



In Brief

Ramblers have been campaigning here for around 20 years for through traffic to be taken off local roads (preferably with a tunnel) to make them walkable and crossable again. The aims can be summarised as

- Keep the Cotswold Way and Gloucestershire Way on their Authors' line
- Ensure safe footpath crossings
- Retain the landmark Air Balloon Inn – a meeting place for walkers

The current proposals

- Divert the Cotswold Way and Gloucestershire Way
- Extinguish footpath crossings
- Demolish the Air Balloon.

Ramblers' Charitable Aims

Defend footpaths, protect places we like to walk, improve access, let the public know what we do.

In March 2018 Ramblers rejected both options 12 and 30 but offered to work with Highways England to 'green up' Option 30.

Simplified or Greened Up Option 30 was evolved which

- deletes the direct link road to Birdlip (none of the tunnel options have a link road)
- keeps the roof on the tunnel as it passes below the Air Balloon car park
- uses green flanked bridges where possible along the route for gain in biodiversity interconnect

At no stage has taking the road below the Air Balloon site (using relatively low cost tunnelling methods such as at Hindhead) been considered as part of the consultation.

In January 2019 Ramblers became concerned about the direction of proposals for the scheme & agreed that landscaping funds should be used to 'green up' the new road in preference to the current one.

With the new road at depths of 30metres (100ft) HE option 30 could be said to be a tunnel option with the roof removed.

Footpath (and bridleway etc) crossings of the current A417 have become increasingly difficult as traffic levels have increased. It was anticipated the scheme would incorporate bridges or underpasses of the new road to allow rights of way to be fully used again. However it seems Highways England instead proposed extinguishing or diverting these routes.

Other organisations are also showing their disappointment with proposals and have raised the prospect again of delay until tunnel options are properly considered.

Background

The Cotswold Way is said to be a 'Jewel in the Crown' for Ramblers. It was first mooted following the passing of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949, which made provision for the designation and creation of long distance paths.

The Gloucestershire Committee of the Ramblers Association submitted plans to the National Parks Commission in 1953. Gloucestershire County Council designated the Cotswold Way route using existing public rights of way and the scheme was launched during Footpath Week in May 1970.

On 24 May 2007 The Cotswold Way was officially inaugurated as a National Trail a 102-mile (164 km) long-distance footpath. It follows the edge of the Cotswold escarpment from Bath to Chipping Campden visiting many towns, villages and landmarks along the way.

Meanwhile traffic levels have been increasing along a cross country route from the M4 near Swindon to the M5 near Gloucester generally following the old Roman Ermin Street (or Way) from Gloucester to Cirencester and on to Silchester. The road has been upgraded to dual carriageway from the M4 at Swindon to Cowley Roundabout. Due to topology the old Gloucester to Oxford turnpike road (A436) has instead been dualled from the M5 as far as the Brockworth Bypass. The B4070 joining the two became very busy and led to creation of the single carriageway A417 Birdlip Bypass in 1995. The roundabout on the A436 junction next to the Air Balloon Inn at Crickley Hill soon became notorious for congestion. This road scheme is to create a dual carriageway for the A417 missing link between Brockworth and Cowley Roundabout.

The Air Balloon Inn is an historic landmark. It's situated on the junction of the Gloucester to Oxford A436 turnpike road and the Old Bath Road from Cheltenham (B4070). The roads predate many of the towns and villages they link today. An indication is the site of Neolithic Emma's Grove round barrows close to the junction. The Air Balloon Inn is many hundreds of years old and was renamed after one of the first balloon flights from Berkeley on the River Severn by Edward Jenner (of smallpox vaccine fame) landed nearby.

In 2001 and again in 2004 Ramblers and other local organisations held 'toot for a tunnel' placard protests on the Cotswold Way outside the Air Balloon, with the aim to remove through traffic from local roads. A number of footpath crossings had become effectively impassable.

In 2014 Gloucestershire County Council instigated the A417 loop consultation, the tail end of which evolved a minimal tunnel, 150 metres, to pass a new A417 dual carriageway beneath the Air Balloon site.

March 2018 saw a Highways England consider 30 Options before offering two for public consultation. The consultation was flawed in a number of ways:-

- Option 12 was referred to as the 'dead duck' option as it included a tight bend with a camera controlled speed limit. Option 30 was in effect the only available Option.
- None of the options considered the short tunnel beneath the Air Balloon, instead demolishing the landmark Inn with a 30 metre deep cutting.
- Tunnel options were discounted due to the use of expensive tunnel boring machines rather than more cost effective tunnelling methods digging from either side.
- The two submitted options were referred to as surface routes, yet included the 30 metre deep cutting that was likely to have greater environmental impact than a tunnel at that depth. If the surface routes were said to be tunnels without a roof, the roof could be kept in place at key points along the route.

