

Notes on GCC 'A417 Loop' proposal 22 Mar 2014

Background

Gloucestershire ramblers have been campaigning for many years

- a) for improvements to the Cotswold Way crossing over the A417 and onwards past the Air Balloon pub and
- b) for improvements to the Gloucestershire way crossing to Emma's Grove round barrows just along the A417.



Over 150 people turned out near the Air Balloon Inn on Monday 22 March 2004 to demonstrate against a road proposal they fear would devastate the local countryside with a five lane highway just as steep as the present one, and result in the demolition of the local pub.

For hundreds of years travellers have headed east uphill from Gloucester to Oxford the A436 (A40). Local traffic from Birdlip and beyond can head north to Cheltenham on the B4070. However in recent times the A417 from Cirencester to Gloucester has become an M4-M5 link with continuous traffic on a dangerous 3 lane road. Opportunities to safely cross are few leaving little option but to take risk.

A walker themodernantiquarian.com noted:- 'The peace and quiet are soon cut through by the looming prospect of two rather nasty roads to cross, the second and worst of which (over the A417) has to be made twice to allow a detour to another rather unmissable site passed by the Way, Emma's Grove round barrows. After a second dice with death on the A417 (I'm not exaggerating this, it's a horrible road to cross here), I leave the road and find myself back on the open escarpment'



The Air Balloon and Walking

The Air Balloon pub has been here since 1780s. In time the hill has become named after the pub and it has become a local landmark.

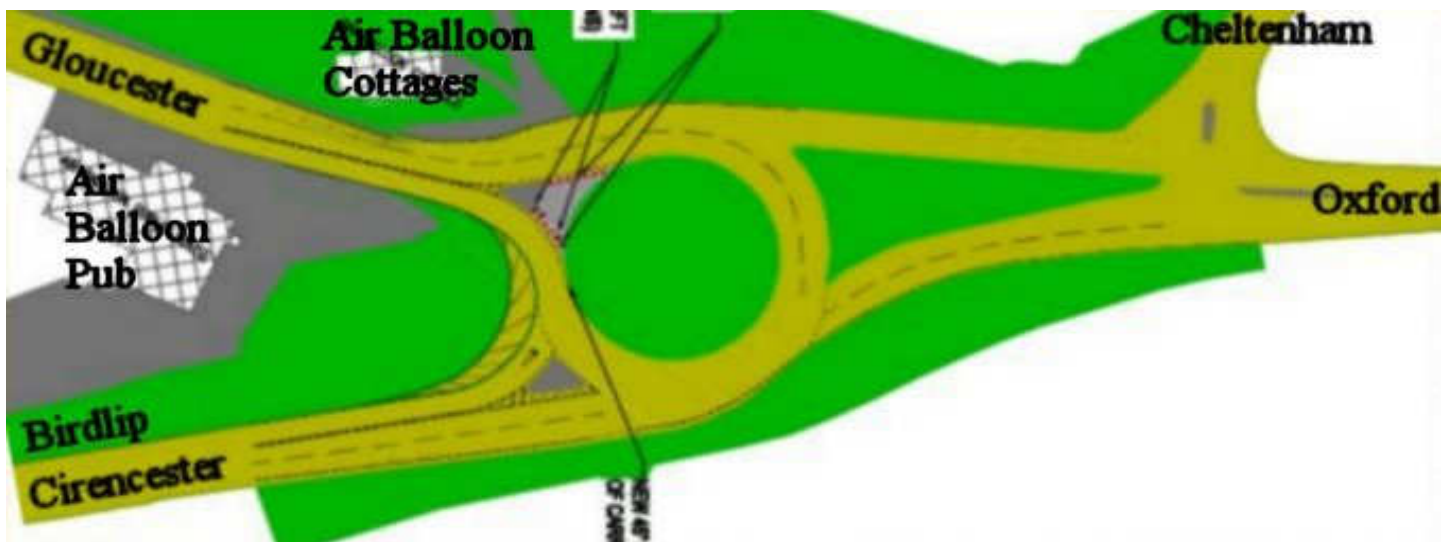
The pub is a useful stop on both the Cotswold Way and the Gloucestershire Way national and regional trails. It features in many local walking guides including (right) this walk to Birdlip, available from the County Council. It's family friendly and a welcome sight at the end of a walk for tea, pudding etc before returning home.

It's also a good base for evening walks. Parking at the nearby Crickley Hill Visitor Centre closes relatively early so walkers find it more convenient to use the Air Balloon to avoid cars being locked in.



