal and the noise and amenity impact for Littleton residents.

Semington Parish Council considered that all routes should keep the impact on the Kennet and Avon Canal as low as is reasonably practical.

## **Seend Parish Council**

The Parish Clerk advised that Seend Parish Council has looked at the various options put forward. It has been intimated in the consultation documents that the route options on the western side of Melksham have more problems to overcome than the eastern side, such as railway lines, electric sub-station, solar farm, golf course as well as a flood plain. However, the benefits of going west should not be overlooked, and therefore all options must still be considered from all angles. The Parish Council made specific comments on the proposed route options as follows:-

### **Option 8b**

Route 8b should not be discounted as a worthy option. Although this is the longer route around the west of Melksham, it would have the advantage of making access to Bath and surrounding towns quicker but, more importantly, it will make travelling to Bath hospital much quicker. RUH is the main hospital for Melksham and surrounding villages and, at present, it can take far too long to travel there, particularly in times of emergencies. Therefore, this option must be given serious consideration, despite the expenditure of the structural obstacles, as the economic benefits may mitigate these extra costs.

In preparing your case for a bypass, you cite extracts from the draft Melksham Neighbourhood Plan. No mention is made of Seend's emerging Neighbourhood Plan. In it the parish council identifies the Kennet and Avon Canal and its surrounding countryside as a major environmental and recreational asset for both Seend and Melksham. Two of the route options, 10c and 10d, will cause great harm to this landscape.

As the parish council is representing the parishioners of Seend parish, they have concentrated their comments on the two routes that would most affect us.

## Option 10c

This route was the one most favoured by Wiltshire Council when it was submitting its Strategic Outline Business Case in 2019. It is cheaper than option 10d and the lowest cost of all the long routes. It does not require bridges to cross the canal and Semington Brook. And it is likely to draw the most traffic from the existing A350 and other routes.

However, the building of the bypass along this route would have an adverse impact on the residents of Bowerhill and restrict their access routes to the Kennet and Avon Canal for recreation. Rights of way would be affected restricting easy access to the countryside on the south side of the canal. Whilst Giles Wood would be better protected by this route than 10d, further forestry and landscaping would be needed to protect the environment and surrounding properties.

However, it is vital that, where possible, parish boundaries are preserved and if the bypass were to run south of Bowerhill, north of Giles Wood, this could go a short way to protecting the parish boundaries between Melksham and Seend. Avon Needs Trees (ANT) have already intimated they would be willing to contribute towards planting of trees and it may be that Giles Wood and surrounding areas would be enhanced with more planting of trees not only for environmental reasons but also to cut down on noise for surrounding properties. More forestry in this area would also enhance the visual amenity of the Kennet and Avon Canal.

The raised level of Seend and Seend Cleeve would mean that this bypass route would be highly visible and there would be heightened noise and air pollution that would need to be mitigated by natural screening.

For freight traffic travelling to and from the various industrial estates in Melksham, route 10c with the additional dualling of the A350 between Semington and Littleton roundabout would have major benefits.

Were this to still be the favoured route of Wiltshire Council, then the parish council would expect much needed mitigation in the form of mass tree planting, landscaping and bunds to reduce the impact on the surrounding countryside. It would be crucial to the wellbeing of all residents impacted by this route that green landscaping is created rather than an infill of housing. This would need to be factored into any costs prior to building.

Where the A350 south would join Hampton Park West, little work and expense would be needed to widen the existing A350 to the Littleton roundabout. When that was

built in 2004, allowance was made for the road to be widened in later years and there is sufficient width under the canal bridge to do that.

This option would not incur further expense of crossing the Kennet and Avon Canal and Semington Brook.

## Option 10d

We note that this option was not one of the original route options in the Strategic Outline Business Case presented to the DfT but came about because of a suggestion at the March 2020 Melksham Area Board meeting.

This route, if chosen, would have the most damaging effect on Seend Parish.

