

Press release

For immediate release

Response to Expressway announcement

Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) is profoundly concerned following today's announcement from the Department for Transport about the Oxford-Cambridge Expressway and associated 'Growth Corridor'.

The Department for Transport has selected 'Corridor B' that extends from South Oxford and in a north easterly direction, which will be used to accommodate the Oxford-Cambridge Expressway and associated housing development. In our opinion this is the worst of the three options that were under consideration (see table 1 in notes below). The Department for Transport has yet to decide whether the expressway would pass west or east of Oxford City.

In BBOWT's submission to the Highways England consultation in April 2018¹ we detailed our concerns about the three routes that were then being proposed, including the impact of building the Expressway and associated housing. BBOWT has also attended numerous stakeholder workshops to help inform decision-makers about the impact the Expressway will have on wildlife.

BBOWT has publicly voiced its concerns about Highways England's failure to commission a Strategic Environmental Assessment as part of the process of selecting a Corridor. This is required under European Law for plans or programmes of this size. This means the public has been denied the opportunity to fully scrutinise the comparative economic, societal and environmental impacts of the options. Several local MPs, councillors and pressure groups share our concern about the lack of consultation.

Estelle Bailey, Chief Executive BBOWT, said, 'In our opinion Corridor B is the worst of the three options. We told Highways England that the potential impact on biodiversity of Corridor B is so serious that the route should have been discounted entirely. The only way to avoid exceptionally serious impacts on biodiversity would be to develop a road route that is so convoluted that it would fail to qualify as an expressway.

'Our most serious concerns are for the designated sites and nature reserves in Cothill Fen, Oxford Meadows, the Otmoor Basin, Upper Ray Valley and Bernwood Forest.'

If the A34 is widened west of Oxford the increase in traffic and pollution could affect sensitive areas such as Oxford Meadows, Cothill Fen and Wytham Woods. An alternative route around the south and east of Oxford would potentially impact on important areas for nature conservation including Bagley Wood, Sandford Brake, Brasenose Wood and Shotover Hill.

The area east of Oxford is characterised by a mosaic of ancient woodlands, species-rich grassland, open water, scrub and hedgerows, which form part of the former Royal Hunting Forest of Bernwood. It is one of the most undisturbed and wildlife-rich areas of Buckinghamshire. The large wetland RSPB nature reserve at Otmoor would also be at

¹ See www.bbowt.org.uk/expressway

risk, as would the Upper Ray Valley and ancient woodlands in the vicinity of Calvert, including Finemere Wood.

Corridor B also crosses the River Ouzel to the south east of Milton Keynes. The river and its associated habitats must be taken into account in the exact route choice following corridor selection. The Greensand Ridge includes a network of wildlife-rich sites including King's and Baker's Woods and Heaths. Rushmere Country Park, a popular public open space, would also be affected. Where the corridor moves towards the M1 around Woburn, there are woodlands which contain Wavendon Heath Ponds. Any route within this corridor would need to avoid these biodiversity hotspots.

BBOWT's concerns are outlined in detail in our aforementioned submission to the Highways England consultation in April 2018. We will continue to work with other concerned NGOs and community groups to lobby for a Strategic Environmental Assessment, instructed under European Law, to ensure appropriate consideration is given to the environmental implications of the development of the Oxford-Cambridge Expressway and Growth Corridor.

Contact for more information:

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Notes for Editors

Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) is one of 46 local Wildlife Trusts across the UK working to achieve the shared aim of securing a better future for wildlife. Our vision is to create a region rich in wildlife and valued by all. We manage 88 nature reserves across the three counties, work with other agencies and individuals to help safeguard the wider countryside, and aim to inspire people to take action for wildlife. BBOWT has a membership of 52,000. For more information visit www.bbowt.org.uk

Table 1: Designated sites, priority habitats and nature reserves within the route corridors potentially affected

Designated sites / priority habitats	Corridor A Area in hectares No. of sites	Corridor B Area in hectares No. of sites	Corridor C Area in hectares No. of sites
Special Sites of Scientific Interest (SSSI)	265 ha 17 sites	2353 ha 51 sites	2032 ha 45 sites
Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) / Biological Notification Sites (BNS)	2063 ha 113 sites	4302 ha 345 sites	3034 ha 274 sites
Area of UK priority habitat within the route corridor	3547 ha	8474 ha	7399 ha
Nature reserves (Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust; Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire Wildlife	2 sites	20 sites	17 sites

Trust; RSPB)			
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