Highways Agency Plan A

Following many abortive attempts at finding a solution to improving traffic flows, the Highways Agency in 2012 put forward a proposal. This was to restrict the Air Balloon roundabout so that traffic travelling from Gloucester up Crickley Hill at the Air Balloon would not have to pause to give way. Instead it would continue without stopping either onwards towards Cheltenham & Oxford or follow the A417 around and up towards Birdlip & Cirencester.

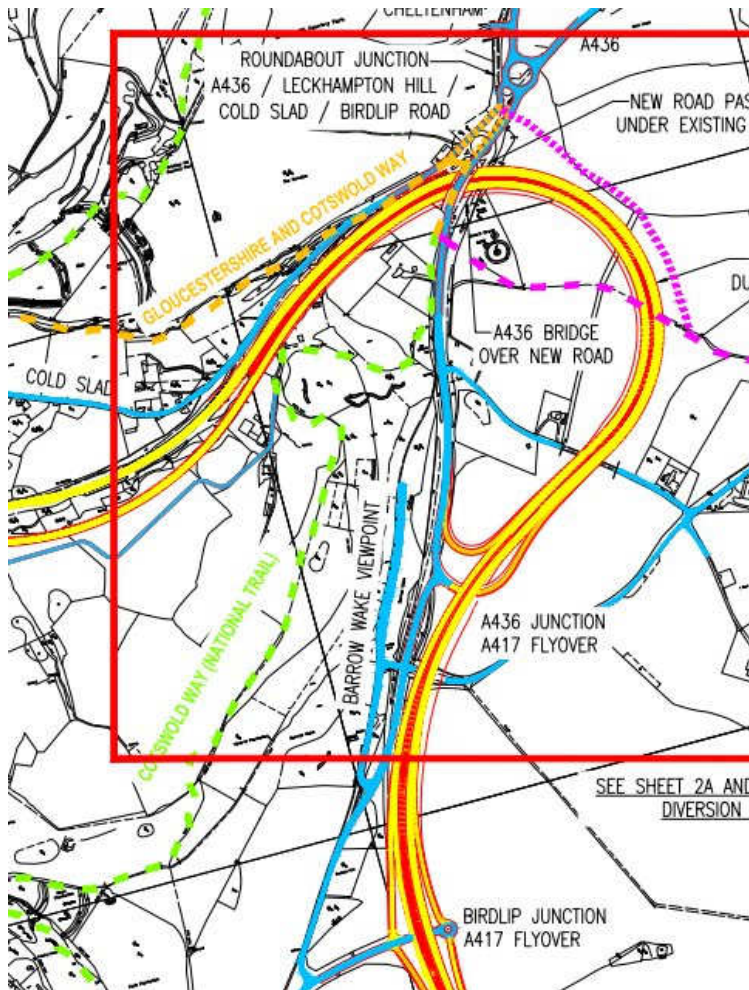


This was widely criticised.

- a) Local traffic from Birdlip direction would be unable to take Cheltenham or Oxford and so face an 8 mile diversion
- b) Traffic from Cheltenham & Oxford to Gloucester would have to wait for a gap in a continuous stream of vehicles

Both Cotswold Way and Gloucestershire Way cross from the Cottages towards the Pub. Without an alternative crossing arrangement, it would become virtually impossible to safely cross the continuous traffic flow to and from Gloucester.

Plan B - A417 Loop



To improve traffic flow Gloucestershire County Council is supporting a proposal for a dual carriageway loop. It has a number of features:-

1. A436 Oxford and B4070 Cheltenham junction, a collision site, is relocated north with a new roundabout.
2. The Air Balloon pub is demolished. This removes any option for walks to involve the pub.
3. Local A436 traffic is separated from A417 traffic using a flyover at the pub site. The Cotswold Way is diverted along the quieter A436 to a crossing at the new B4070 roundabout.
4. To avoid the Gloucestershire Way crossing the new A417 loop, a possible outer diversion (dotted purple) is suggested, missing Emma's Grove round barrows.
5. A436 and A417 traffic join together at a new junction arrangement just south towards Barrow Wake.
6. Birdlip junction (the site of a number of turning right collisions) is improved with a flyover.
7. The dual carriageway continues to Nettleton Bottom where the A417 is already dual carriageway.

Support with Reservation?

There appears to be a window of opportunity to attract funding. The main aspect of the A417 loop is to increase throughput and to improve safety at nearby black spots

With the available level area north of the pub it is not clear why the route was taken through the Air Balloon.

Once the B4070 junction is moved north it appears a wider loop ought to be possible using the space at the redundant current roundabout site. The footpaths and pub would stay accessed off the quieter road now A436.

Should the position of Ramblers in Gloucestershire be to support the concept of the A417 Loop? (So that walking trails are kept pretty much as they are today but with safer crossings, and request alignment is reviewed so that if possible keep the landmark pub?)