The description in the consultation document of this route describes it as follows: “There are no statutory environmental designations expected to be impacted by this option. The corridor passes through land associated mainly with farming and equestrian uses. The crossing of the Kennet and Avon Canal is likely to affect its setting, with potential visual and amenity impacts.”

The quality and value of the landscape in both environmental and amenity terms is very much understated in this description. More green field sites in this option would be used either for structural buildings and/or further housing development. Melksham/Bowerhill is already undergoing extensive development and these green field sites should not be used as an attempt to build yet more housing, particularly as it would be likely that Bowerhill would meet up with Seend, thereby not leaving any gap to decipher the parish boundaries.

Option 10d uses the largest amount of land (23 hectares) and is one of the longest routes at 5.9 miles. It would need two bridges to cross the canal and Semington Brook and major structural work to cross a flood plain. It would also need improvements and a new junction made on the A361. This makes it one of the most costly of all the routes.

The parish council also stressed the importance of the Kennet and Avon Canal and drew attention to the Seend Neighbourhood Plan, the presence of floodplains, the loss of view from Seend Cleeve, and raised concerns about the potential for increased traffic through Seend, and the effect of any scheme on the restoration of the Wilts & Berks Canal.

In conclusion Seend Parish Council strongly urged that their concerns with the Option 10 routes should be taken on board. They do not believe that the plans for these routes, (most particularly with route 10d), take into consideration the criteria set out in the Neighbourhood Plan.

“In the event that a Melksham Bypass is constructed and passes in part through the Parish, the effect of the infrastructure proposal on the following elements of the canal’s setting will be expected to demonstrate how they will be mitigated: tranquillity, light pollution, biodiversity assets in recognition of its status as a County Wildlife Site, heritage assets, including archaeology and access to the Canal”

“The landscape, biodiversity and heritage assets associated with the Kennet & Avon Canal are highly valued in the Parish and are underpinned by four Neighbourhood Plan evidence base reports: Seend Parish Character Statement (2020), the Seend Parish Green Infrastructure Report (2020), Seend Parish Local Key Views Report (2020) and the Locally Valued Heritage Assets Report (2020). Any developments affecting the canal must protect and reinforce its distinct character and enhance its setting and surroundings.”

This green space between Melksham and Seend promotes both physical and mental well-being, crucial in this current climate, and must be protected at all costs.

## Great Hinton Parish Council

The Chairman indicated that the parish council felt very strongly that Option 10d is the worst possible option in every way. The impact on the environment and wildlife would be huge, involving closing the canal for months where businesses are already struggling. The noise pollution would be much worse than it has been since the new section of road was built. The long term prospect of possible extension of Option 10d towards Yarnbrook /Westbury is extremely concerning and could have a hugely detrimental effect on all local villages.

If the bypass must go to the east, then Option 10b would be by far the best proposal for all local areas. If this option was chosen, then we would assume that the Semington Bypass would be made dual carriageway. This could alleviate the majority of the current problems which have been highlighted.

## Steeple Ashton Parish Council

The Parish Clerk advised that the parish council agrees that a bypass for Melksham is desirable. The route of the bypass has no direct impact on the parish as it terminates north of the Semington roundabout however, members request that consideration is given to the effects of bypass related traffic increase in the following areas to the south of the scheme:

- Safety of junctions at Common Hill and Cold Harbour with increased traffic flows;
- Air quality and noise impacts from increased traffic and congestion to properties at Ashton Common, Ashton Road and along A350 itself;
- Impact from increased traffic on woodlands at Green Lane Wood and Smith's Well Wood;
- Risk of traffic rat-running through Steeple Ashton to avoid congestion on Yarnbrook to Westbury section of A350;

The Steeple Ashton Parish Council also feels that Wiltshire Council should consider implementing a Westbury bypass in conjunction with the Melksham scheme to minimise congestion north of Westbury.