Gloucestershire Ramblers, in rejecting both options, offered to work with Highways England to 'green up' Option 30 based on the lowest cost tunnel - Option 3. A 150 metre version of the tunnel could pass below the Air Balloon car park, & keep the Inn and Cotswold Way in place. It would also retain the Gloucestershire Way as it passes both the Air Balloon Inn and Emma's Grove.

Reponse using Fly through stills from Highways England Video

1. Do you have any comments on our proposed route from the Brockworth bypass to Shab Hill Junction?

Missing crossing point on the proposed Dual Carriageway



This is a crossing point from Dog Lane Bentham on the north (left) side of the road to multiple paths to the south
ABA125 Badgeworth Bridleway 125
ABA74 Badgeworth Footpath 74
ABA77 Badgeworth Footpath 77
ABA80 Badgeworth Footpath 80
ABA91 Badgeworth Footpath 91

Google maps shows the crossing at the end of the current A417 dual carriageway.



Missing crossing point across dual carriageway

From Bentham- Cold Slad narrow road on left to ABA84 Footpath emerges from Flyup A417 on the right – the old entrance to Crickley Hill Farm.



Google Maps shows the footpath sign post for ABA84 across the A417 from Dog Lane. The signpost is at the location of the central reservation once the west bound carriageway is constructed. Dog Lane stays in place for local use.



Heading East approaching the A436 turn - there is a missing footpath Crossing ABA86



Looking west the footpath sign is just visible to the left on google maps



Note the wide verge and footway to the right i.e heading down towards Bentham

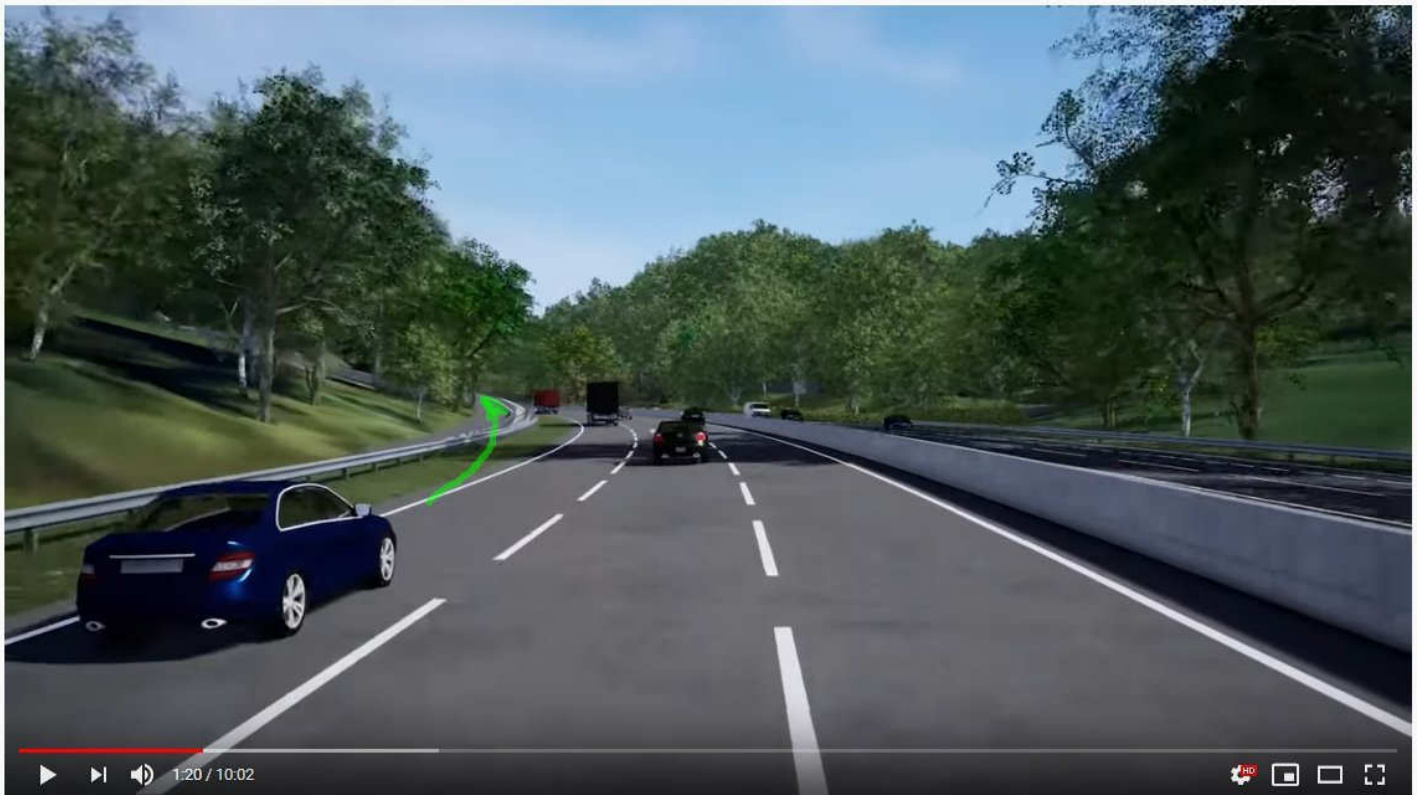
The Cold Slad turn is here on the left. There is a missing Bridleway Crossing ABA87 here



