

The Leicestershire Local Access Forum (LLAF) would wish to comment on the plans for the Melton Relief Road. The LLAF is an independent statutory body, set up as a result of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW) 2000, and exists to represent the interests of everyone concerned with access to the countryside and the public rights of way network including footpaths, bridleways and byways, cycleways and areas of open access. Section 94 of the CROW act makes it a statutory function of the Forum to give advice to a range of bodies, including local authorities, on access issues in respect of land use planning matters.

The Secretary of State has advised that in particular, forums were to focus on the impact and options for minimising possible adverse effects of development proposals in respect of future public access to land and identifying and expressing support for opportunities to improve public access, or associated infrastructure, which might be delivered through planning policies or new development. We therefore represent the wider public with an interest in the legal right of passage along routes affected by this project. We also bear in mind the impacts and potential benefits of the footpath, bridleway and cycleway network on sustainable transport, green infrastructure, recreation, tourism and health & well-being.

Melton can be proud of its riverside parks in the centre of the town but as the town expands, care should be exercised that these do not become isolated pockets of wild life. Creatures need green corridors to be able to migrate if gene pools are not to be reduced to the point of local extinctions. Such green corridors can also make excellent rights of way (PRoW) to allow people to escape into the wider countryside. In designing this new road route, migration corridors, hedgerows and stream courses should be protected as much as possible.

There is and will be an increasing need for open spaces and we feel that informal and lightly managed areas should be provided and during the process of land acquisition for the new route consideration should be given to some natural separation zones

We feel that as a key market town Melton, must work to keep the town centre attractive and alive. Every opportunity should be taken to increase the number of people living within the town by maximising the use of brown field sites for housing developments and to encourage and facilitate people to visit to shop and access services. It is also important to encourage a diverse range of employment opportunities. Given the number of houses required however, there will inevitably be green field development within the potential route under consideration. We accept that the hamlet of Thorpe Arnold and the village of Burton Lazars would have to expand but we would limit that to 30% to allow them to keep their own identities.

In addition we would wish to see green separation zones between these communities and the growing Melton, and between each other. These could provide wildlife and recreational links from the river to the wider countryside. In a similar vein we would like to see a green corridor along the river maintained, continuing the parkland features at present in Melton. If Melton Country Park is to retain a wildlife population it also should still be a gateway to the wider countryside and not an island oasis within urban sprawl. In the greater scheme of things the opportunity should be taken to create a bridleway along the old railway from Melton Country Park to Scalford, largely parallel to E18, but more suitable for adaption for non motorised multi-use.

We feel it important that such green wedges and corridors be included in the Local Plan. It is all too easy for planners to lose track of the bigger strategic picture when looking at planning applications in isolation and it would strengthen their case when wishing to turn down inappropriate applications.

It is also essential that where any sizable development is planned there are off road routes created to allow people to both join the wider rights of way network and to also gain access to local amenities, shops, schools and bus stops etc. The paths and cycleways are the primary mechanism for linking employment areas, communities and facilities if we are to reduce motorised transport and the carbon emissions that ensue. Whilst moving traffic out of the town centre will assist in mitigating these problems we feel the project affords an opportunity to enhance the non-motorised links into the town centre possibly from car parks along the proposed route.

The protection or indeed development of the recreational potential of the area, in which the rights of way network plays a large part, will have to be considered along with the need to protect and enhance the ecology and landscape

It is all too evident that the town centre's road network is not fit for purpose and the need for a relief route obvious. Given the roads are at or close to capacity and cannot cope with the levels of road traffic at present, if we are to build 6,000 new homes with associated facilities and employment opportunities the need is pressing. As we see it, the problem is there is no obvious solution which fully addresses all the issues. Whilst arguments could be made for routes to the west, the project is too far advanced to be looking at these options and we must assume we are now talking about fine tuning an eastern route.

We do not have access to the detailed studies which have been made so must accept that the eastern route is the best and we now look at the impacts, the design of junctions and the exact route. Two basic routes have been considered, a shorter route passing to the west of the River Eye and a longer route passing to the east of the river. We must assume the longer route would be more expensive but do think that the shorter route has some issues.

