**Western Harbour Feedback**

**from the**

**Hotwells and Cliftonwood Community Association**

**and the**

**Cumberland Basin Stakeholder Group**

**on possible road network changes**

**Introduction.**

The Community Association and the Stakeholder Group decided that the only way to make some considered response to this request for feedback was to hold an open public meeting to gauge the views of those who live and work in the area. The form supplied is in no way designed for responding on behalf of a Community or common interest group. We are therefore responding in the form of this document.

The open public meeting was held on 11th September at Holy Trinity Hotwells at which some 180 members of the public were present.

The response given below emanates from this meeting.

**Comment on the “feedback”process**

Before commenting on the options it is very important to make our views clear on the process of this “request for views”

1. The vast majority of those at the meeting considered that there had been insufficient time to allow for response. The timing for this request for views was simply bad. Publishing in the middle of the summer holidays had inevitably led to a larger number of people missing out on an opportunity to consider this than would have been the case if the original timetable had been adhered to. Many people considered this to be deliberate and officers had been warned of this danger.

2. There was a unanimous view that the information supplied was insufficient to make any sort of informed response. The drawings are inadequate in detail with crude lines for roadways, no illustrative indicators of cycle or walk ways. There was scant reference to environmental impacts. Everyone understood that “transformative options” are the ones chosen but there was almost no indication as to what this might actually mean with any of the options.

3. Because we know nothing of the other options in the report we are left with commenting on the 3 presented and talking about the current system, when there might well be another option which attracts attention and provides some developmental opportunities.

4. We are not given any idea about how these options have been chosen, nor do we know how the responses will be judged and whether any criteria or weighting will be applied to answers. It was evident that even elected representatives do not know how they are to be involved, if at all, in these decisions.

Sufficient to say that the meeting expressed overwhelming concern about the “feedback” process and frustration was expressed that no-one seems to know what happens now.

Some have noticed the Redline of Western harbour expands South in contradiction to their comments to the 2018 Local Plan consultation and now note an even larger redline particular to the "engagement exercise" put forward by the transport team which might include additional road widening etc. Particular fears are also prompted about publically valued riverside parkland and what the City team really mean by "unlocking greenspaces".

There is the view both in the Community Association and in the Stakeholder Group that the lack of engagement and information has at the very least annoyed many people and left them wondering if there is any point in saying anything.

**Comments on the Options**

**Before commenting further it should be made clear that the overwhelming majority of those present rejected all 3 options and would want to persuade the Mayor and Council to retain the present structure or something close to it.**

**Western Option** There were no supporters for this option. Why? The main reasons given were:

1. Totally, completely and utterly spoil the iconic view of Brunel’s suspension bridge

2. Why on earth would you have two moving bridges over the river and what about marine safety, keeping boats waiting in a fast running tidal river. Very unlikely to be accepted by whoever considers marine safety

3. Environmental impact along the gorge

4. The spoiling of a well-used and, currently at least, a semi rural cycle way that would then likely be adjacent to or under a 4 lane highway as well as the spoiling of destination riverside parks.

*Note* There were very many in the audience who are quite convinced that this option is so obviously unacceptable that it was put in deliberately and cynically, knowing that it was totally inappropriate, in order to steer peoples’ minds to the Eastern option.

**Eastern Option** There were no supporters for this option. Why? The main reasons given were.

1. This would be most like what happened when the Plimsoll bridge was constructed. Tearing down houses, destroying communities, increasing traffic into the city, raising pollution levels. We should not be making the same mistakes again.

2. Making Merchants Road into a 4 lane highway is going to make life a lot worse for a lot of people and increase air and noise pollution in the area, which is already very bad.

3. The indications are that this would destroy the Riverside Garden Centre, which is both a valuable asset in the area and is very much an active part of the local community, as well as spoiling formal and riverside parks used in getting to the garden centre

4. How are emergency services going to access South West Bristol and North Somerset when the bridge is open?

5. The one bridge option must result in congestion whenever the bridge needs raising. This is going to add to the pollution effect.

*(Note: Because the drawings are inadequate no-one has been able to indicate exactly how much destruction of homes etc. this option would require. The Mayor and his staff should not be surprised at the raised levels of fear about the future with this option).*

**Hybrid Option** There were no supporters for this option. Why? The main reasons given were.

1. The negative impacts of the Western Option, above, remain

2. The negative impacts of the Eastern Option, above, remain largely the same

3. Hybrids are simply seen as the worst of both worlds

**Comments relating to all 3 options.**

1. While there are some indications of the vision given in the document, nothing has been said about the preservation of any of the current public green spaces or the allotments which abut this area. So it is assumed by many that all of them are vulnerable. As a consequence people imagine significantly less green space than that currently enjoyed.

2. Concerns were expressed that because this exercise focuses solely on the transport/traffic issues there was no space for any related urban design ideas or plans for the building of community. Therefore we have no chance of looking at this holistically, even in some outline way.

3. Nothing had been said about discussions with North Somerset, and indeed the meeting understood that no information had gone out to near neighbourhoods in North Somerset, despite, obviously, a regular usage of the roads concerned in this feedback

4. There was fear by many that with any of the options any space freed up would automatically mean high rise buildings. Partly this is engendered by the perception that this is the only thing the Mayor wants and partly it is brought about by lack of information relating to publicising details of the land space freed up and the sort of numbers of housing units that could be accommodated on such land.

**Updating the existing road network**

All but 2 people at the meeting supported the retention of the existing road network or something close to it. All felt the public should have more information relating to the bald figure of £40m quoted in the document.

**Other related issues**

1. Most people believe that it is more important to invest in traffic reductions methods before considering major new roadways

2. All recognised the need for more homes but some considered the viability of building in an area liable to flooding to be questionable

3. The fact that the Local Plan is running well ahead of any realistic thinking on road network changes is not helping anyone. The absence of planners in this process has been noted.

4. The meeting knows, and indeed the feedback document tells us, there are other options but that almost no-one has been able to see them. You yourselves say “*There also remains the option of investment to extend the life of the existing road and bridge infrastructure. In addition interim or partial approaches could be considered, involving retention of some existing highway sections but removal of other sections. These are less transformative but worthy of consideration*…………” If options are worthy of consideration then the public should have access to them to be able to comment and react.

In summary none of the options presented are acceptable. Before proceeding further on any roadway thinking it is necessary for people in the community to be able to have a better understanding of what kind of new communities are being planned and where. We are in danger of being led into prioritising traffic above everything else and in particular the communities we might want to create.

Dennis Gornall

Chairman Hotwells and Cliftonwood Community Association and the Cumberland Basin Stakeholder Group

On behalf of these two bodies and the members of the public who attended the meeting.

14/09/19