Google maps shows the entrance to Grove farm to the right where Bridleway ABA87 emerges. Just along the Bridleway is the turn to footpath ABA89



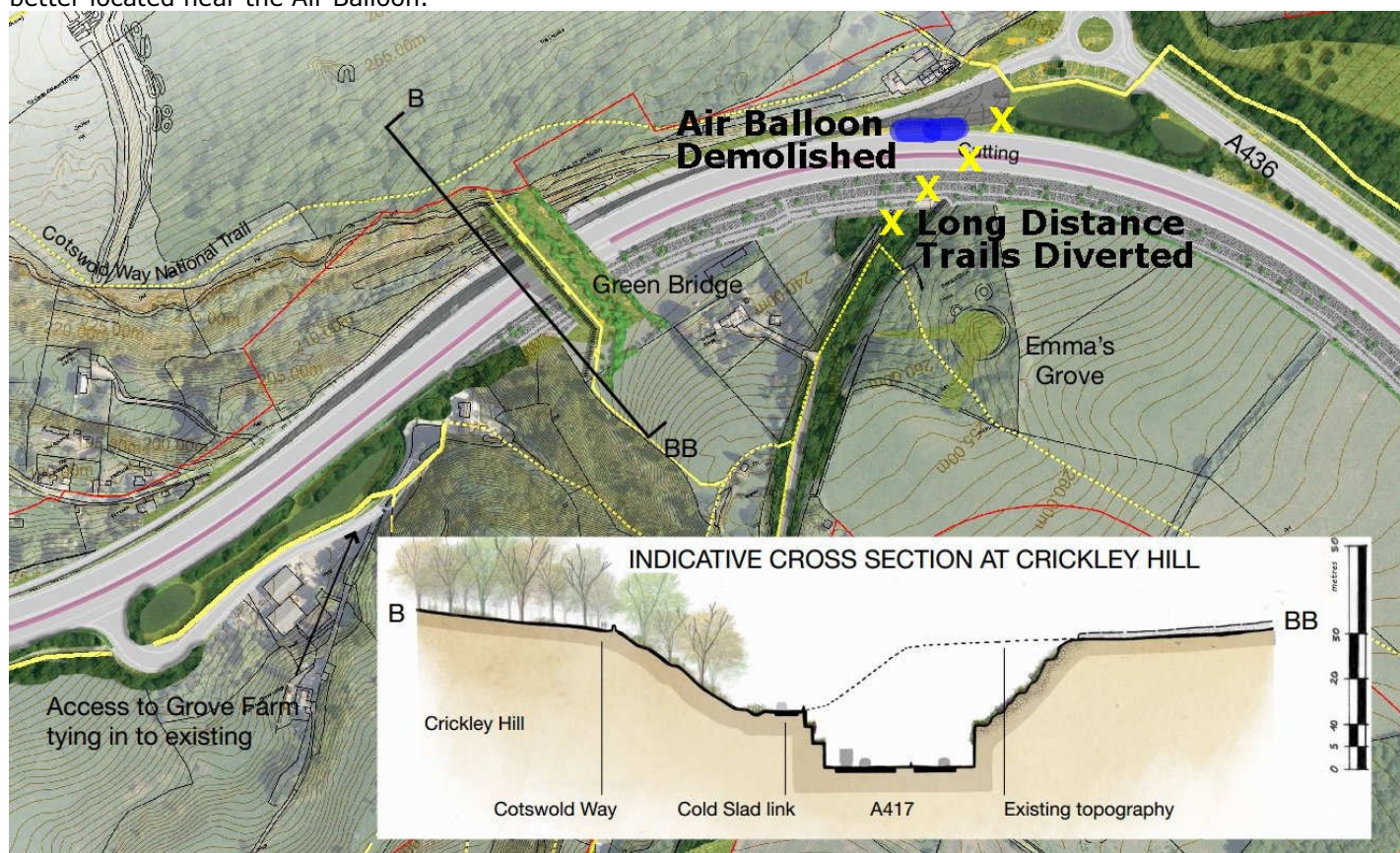
At the Cold Slad turn the new A417 Dual Carriageway diverges to the right away from the current A417 which can be seen heading left up towards the Air Balloon Roundabout. Simplified or greened up Option 30 used this as an A436 short cut up to the roundabout and on to Oxford.