The proposed route involves a 4 mile single carriageway but looking to future-proof this we suggest a dual carriageway should be considered, especially if the East Leicestershire distributor road is ever constructed. We recommend a cycle lane or better still a bridleway alongside the road especially if it is to be single lane. This could facilitate better connectivity between existing rights of way. Also if a single lane, we see no reason to divert any PRoWs crossing it, as long as waiting spaces were provided and central refuges, with appropriate road signs warning of the possible presence of pedestrians.

Looking at the preferred route, Melton Spinney Road is part of National Cycle Route 64, so the roundabout here would need special provision for cyclists to negotiate it carefully.

One other junction in particular looks problematical. Junction 5 has many issues and we would have thought could be better sited or designed. It is challenged where it is by the existing infrastructure. As indicated Lag Lane would cease to be a through route and the proposed route of a restored canal would seem to be compromised. Lag lane is of course, part of a British Horse Society and Leics County Council promoted horse riding route around Melton and is the only safe route for horse riders going north/south to the east side of Melton.

Redesign close to where suggested is hampered by pylons but power lines can be buried or pylons re-sited. The Oakham Canal is an ambition for restoration and would run alongside Saxby Road and this possibility should not be thwarted by this scheme when solutions are available. Saxby Road would be diverted to a new roundabout once a junction is created on the new road and we see no reason why this diversion and junction should not be moved further west solving several problems. We are looking at something between the two option routes.

We suggest that the new road could have a more gradual curve and could cross the river at the point where Saxby Road is nearest the river where a bridge over the river could also go above the route of the possible canal. This would take it away from Lag Lane and it would be roughly half way from Lag Lane to Shipman's Barn. Lag Lane need not then be cut off from Saxby Road which

itself could be raised to give access to a new junction as the new road rises to create the river crossing.

Another option to protect the route of the canal would be to bridge it. The road will have to rise to cross the railway further south, so perhaps it should be elevated above the flood plain of the river from the B676 southwards.

Lag land would have to be crossed further south as it approaches Sawgate Road and some means of accommodating horse riders here is needed possibly in conjunction with pedestrians using path E1

Looking at the rest of the route we are conscious of the impact on PRoW and informal paths etc.

Starting from the A606 Nottingham Road to the north of the town, before crossing Scalford Road, it cuts across footpath E17 a valuable off-road route from the town opening out into an extensive network of paths and an invaluable leisure route into the wider countryside. This route must be accommodated in some fashion.

Between Scalford Road and the Twinlakes Park it similarly crosses footpath E18, a walking route out of Melton; north along valley of the Scalford Brook to Scalford. It is a part of the long distance Jubilee Way and again this must be protected. From there the proposed route either crosses E25 or obliterates it (hard to tell at the scale the route is indicated) and a solution to this is needed. The route then cuts path F2, a valuable walking route to Thorpe Arnold, and then east to Woodfold Lane, Brentingby.

There is a spur off F2 currently shown as a dead end but possibly historically a through route. A possible continuation to the dead-end spur of F2, turning to meet the A607 would provide a good off road route. This would be virtually parallel to the line of the new road as an alternative to providing a route serving the same purpose alongside the new road. A completely new route would though give better connectivity to the paths on the east side of the A607

Moving south it then cuts path E1 which is a valued route to Burton Lazars.

These rights of way must be protected as they will be of increasing importance as additional infill housing is created. Potential cycle ways should also be considered to accommodate non-motorised travel into Melton from these new potential suburbs. It is quite possible that informal paths and currently unused historic paths might become of great worth as Melton expands. Also wherever possible bridleways should be considered, to afford present and future populations in the urban fringe, the chance to ride out into the rural areas, both for the exercise and fresh air, but also for the boost to rural economies that can then occur.

We trust you will find these observations constructive and of assistance as you fine tune this project.

John Howells Chairman, Leicestershire Local Access Forum,  
Roy Denney, Chair LLAFF Planning & Travel Committee  
C/o Room 700, County Hall, Leicester, LE3 8RJ  
([www.leics.gov.uk/laf](http://www.leics.gov.uk/laf))