

ROTHERWAS ARCHAEOLOGY: OPTIONS FOR PRESERVATION OF THE RIBBON AND COMPLETION OF THE ROTHERWAS ACCESS ROAD

PORTFOLIO RESPONSIBILITY: ENVIRONMENT AND STRATEGIC HOUSING

CABINET

6TH SEPTEMBER 2007

Wards Affected

All wards

Purpose

To approve the recommendation that the appropriate approach to completion of the Rotherwas Access Road in the context of the advice received from English Heritage as to the best method of preserving the archaeological remains that the Rotherwas access Road be completed and the Rotherwas Ribbon be preserved in accordance with Option F of this report.

Key Decision

This is a key decision because it is likely to be significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in Herefordshire in an area comprising one or more wards.

Recommendation

THAT the Rotherwas Access Road be completed and the Rotherwas Ribbon be preserved in accordance with Option F of this report.

Reasons

Option F will ensure completion of the road to the original time scale at the lowest cost whilst preserving the Rotherwas Ribbon in a manner approved by English Heritage.

Considerations

1. In the Cabinet Report of 7th September 2006, Rotherwas Access Road, the decision was taken to implement the Rotherwas Access Road scheme.

Planning Policy Guidance PPG16 and English Heritage

2. Planning Guidance PPG16 sets out very clearly the Secretary of State's policy on archaeological remains on land, and how they should be preserved or recorded both in an urban setting and in the countryside.

3. The Council considers it has rigorously followed the guidance offered by PPG16 and also the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges adopted by the Highways Agency. Confirmation of compliance with PPG16 has been sought through an independent review being undertaken by officers of the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers. A copy of the report arising from this review may be found at appendix (a).
4. The results and details of the archaeological investigations to date may be found at appendix (b) – Interim Statement on the Archaeological Discovery at Rotherwas.
5. English Heritage has been involved with the Rotherwas access road since being consulted during the planning process and since the initial discovery of the Ribbon (see Recent Chronology below).
6. Our consultants, Owen Williams, have worked closely with scientific advisors from English Heritage to design an engineering solution that will provide long-term protection for the Ribbon. English Heritage is content that the solution we have designed (through our consultants) will protect the Ribbon for future generations. English Heritage confirms this protection will be effective whether or not the construction of the road continues directly over the Ribbon. A copy of the letter from English Heritage to the Director of Environment dated 14th August 2007 may be found at appendix (c). Full details of the technical solution may be found at appendix (d) – Archaeology Method Statement and (d)(i) Protection Drawing 550370.
7. The implementation of the protection solution is underway. This does not prejudice any decision that may be made by Cabinet in respect of this report. (see 13. below).

Recent Chronology

8. In April of this year renewed and additional archaeological investigations were commenced along the route of the road. On 24th April the first indications of a Bronze Age feature became apparent.
9. On 8th May English Heritage visited the site with Dr Keith Ray MBE (the Council's archaeologist) and manager of Herefordshire's Archaeological Team.
10. On 16th May a meeting of the (construction) project team and Dr Ray was held and it was decided to consider preserving the site in situ. Archaeologists were asked to extend the excavation under the area alongside the road route.
 - a. An article was published in Herefordshire Matters (May to August edition) announcing the find.
 - b. On 13th June a meeting with project team was held confirming potential significance of the site and Dr Ray received an initial design to preserve the site in situ. Dr Ray asked for protection to commence in early July. The possibility of a press conference and open afternoon discussed.
 - c. On 4th July a national press conference was held and on 9th July English Heritage made a further visit.
 - d. On 6th July, following great public interest in the site, a decision was made to hold an open week between 16th and 21st July. Following exceptionally bad weather at the end of that week a decision was made to cancel the visits in order to protect the site. A decision was also made to implement the protective covering solution as soon as site conditions allowed.

- e. The Council, in the meeting of 27th July 2007, passed the following motion:
- (a) The Council resolves to ensure that no irreversible action be taken that would prejudice the preservation or the potential for access, if appropriate, to what as currently advised is a site of archaeological importance.
 - (b) That Council notes that work on the construction of the Rotherwas Relief Road in that area is currently suspended (NB some works are being undertaken to protect the site) and that Cabinet be asked to address the issue of the appropriate approach to completion of the Rotherwas Relief Road in the context of the advice to be received from English Heritage as to the best method of preserving the archaeological remains.
 - (c) Council requests Cabinet to address the issue of the financial consequences of the delay to date on the Rotherwas Relief Road, as part of the fuller considerations, and to quantify the financial impact of further delays and make recommendations to Council as to how those issues might be addressed within the Council's budget.
 - (d) That Council be invited to note that any decision made by Cabinet on this issue would be a key decision within the Constitution and will therefore be liable to call-in for scrutiny. If Scrutiny express any significant concerns about the action proposed by Cabinet, which action will only be taken on the advice of English Heritage, and Cabinet is minded to proceed without addressing those concerns then the Leader gives an undertaking to approach the Chairman to call a special meeting of Council.