Further east the proposed green (grass) bridge ahead for a wildlife crossing seems more concrete than green. The current A417 is on top of the embankment to the left. Simplified Option 30 takes a single lane down slip across the Dual Carriageway in the foreground here but a low green bridge could also be used as a Bridleway Crossing for ABA89 mentioned earlier.



Here is a cross section view. The depth of the new A417 cutting is almost 30 metres below current ground level. Further along the Air Balloon Inn is demolished and brideways footpaths etc diverted back across what was supposed to be the Wildlife Green Bridge. The bridge is not best placed to minimise impact on the SSSI and could be better located near the Air Balloon.



Further along this image illustrates the depth of the new A417 alongside the current A417 at the Air Balloon site. The Air Balloon Inn and roundabout have been removed but to the left a silo indicates the Air Balloon Cottages



Below photoshop sketch image of the Air Balloon Inn retained next to a green flanked bridge over the new A417. Just behind the Inn is the road across past Emma's Grove and with Alternative 1 on towards Birdlip (as well as a private property). Alternative 2 uses a link road ahead to reach Birdlip and to drop the A436 down to the A417.



An updated image shows the Gloucestershire Way also passing the Air Balloon before heading away through Emma's Grove and the Neolithic round barrows. The Cotswold Way passes the Air Balloon but continues to Barrow Wake.