## Natural England

The Conservation and Planning Lead Adviser for the Wessex team commented that it is difficult to confirm at the resolution provided but it appears that options 10b, 10c and 10d have the potential to impact on Spye Park SSSI. Any proposal moving forward with either of these options would have to demonstrate it does not impact on the features for Spye Parks notification.

Attention was drawn to the National Planning Policy Considerations. Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006) requires that, 'Every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity'. Section 40(3) also adds that 'conserving biodiversity includes, in relation to a living organism or type of habitat, restoring or enhancing a population or habitat'. The authority should also consider the proposals in light of the policies set out in Section 15 Conserving and enhancing the natural environment of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2019).

Other factors to be considered included best and most versatile agricultural land and soils, protected species, local sites and priority habitats and species, ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees, environmental enhancement, access and recreation, rights of way, Access Land, and National Trails.

## Canal and River Trust

The Area Planner for the Canal & River Trust indicated an interest in Option 7c if chosen and noted that Option 10d would require significant involvement from the Trust in the design and location of a proposed new bridge, suitable mitigation, Legal agreement and DEFRA consent.

## National Trust

The Planning Advisor, south west region, felt that further information would be needed for the Trust to come to a fully informed view on the different options, and how they may affect our landholdings and interests. At present, they ask the council to take into account the existing traffic issues being experienced at Lacock – see below – and consider the extent to which the various options might be able to address those issues. Furthermore, there are other matters that – as a conservation organisation – the Trust would want the Council to bear in mind.

The Trust has previously noted in responses to planning proposals at Melksham and Chippenham that there is a problem with rat-running traffic through Lacock village. In essence, drivers from the east attempt to get to the A350 in the west while avoiding town centre traffic in Melksham and Chippenham. This often means extra traffic driving through Lacock – along Hither Way (which visitors to Lacock cross to enter the village) and along West Street and Cantax Hill (within the Conservation Area). It also means extra traffic in rural lanes in the wider area (e.g. Forest Lane, part of National Cycle Route 403). This extra traffic harms the historic character of the village, and the safety of other road users.

In addition, the Trust have concerns about the safety of the southern A350 junction serving Lacock (A350 / Melksham Road). The A350 is a busy road, with many vehicles travelling at some speed. This can create problems (and safety concerns) for vehicles wanting to join the A350 from Melksham Road, in particular for vehicles turning north. Potentially junction improvements could improve this situation and enhance highway safety.

Other matters the Trust thought should be considered included the effects of new infrastructure, climate change, biodiversity, active travel, heritage and landscape, flooding and water quality and noted that the Trust's land at Lacock has been declared 'inalienable' and cannot be compulsorily purchased against the Trust's wishes without special parliamentary procedure.

## **Brisith Horse Society Wiltshire**

BHS Wiltshire County Access Officer emphasised the importance of bridleways crossed by any route of a Melksham Bypass, which would be used by riders who are very vulnerable users, and by off-road cyclists and walkers. Crossings over or under the bypass must be carefully designed with safety of horse riders, cyclists and walkers in mind.

Examples of bridleways which could be affected were identified and it was suggested that the opportunity could be taken to link up routes with a new route along the line of the bypass.

## **Wiltshire Wildlife Trust**

The Chief Executive proposed a different approach that puts environmental enhancement as one of the objectives to be achieved by the scheme rather being seen as a constraint.

The risk table in the business case identifies a risk of "Objections to some elements of the scheme by local residents, landowners and environmental groups", with the suggested mitigation of "Early engagement with stakeholders and communications to highlight the benefits of the scheme".

An alternative way to avoid objections would be to deliver a scheme that is truly innovative and ambitious in the way it avoids and addresses environmental impacts and genuinely delivers biodiversity gain, carbon offsetting and helps Wiltshire to ensure that at least 30% of its land is protected to reverse biodiversity loss by 2030.

