

News Release

CPRE Bedfordshire responds to Government refusal to hold a Public Inquiry into plans for an A6 - M1 Link Road, through the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

CPRE Bedfordshire, is deeply disappointed that the Government has decided not to intervene and carry out a Public Inquiry into Central Bedfordshire Council's proposed plans for an A6 - M1 Link Road, north of Luton.

The proposed road will slice through the protected Chilterns Area of Outstanding National Beauty (AONB), adversely impact two ancient woodlands and an important SSSI site. The entire development will be within the Greenbelt.

This is despite Call-In requests being submitted to Government by a number of environmental organizations including, CPRE Bedfordshire, the Chilterns AONB Board, The Chilterns Society and Luton Borough Council.

In a response letter to CPRE Bedfordshire, the Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHC&LG), the Rt. Hon. Robert Jenrick MP, declined to intervene.

CPRE Bedfordshire had called on the government to halt the application and allow a full public review of plans for the construction of a new single and dual carriageway road between the M1 Junction 11a and the A6 Barton Road, which would have a serious impact on the Chilterns AONB landscape.

Lois Wright Manager of CPRE Bedfordshire, said:

"The "Glover Review of Protected Landscapes" (September 2019) which was commissioned by the Government following the 25 Year Environment Plan, called for AONB's to be given much stronger protection. One of the report's key recommendations was that the Chilterns be re-designated as a National Park.

Unfortunately by refusing to hold a Public Inquiry into this completely unjustified and unnecessary intrusion into the Chilterns AONB, the Government has failed the first real test.

It seems that the new Government will now be back pedalling on protections given to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty which include some of the most important landscapes in the country.”

This is environmental vandalism on a grand scale. Not only will the road lead to countryside loss but also to increased air pollution and carbon emissions. All at a time when we urgently need to be tackling the Climate Emergency and catastrophic Biodiversity Loss.

The MHC&LG, said in response to CPRE Bedfordshire’s request:

“The Government remains committed to giving more power to councils and communities to make their own decisions on planning issues and believe that planning decisions should be made at the local level wherever possible.”

“The Secretary of State has decided, having had regard to this policy, not to call in this application. He is satisfied that the application should be determined at a local level.”

This is an appalling abdication of responsibility – the Chilterns AONB in Bedfordshire is a landscape of national significance – it is not simply a local matter.

The Inspectors currently examining CBC’s Local Plan 2035 have been extremely critical of the Plan and in particular Policy SA1 which includes the A6 - M1 Link Road.

The future of the Bedfordshire Chilterns AONB and the surrounding countryside is now in the hands of CBC’s Local Plan Inspectors and we very much hope that they will continue to listen to all the environmental organisations that have objected to CBC’s proposals for the Link Road.

CPRE Bedfordshire will be considering what future action we can take to protect this hugely important area of countryside.

**CPRE Bedfordshire
28 October 2019**

Notes for readers:

The Response letter from the MHC&LG dated 24 October and a copy of the Glover Report, can be downloaded here from the CPRE Bedfordshire website.

<http://www.cprebeds.org.uk/news/item/2421-our-aonb-might-be-a-local-asset-but-it-is-also-a-national-asset>

This new Link Road will also impact Bedford Borough as the number of HGV’s using the A6 to access the proposed Rail Freight Interchange at J11a (the main reason for the Link Road) will increase substantially.