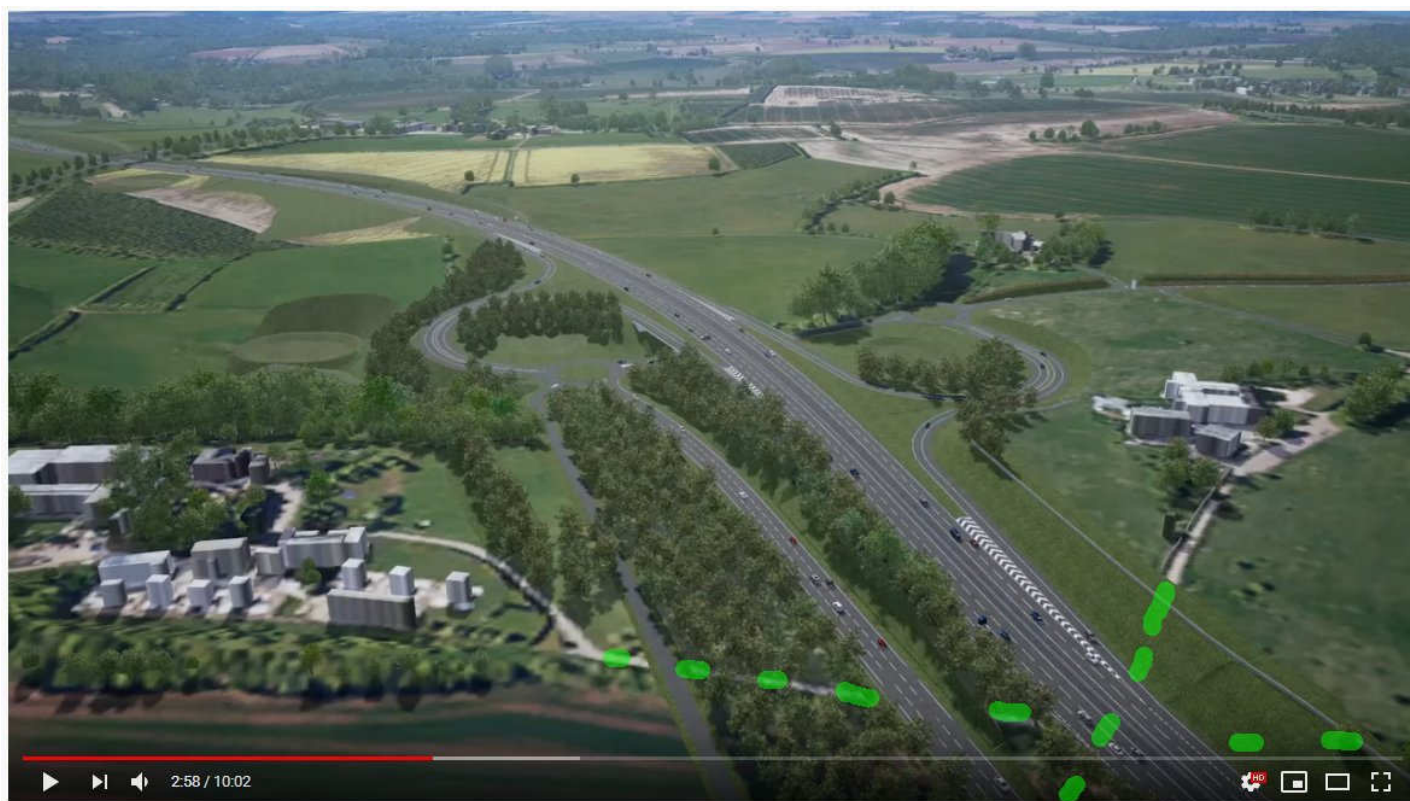


Relocating the wildlife green bridge here minimises impact on the Crickley Hill SSSI while allowing a 50metre Wildlife Corridor over the current road left, over the new dual carriageway and on to the Barrow Wake SSSI.

Below continuing from the Air Balloon Site towards Shab Hill, looking south east. This is where the proposed A436 alternative 2 link road is higher than the rising new A417. It might be expected to find a standard roundabout junction ahead over the Dual Carriageway.

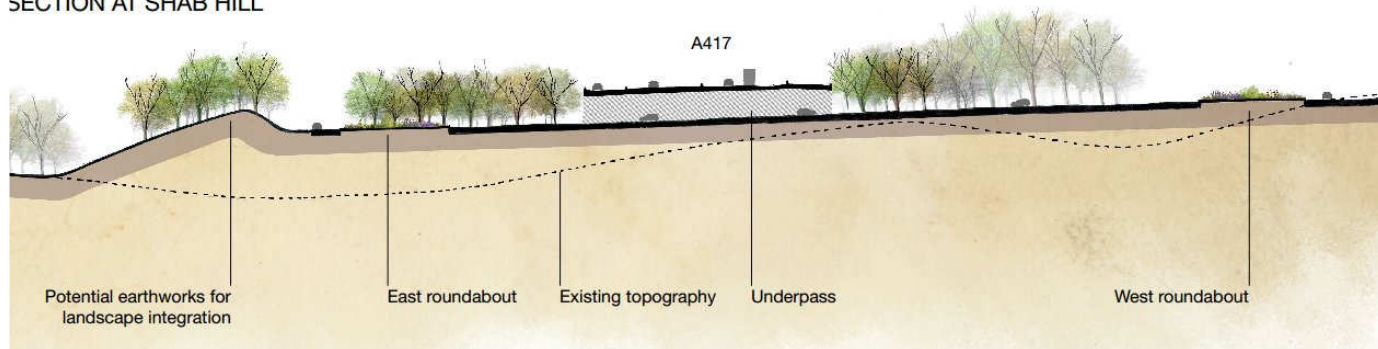


However the Dual carriageway continues to rise until it's on a flyover above the junction.



Notice in the foreground the junction of the Gloucestershire Way footpath ACO16 and other popular walking and riding routes have not been given a bridge.