All of the options presented in the assessment have been identified as having an adverse impact on biodiversity and the water environment. One of the problems of the approach being taken is that the environment is being seen as a constraint. A different approach would be to see this as an opportunity to not only meet the requirements of the business case but also protect and enhance the natural environment and deliver benefits to people and wildlife. The approach taken to Salisbury's River Park seems a good example of this.

The key physical constraints map identifies the river, floodplain and areas of woodland, but it must be recognised that the blank spaces on the map will contain features that are of great importance to the movement and lifecycle of key and priority species. These include woodland copse, hedgerows and other agricultural habitats and riparian and floodplain habitats, and as identified in the Business Case, commuting and foraging habitat for bats.

The scheme information addresses the carbon footprint of the works in terms of reducing traffic congestion and using energy efficient plant, materials and processes. It also assesses the impact of climate change and the effect this will have on the scheme infrastructure, e.g. resilience to flooding. Any mitigation and environmental enhancements planned as a result of the environmental impact assessment should also incorporate the potential for carbon offsetting and increase the resilience of local habitats and species to the impacts of climate change.

In exploring potential routes, environmental impacts and potential for biodiversity gain should be set out at the outset. The approach should not be how to minimise impacts once a short list of routes has been selected. The business case states repeatedly that “Potential moderate or major adverse environmental impacts have been identified... but have scope to be reduced or mitigated through the planning and design process”. But that is too late – the selected route may be highly destructive. If the natural environment is taken fully into account and given due weight in the initial assessment process, a better outcome may be achieved; it is not a case of mitigating damage but embracing opportunities for environmental enhancement at the outset.

In September of this year the Prime Minister committed to protect 30% of the UK’s land by 2030, to address the emerging ecological and climate crisis. The full environmental impact assessment and planned mitigation measures for this scheme must be robust and ambitious in their scope, in order to not just avoid or mitigate for adverse impacts but contribute to biodiversity net gain and help achieve the 30% target.

## TransWilts

The Chair of TransWilts considered the A350 bypass as an exciting and important opportunity, and they welcome the comprehensive consultation process to enable input to the scheme.

TransWilts have already provided a report to Wiltshire Council on potential Melksham Station passenger growth, and they very much welcome the inclusion of the aim “providing better access to the railway station from the town and residential areas” in the consultation.

Whilst the Covid pandemic has put a short term collapse of passenger numbers nationally, the long term growth in rail passengers will recover, and the importance of connectivity to education and jobs has never been more important, particularly to the Melksham population demographic without a car. TransWilts conducted a Melksham Station passenger survey in late 2020, whilst the numbers were lower the majority of the passengers using the station were arriving on foot, mainly younger passengers

and mothers with pushchairs. The substantial growth expected in rail travel at Melksham needs supporting with much improved access particularly with the station's location being west and north of the major residential and business centres.

The Bypass scheme gives the opportunity to substantially improve the accessibility to the station with safe walking and cycling routes. Regular bus route access to the station is important and the envisaged infill development should secure CIL funding and developer s106 contributions that secure the cycling and bus routes that will encourage low carbon transport options.

TransWilts sees the opportunity to enhance the tourist and visitor economy of Melksham and are starting to promote weekend visitors by rail. Destinations from Melksham are varied and the inclusion of cycle routes for Semington K&A canal, River Avon, Lacock and National Trust properties should be included. The opportunity for installing safe cycle lanes on the old A350 route (Options 7a, 7b, 7c) should be included. No doubt a safe cycle/ pedestrian crossing of Options 10a, 10b, 10c whilst travelling along the River Avon to Lacock will be included as part the northern junction design with the A350 south of Lacock.

The station pedestrian access is via an underpass tunnel under the existing A350. It is not an attractive route to the station, with the lower traffic numbers on the old A350 route, we would like to restore a surface access to the station replacing the underpass.

They understand the existing pedestrian bridge across the River Avon from Scotland Road will not accommodate cyclists. This has the potential for an attractive route to the town centre, community facilities and leisure routes. They would like the bypass scheme to include a new cycle bridge over the Avon making a second safe cycle route from the town to the station via Foundry Close and link to the planned northern access to Melksham Station.

