

Letter to Secretary of State for Transport from Council for National Parks, also on behalf of the Broads Society

22 June 2005

The Rt Hon Alistair Darling MP

Secretary of State for Transport

Department for Transport

Great Minster House

76 Marsham Street

London

SW1P 4DR

Dear Secretary of State

A47 Acle Straight – Stage 3 Environmental Assessment Report

A number of environmental bodies met at the end of May to consider the above report. This letter sets out our views which we hope will be helpful to you when you come to make your decision on the A47 Acle Straight.

1. Dualling Options

We wish to re-state our strong opposition to the principle of dualling on the following grounds:

- the options tested in the Report would have a "Large Adverse" impact on the Broads, which has equivalent status to a National Park;
- the ecological impacts would have a "Large Adverse" impact despite mitigation;
- the economic case for dualling is weak, as underlined by the recent report of the pro-dualling A47 Alliance;
- with regard to safety, we note the Highways Agency assessment that the casualty rate on the Acle Straight is lower than the national average for single carriageway A roads;
- dualling would be contrary to the Government's commitment to a "strong presumption against schemes that would significantly affect environmentally sensitive sites, or important species or habitats" (*The Future of Transport White Paper*, DfT, 2004).

We urge you to reject dualling at this stage and make an announcement accordingly so that local decision-makers can plan and move forward with greater certainty. A decision would also be helpful in relation to the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy; the examination in public opens on 14 September

and the East of England Regional Assembly is advocating dualling of the A47 Acle Straight as a regional priority.

2. Widening Options

We recognise the legitimate public safety concerns and to this end we urge the immediate installation of a 50mph speed limit and associated enforcement measures in accordance with your announcement on the roads-based study recommendations in 2001. There may also be scope for further minor safety measures in the short term within the boundary of the dykes, for example, lengthening existing laybys and the creation of new ones. Monitoring of the safety measures will be essential.

We find it difficult to comment on the environmental and safety impacts of widening in the absence of a detailed 'on the ground' road design; one which is accompanied by full data on impacts and feasibility of mitigation measures.

Notwithstanding the absence of firm design proposals for widening, the report concludes that widening would have a "Large Adverse" impact on ecology, especially at Damgate Marshes, a SSSI and candidate SAC, and that it would also be "*in conflict with national policies for protecting an area with National Park status*".

We note that there are many issues associated with the provision of farm access tracks along either side of the road. These account for a significant proportion of the environmental disbenefits (both ecological and landscape). If this element were to be dropped from the final design, the road widening option within the current constraining dykes might form an acceptable option for this sensitive wetland location. However, this would need to be assessed in the light of all available information.

To sum up, the signatories' preferred way forward is:

- for the Government to announce that dualling will not proceed;
- for the Government to delay a decision on whether to proceed with widening until all environmental matters have been fully addressed;
- for the Highways Agency to implement the recommended 50 mph speed limit and enforcement measures, with subsequent monitoring, as a matter of urgency. In addition, the Agency should investigate further small safety measures which do not compromise protection of biodiversity and landscape such as lengthening the existing laybys;
- for the Government to encourage the local highways authority and local planning authority to address congestion and transport/social equity in Great Yarmouth by non-road building means through the Local Transport Plan and other strategies and initiatives.

Yours sincerely

Ruth Chambers

Deputy Chief Executive, Council for National Parks

On behalf of the following organisations:

Keith Bacon

Chairman, The Broads Society

Ian Shepherd

Policy Co-ordinator, CPRE Norfolk

Simon Garnier

Chairman, East of England Environment Forum (signed on behalf of the Non-Governmental Members)

Paul Wilkinson

Head of Regional Conservation Policy, East of England Wildlife Trusts

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