SECTION AT SHAB HILL

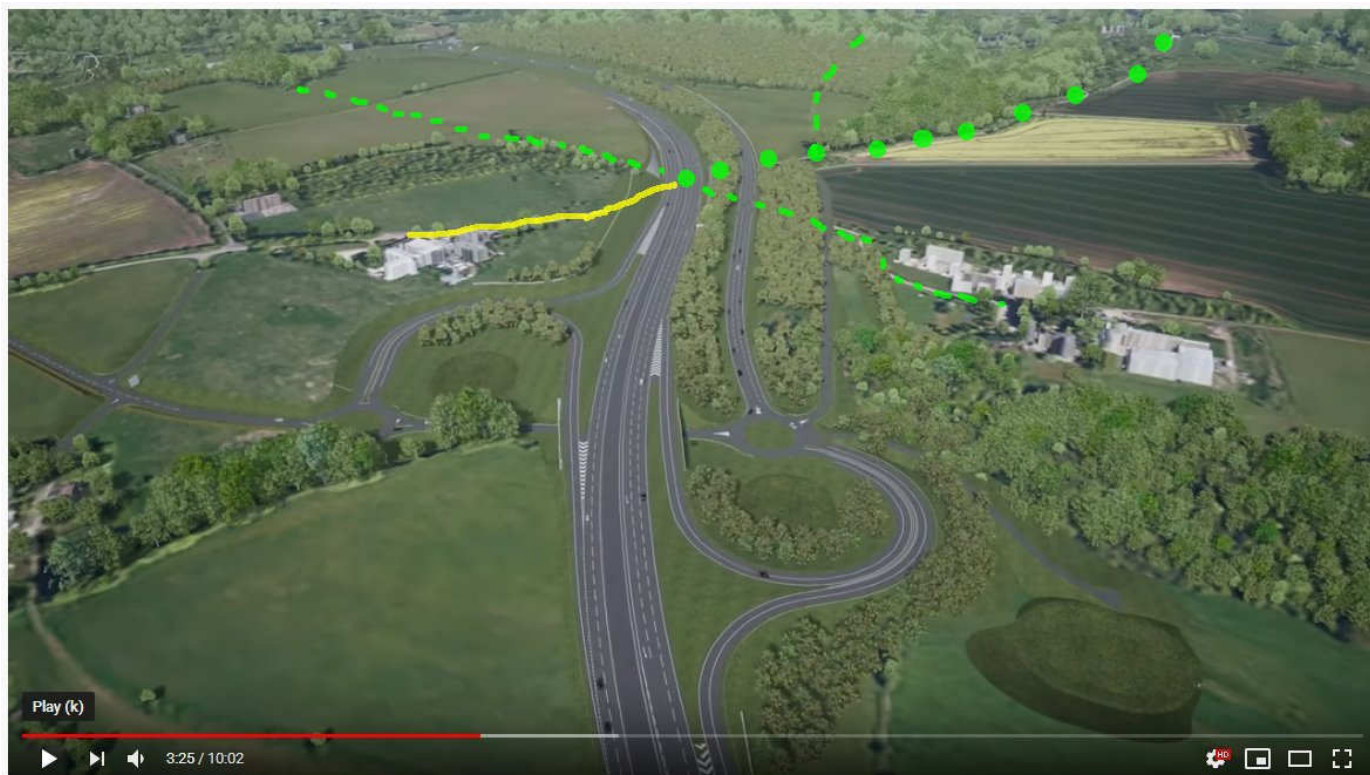


The proposed Shab Hill Junction is upside down – traffic has to accelerate uphill to join the new A417. It's also at a landscape high point. With the new A417 taken on a flyover, its elevation could give noise concerns across the countryside.

Surely if the junction is to be located here, it should be inverted with the A417 in a cutting underneath the link road.

Another view of the Shab Hill junction this time looking north and showing where there is a 'crossroads' a number of paths bridleways tracks etc. Footpath ACY3 and ACO16. ORPA 50852 (dots) with Footpath ACO15 heading north. The yellow lane passes through Birdlip radio station.

A green bridge was suggested here but currently there is no crossing point.