## Written and email responses to the consultation

As well as the completed questionnaires there were 175 letters and emails received in response to the consultation which included 953 comments on aspects of the scheme or specific route options. A number of these communications were received before the consultation started but given the circumstances Wiltshire Council agreed to consider these as part of the consultation response, and they have been included in the analysis. It should be noted that in some cases the written submissions may duplicate questionnaire responses also given. The comments on the scheme in general were:

General comments on scheme in written and email responses	Number
Scheme not required	30
Not required because of reduced traffic following Covid-19	27
Adopt policies to reduce traffic	25
Damage to countryside	21
Object to scheme	14
Will cause increase in housing	12
Bypasses increase traffic	10
Adverse effect on wildlife	10
Time savings not sufficient to justify scheme	10
Adverse environmental effects	9
Carbon impact and climate change concerns	7
Westbury Bypass needed	6
Adverse effect on residents	6
Should be considered in more detail	5
Not long routes to south	4
Will reduce noise and vibration	3
Need to consider effect on schools	3
Adverse effect on canal	3
Further details required on effects of routes	3
Adverse effects on rights of way	3
Implement Options 1-6 with bypass	3
HGVs through Seend	2
Further information on ecology required	2
Consider A350 improvement north and south of Melksham	1
Scheme incompatible with Core Strategy	1
Adverse effect on flood risk	1
Put house building on hold until route adopted	1
Bypasses don't work	1
Provide landscaping and ecosystem with project	1
Consider line of Wilts and Berks Canal	1
Consider use of rail for long distance freight	1
Need to protect station environment	1
Prefer longer eastern route	1

General comments on scheme in written and email responses	Number
Not a western route	1
Prefer Eastern route not affecting Bowerhill	1
Assessment of economic effect on town required	1
Need to take into account existing traffic issues in Lacock	1
Consider potential impact on Spye Park SSSI	1
Consider access to Great Chalfield with Options 8 and 9	1
Consider link road for Melksham instead	1
Safety of junctions on A350 south of Melksham	1
Air quality and noise impacts on A350 south of Melksham	1
Improved access to the station not using subway	1
Improved cycle links from station to canal and Lacock	1
Environmental enhancement should be an objective for the scheme	1
Potential for carbon off-setting should be included	1

There were comments regarding specific route options:

Option 7a comments on scheme in written and email responses	Number
Suitable option	6
Not a suitable option	5
Option 7b comments on scheme in written and email responses	
Suitable option	6
Not a suitable option	5
Option 7c comments on scheme in written and email responses	
Suitable option	10
Not a suitable option	5
Impact on canal would need to be considered	1
More noise screening required for Semington with Option 7c	1
Options 8a, 8b and 9a comments on scheme in written and email responses	
Not a suitable option	3
Poor value for money	2
Adverse impact on heritage	2
Suitable option	1
Adverse flood risk	1
Terrorism risk with electricity sub-station	1
Adverse impact on Golf Club	1
Adverse effects on residents	1
Option 8a comments on scheme in written and email responses	
Suitable option	1
Not a suitable option	1
Option 8b comments on scheme in written and email responses	
Suitable option	4

Option 7a comments on scheme in written and email responses	Number
Not a suitable option	2

Option 9a comments on scheme in written and email responses	Number
Suitable option	2
Not a suitable option	2
Option 9c comments on scheme in written and email responses	
Not a suitable option	1
Option 10a comments on scheme in written and email responses	
Not a suitable option	10
Suitable option	5
Severs school from town	1
Adverse effect on pedestrian and cyclists	1
Would increase accidents	1
Option 10b comments on scheme in written and email responses	
Not a suitable option	11
Suitable option	5
Adverse effect on pedestrian and cyclists	1
Would increase accidents	1