Options

- 11. Consideration has been given to diverting the course of the road, suspending the construction of the road for 6 months and to stopping the construction all together. In addition to the financial considerations outlined below, consideration must also be given to planning implications. Options other than F and G would require further planning consents.
- 12. The Council's contractor Owen Williams, has been asked to give indicative costs to 7 options that each seek to preserve the archaeology by deploying the preservation solutions as well as a 6 options that would determine completion (or otherwise) of the road. Cost estimates and details for options A-E may be found at appendix (e) and (f) but are summarised as follows:

A. Diversion of the road to the South	£9M	appendix (e)
B. Diversion of the road to the North	£7M	appendix (e)
C. Creation of a bridge	£10M	appendix (e)
D. Creation of a tunnel	£110M	appendix (e)
E. Abandoning the road	£6M	appendix (f)
F Continuation of the road on its proposed course	£445k	
G. Suspending the construction of the road for 6 months	£430k	

(plus additional costs according to which option is subsequently chosen)

13. English Heritage has previously advised that, while acknowledging the wishes of the Council that more opportunities needed to be given to the public to view the monument, that part of the structure already revealed must be covered up soon. To that end the works to implement the preservation part of the solution have already begun. These works are entirely reversible (by design) and provide adequate protection for the foreseeable future.
14. Options A – E present the Council with very serious financial challenges that, should any of these options be approved, would require the entire capital programme and medium term financial management strategy to be revised. Cabinet would need to consider whether or not diversion of the road in these options represented good value for money when placed alongside other needs of the County.
15. Option G would, from indicative costs, add £430,000 to the overall cost of the road in addition to whatever final option were chosen. It is also likely that the overall cost would rise for inflation and, it should be noted, that any delay will be likely to damage, delay or inhibit the aims of the Rotherwas Futures project.
16. Accordingly, the recommendation of this report is that the Cabinet approve option F – continuation of the road along its proposed course over the design solution recommended by English Heritage.

Further Investigations, Tourism, Education and Heritage

17. The Cabinet are asked to note that an application for funding has been made to English Heritage to allow further investigation of the presumed course of the Ribbon both North and South of the original course of the access road. A meeting between the Director and the owner of land adjacent to the road took place on 14 August and the land owner has expressed willingness, subject to appropriate compensation, for these investigations to take place.
18. Should these investigations reveal more of the Ribbon, or other significant archaeology, then a further report will be brought to Cabinet setting out, in detail, the results of the investigation.
19. Depending on 18. above, Cabinet may wish to ask for further reports to be brought forward to consider in more detail any relevant options relating to tourism, education and heritage. An initial proposal for archaeological evaluation of the Ribbon at Rotherwas Industrial Estate may be found at appendix (g). This proposal is currently being considered by the Environment Directorate and Cabinet Member for Environment and Strategic Housing.
20. It is important to note that the investigations carried out to date include a highly detailed record of the Ribbon so far revealed including stereoscopic photography, drawings, measurements and scientific analysis. It is believed that this detailed record will help the archaeological world understand better what the Ribbon may have been and what it may have been used for. Plans will be developed to allow for virtual rendition of the Ribbon on line and for an exhibition in the Hereford Museum.

Financial Implications

If the Cabinet choose any of the options A-E then the impact on the medium term financial management strategy is considerable. Other, yet to be determined capital projects, would have to be stopped and a revised strategy taken back to full Council for approval.

The Council Motion specifically asks Cabinet to address the costs of delays to date. As this report is being written the contractor has now indicated that the costs of delays up to early October will amount to approximately £50,000. Depending on progress of the rest of the project, and any other delays, this figure may change.

There is a contingency sum built into the contract which, depending on the final cost, may be sufficient to pay for the delay, additional works necessary to date and implementation of option F.

Risk Management

In essence, this report is concerned with managing risks relating to archaeological preservation, completion of a major infrastructure project and the Council's financial position. Accordingly there is no separate consideration of risk management in this report.

Alternative Options

The alternative options are contained in the body of this report

Appendices

- (a) Independent Review of Herefordshire Council's Adherence to PPG16 (to follow)
- (b) Interim Statement on the Archaeological Discoveries
- (c) Letter from English Heritage to Director of Environment
- (d) Archaeology Method Statement
 - i. Protection Drawing 550370
- (e) Alternative Options to Avoid Archaeology
- (f) Termination Clause Report
- (g) Proposal for Archaeological Evaluation of the Ribbon at Rotherwas Industrial Estate

Background Papers

None