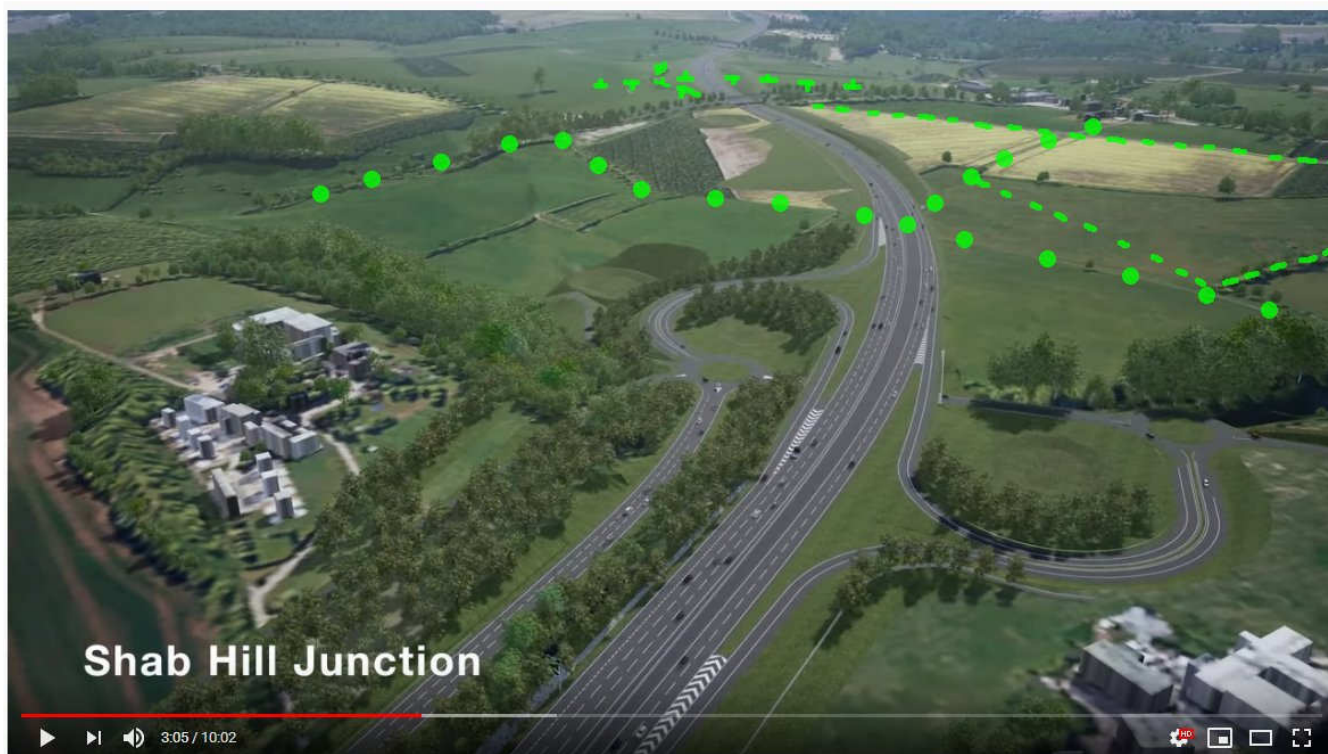


2. Do you have any comments on our proposed green bridge?

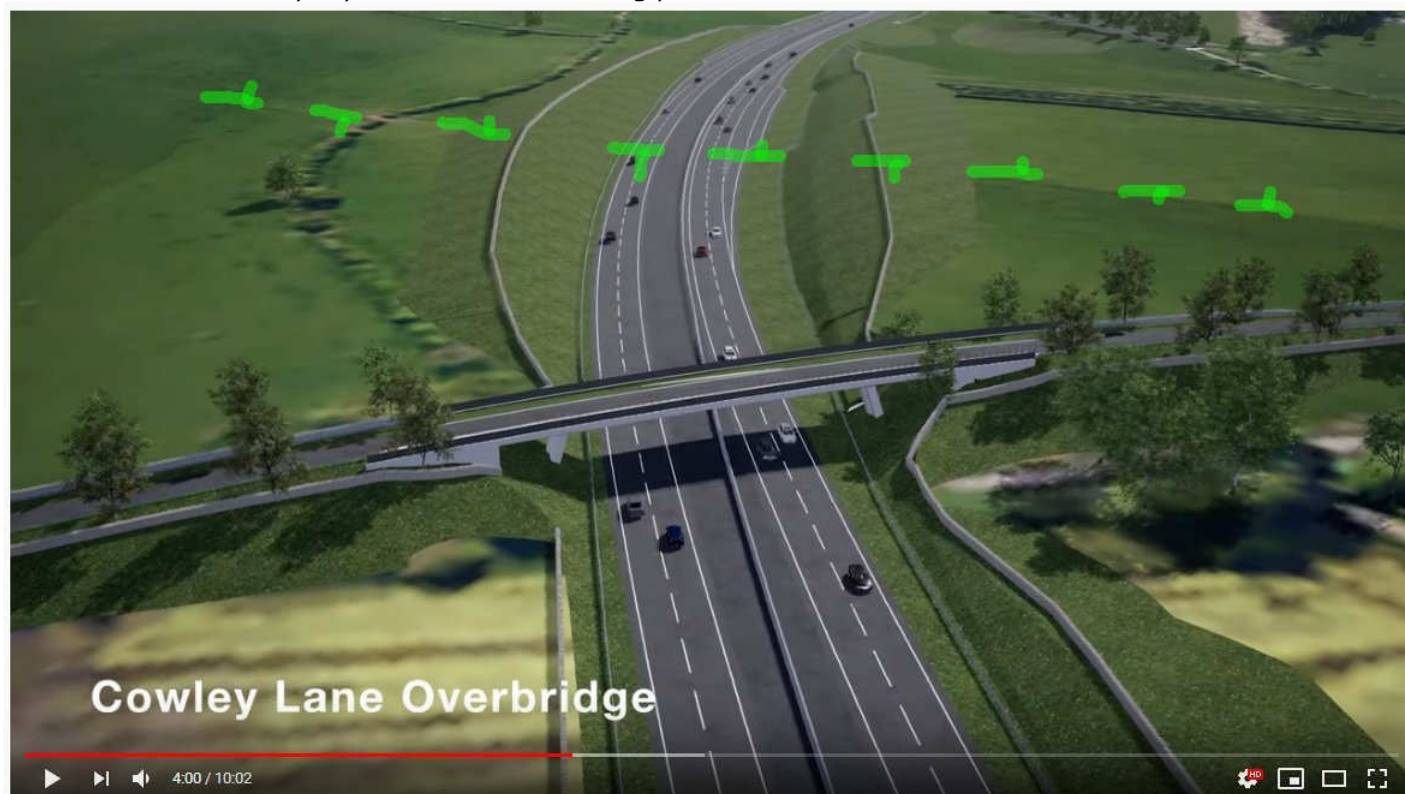
As seen in section 1, the wildlife bridge is in the wrong place. It should be to one side of the SSSI forming part of a larger Green flanked Bridge or short tunnel, carrying the Air Balloon car park. The Cotswold and Gloucestershire Ways can continue on their Authors' intended route past the historic Inn. The recent Gustav Holst way also uses the Air Balloon as a landmark.