Option 10c comments on scheme in written and email responses	
Suitable option	25
Not suitable option	17
Adverse effect on countryside	16
Adverse effect residential areas and access to countryside	12
Adverse effect on rights of way	9
Adverse effect on wildlife	6
Adverse effect on canal	6
Adverse effect of noise and pollution	5
Would increase housing with adverse effects on town	4
Consider planting opportunities with Option 10c	3
Option too expensive	2
Comments on rights of way	2
Protection of Canal required with this option	1

Option 10d comments on scheme in written and email responses	
Not a suitable option	89
Adverse effect on countryside and landscape	74
Adverse effect on wildlife	57
Option too expensive	45
Adverse effect on canal	33
Adverse effect on tourism and tourist businesses	28

Option 10d comments on scheme in written and email responses	
Adverse effect on flooding	23
Adverse effect on farm	22
Adverse effect of noise and pollution	21
Adverse effect on residential property	18
Adverse effect on agriculture	17
Adverse effect on rights of way and access to countryside	16
Adverse effect on monuments listed buildings	9
Would increase housing with adverse effects on town	9
Suitable option	6
Adverse effect on business	6
Adverse effect on road safety	3
Would increase traffic in Seend	2
Link direct to Semington Roundabout	1
Wish to be involved in canal aspects	1

Various organisations submitted letters and emails in response to the consultation, which included detailed information on the area and the proposals.

## Melksham Rail Users Group

It was requested that the Melksham Rail User Group and the TransWilts Community Rail Partnerships should be stakeholders and consultees throughout this process. They commended Options 4 and 5 (rail and bus) public transport and Option 6 (cycle and walking) improvements, and noted that they score very highly on deliverability, affordability and acceptability. Whilst they are unlikely to meet your objectives on their own, they should provide a valuable and significant element implemented as thoroughly as practical in any solution.

It was suggested that the A46/A36 should be looked at as an alternative long-distance route rather than increasing capacity on the A350, and the alternative of rail use for longer distance freight and medium and longer passenger traffic via the TransWilts railway line which parallels the A350 road.

It was suggested that any railway crossings (Options 9a, 9b, 9c, 8a and 8b) should allow for the line to be restored to a double track such that trains can path both ways under or over the bridge at the same time. Please rule out level crossings at each point that rail and road cross.

It was requested that any development of Options 7a, 9b and 9c should not encroach on access to and use of the railway station and public transport hub on Station Approach. The opportunity should be taken within any option to improve bus/road access to the station.

The need for modelling to include current and projected factors in preference or addition to historic ones, and consequential housing and business development to

be included. Current and planned canal access, use and development should not be restricted by the scheme, and the opportunity taken to improve national and other cycle routes.

## **Community Action Shaw and Whitley (CAWS) Group**

CAWS appreciated the current constraints regarding traffic volumes, road safety, accidents and journey times, and were generally in support of such a scheme. They agreed that the non-road options in isolation would not deliver the necessary benefits, but that they should be considered as part of a larger scheme, especially as there is an aging population and there would be health benefits through walking and cycling, and improved rail and bus services would be of benefit to the communities.

CAWS did not support Options 7a, 7b and 7c because they would not deliver material benefits to their communities in terms of traffic volumes and safety. Options 8a, 8b, 9a, 9c were not supported because of environmental and other reasons. Options 10a and 10b were not favoured at this time because of minimal improvements in journey times.

Options 10c and 10d were supported because they offered the greatest improvements in journey times and value for money. It was also noted that these routes would run closer to existing recent residential developments and likely future developments.

## **Wiltshire West Scouts**

The Assistant District Commissioner expressed concern about Option 10d which would pass close to land owned by local Scout Groups and other groups from outside the district have used for many years for camping and outdoor activities.

## **A36/A350 Corridor Alliance**

They did not consider that road building was a solution and that the Department of Transport's scheme assessment methodology diverted national and local government away from thinking about sustainable transport and environmental issues.

Reference was made to the Westbury Eastern Bypass Inquiry, and the difficulties associated with improving the A36/A350 corridor route in Hampshire and Dorset. The climate emergency and carbon cost of providing and using infrastructure should be taken into account. The group criticised government policy and indicated that Wiltshire Council should not be following their lead.

A36/A350 Corridor Alliance concluded that the Melksham Bypass proposal is a dinosaur. There is no place in the future for evolutionary dead-ends. It really is time that Wiltshire Council moved into the 21st Century and learned how to do land-use and transport planning for a sustainable future.

## Alternative options suggested during the consultation

The letters, emails and questionnaire responses suggested a small number of alternative routes for the bypass and variations of the consultation options. These were:

- A36/A46 connection should be constructed to the east of Bath so that that the A36 becomes the main north-south route.
- Option 10d should be extended to the south to join the A350 south of the current A350/A361 junction at Semington.
- Option 10d should be diverted to connect directly into the current A350/A361 junction at Semington, rather than to the A361 east of that junction.
- The northern end of the bypass routes should be extended to a new junction at the southern Lacock junction on the A350.

Other suggestions for alterations to the existing road included:

- Removing the traffic signals at the entrance to Asda on the A350.
- Improving the Aldi/MacDonalds junction on the A350.
- Changing the traffic signals on Farmers Roundabout

These suggestions will be investigated, and the conclusions reported to the Council's Cabinet when the response to the consultation is considered.

## Summary of the responses to the consultation

1. There were 175 letters and emails in response to the consultation, and 1,018 responses to the on-line questionnaire.
2. The local town and parish councils were consulted and made a number of comments regarding the scheme and their preferences on options.
3. Melksham Town Council preferred an eastern route, but not one that incorporated Eastern Way.
4. Melksham Without Parish Council preferred an eastern route which did not have an environmental impact upon the community of Bowerhill.
5. Seend Parish Council thought that Option 8b should not be discounted and raised some concerns about Option 10c should it be adopted. Option 10d was considered to have the most detrimental effect.
6. Semington Parish Council were not in favour of Option 8b because of the environmental impact and would object to Option 10d. They considered Option 10c to be the least worst option.
7. Great Hinton Parish Council felt that Option 10d was the worst possible one in every way and Option 10b to be the best by far.
8. Steeple Ashton Parish Council agreed that a bypass for Melksham is desirable, but the route had no direct impact on the parish.
9. Comments were received from Natural England about Spye Park SSSI, Canal and Rivers Trust regarding the canals, and from the National Trust regarding Lacock. TransWilts commented on the importance of access to Melksham Station and the British Horse society on the importance of bridleway and rights of way. The comments from the organisations identified factors that would need to be taken into account in developing any proposals further.
10. The majority of the questionnaire responses received were from individuals (962) with a small number from businesses or organisations (42). Most of the responses were local with 886 being from Melksham or within 5 miles. The responses from businesses and organisations responding were also predominantly locally based.
11. Those responding mainly used the A350 through Melksham for shopping (670) and recreation trips (633) and used it mainly outside the peak hours (695) and at weekends (674).

12. The main concerns about the current situation on the A350 in Melksham and Beanacre were about walking and cycling facilities (56.6%), landscape and scenery (50.4%) and traffic congestion and delays (50.2%).
13. Most respondents supported the need for an improvement to the A350 at Beanacre and Melksham (594 Yes/406 No).
14. Those not supporting the need for an improvement gave various reasons but the most frequently mentioned were:
  - Adverse effect on land and countryside (110)
  - Existing road works well (67)
  - High cost of scheme (48)
  - Bypass not needed (44)
  - Concern about more houses in Melksham (43)
15. Of the non-road options based on the first choice of option the most preferred options were:
  - Option 6 – Walking and cycling (41.2%)
  - Option 4 – Rail Improvements (37.3%)
  - Option 5 – Bus Improvements (32.3%)
16. Option 2 – Road User Pricing and Option 1 – Workplace Parking Levy had the least support of any option (6.7% and 6.5%).
17. Of the road options the most preferred options based on the first choice were:
  - Option 7a – Existing road northern section (31.0%)
  - Option 10c - Long eastern bypass (30.8%)
  - Option 7b – Existing road central section (29.9%)
  - Option 7c – Existing road southern section (27.8%)
  - Option 10d – Longest eastern bypass (20.8%)
18. Of the road options the western routes, Options 9a, 9b and 9c had the least support (11.9%, 11.0% and 10.8%).
19. The reasons given for choosing Options 1 to 6 were often that they would provide an alternative to the use of the car, would discourage car use, and would have less impact on the landscape and environment.
20. The main factors influencing choice of route option were generally the potential impact on the countryside and residential properties. There were a range of other factors given, including cost, effectiveness, adverse effects of alternative routes, and the potential or otherwise of in-fill housing development.

21. The chosen options were considered to improve the following:
- Traffic congestion and delays (85.7%)
  - Road safety (81.6%)
  - Impact of traffic on residential properties (78.1%)
  - Landscape and scenery (67.7%)
  - Walking and Cycling (65.6%)
  - Employment and businesses (65.2%)
22. The majority of responses would like to see more facilities for walking and cycling within Melksham come forward as complementary measures to a potential A350 Bypass (Yes 682/No 318).
23. There were 270 comments that wanted to see more cycle paths and routes, 185 wanted improvements to walking and cycling facilities, and 54 wanted walking improvements. There were a variety of suggestions and requests made, including the standard of walking and cycling infrastructure, facilities required to encourage walking and cycling, and suggestions for new routes which should be provided.
24. The opportunity was provided to enable further comments and the opportunity was taken to reinforce views previously given regarding the need or otherwise for the schemes and on particular options.
25. Other matters that were raised frequently in the questionnaire included the potential adverse effect of options on the countryside, concern about additional housing as a result of the scheme, the reduction in traffic following Covid-19, the effects on wildlife and biodiversity, the impact on residential areas and their access to open spaces, and that the journey time savings do not justify a scheme.
26. There were 175 letters and emails received in response to the consultation, which reflected similar concerns to those raised in the questionnaire responses described above.
27. There were letters and emails regarding specific route options, with many indicating that Option 10d was not considered a suitable option (89), because of its adverse effect in terms of countryside (74), wildlife (57), cost (45), canal (33), tourism (28) and flooding (23).
28. An alternative route option, three variations of the consultation options and alterations to the existing road were suggested, which will be investigated further and reported to Cabinet in due course.

## How the consultation will be used

The information collected through the consultation process will be used to develop and inform the assessment of the options in more detail, and potentially help to identify a short list, or preferred option, for further informal consultation. The views of organisations with specialist knowledge of the area are particularly important in helping to refine and assess the proposals.

It should be noted that, as set out in the consultation material, the consultation is not a public 'vote' for the most popular route or option. There are many factors to be taken into account in determining the preferred option, including emerging guidance on carbon impacts, ecology, public health and road safety, landscape, archaeology, employment and the economy, flood risk and drainage, cost and economic benefit. The preferred option may be a variation of the options being consulted on as the design will be refined in response to the consultation.

The assessment of scheme options will need to be in accordance with Department for Transport (DfT) guidance, primarily as set out in DfT's Transport Analysis Guidance (WebTAG). The Outline Business Case (OBC) for the scheme will have to make the case for obtaining DfT funding as the Council would not be able to fund a major scheme of this type from its own resources. The preparation of the OBC will require the consideration of the strategic, economic, financial, management and commercial cases.

The response to the consultation, outcome of further investigation and consideration of the alternatives will be reported to Wiltshire Council's Cabinet, probably later in 2021, when a decision will be made on how to proceed regarding this scheme.

# Melksham Bypass

## Public consultation report