3. Do you have any comments on our proposed route from Shab Hill to Cowley Junction?

Looking south east again there is a missing crossing point for ORPA (Other Route of Public Access) 50853 (a class 5 highway) at the southern end of Shab Hill Junction. ORPA 50944 from the south meets 50853 here. Green Dots = ORPA. Short Dashes = Footpaths. Dash with sidebars = Restricted Byways
In the distance is the Cowley Lane bridge and a missing Restricted Byway (ACY36) crossing point.



Here is the Cowley Lane Bridge. Note the indication of a vintage hedge heading off to the left and around. In the foreground is the current Cowley Lane with its avenue of trees. Also shown Restricted Byway ACY36 with no crossing point.

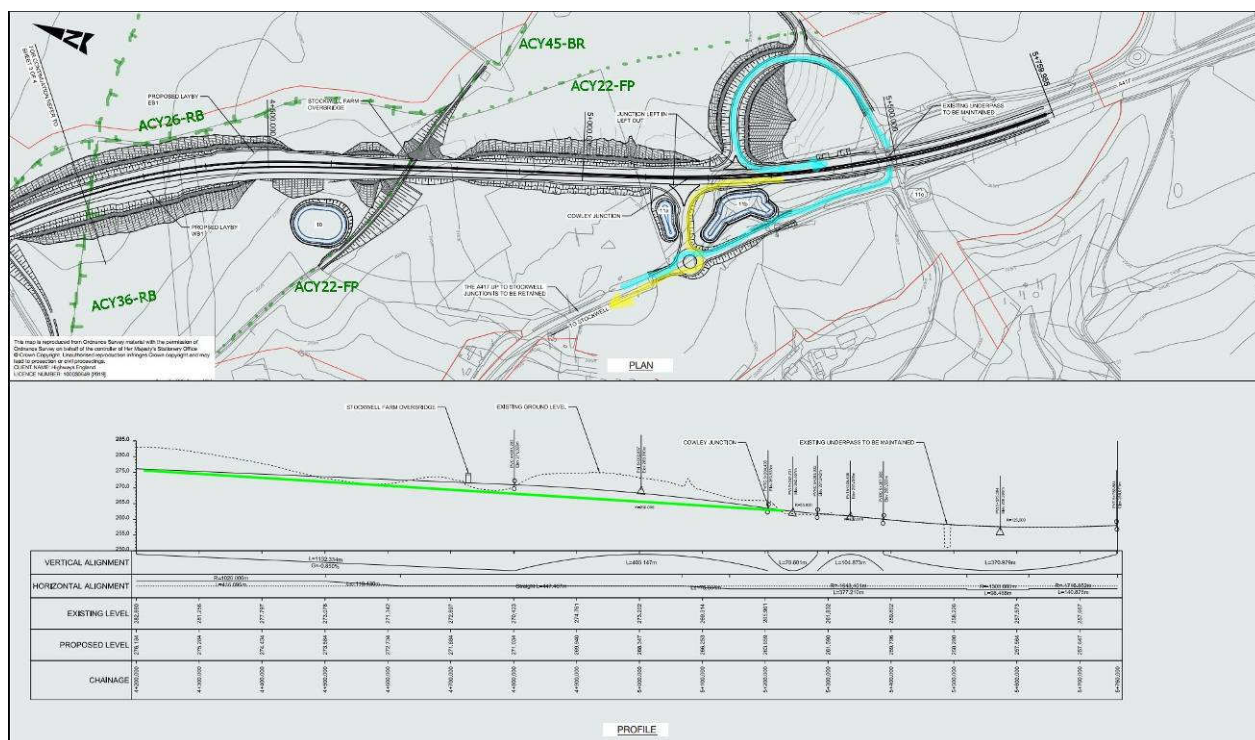


Here another view from google maps of Restricted Byway ACY36 and the ancient hedge alongside it.



In the year 2000 under the CROW act many RUPPs Roads Used as Public Paths were blanket changed to Restricted Byways without fully checking their status. ACY36 may well be an ancient road as well as having an ancient hedge alongside it.

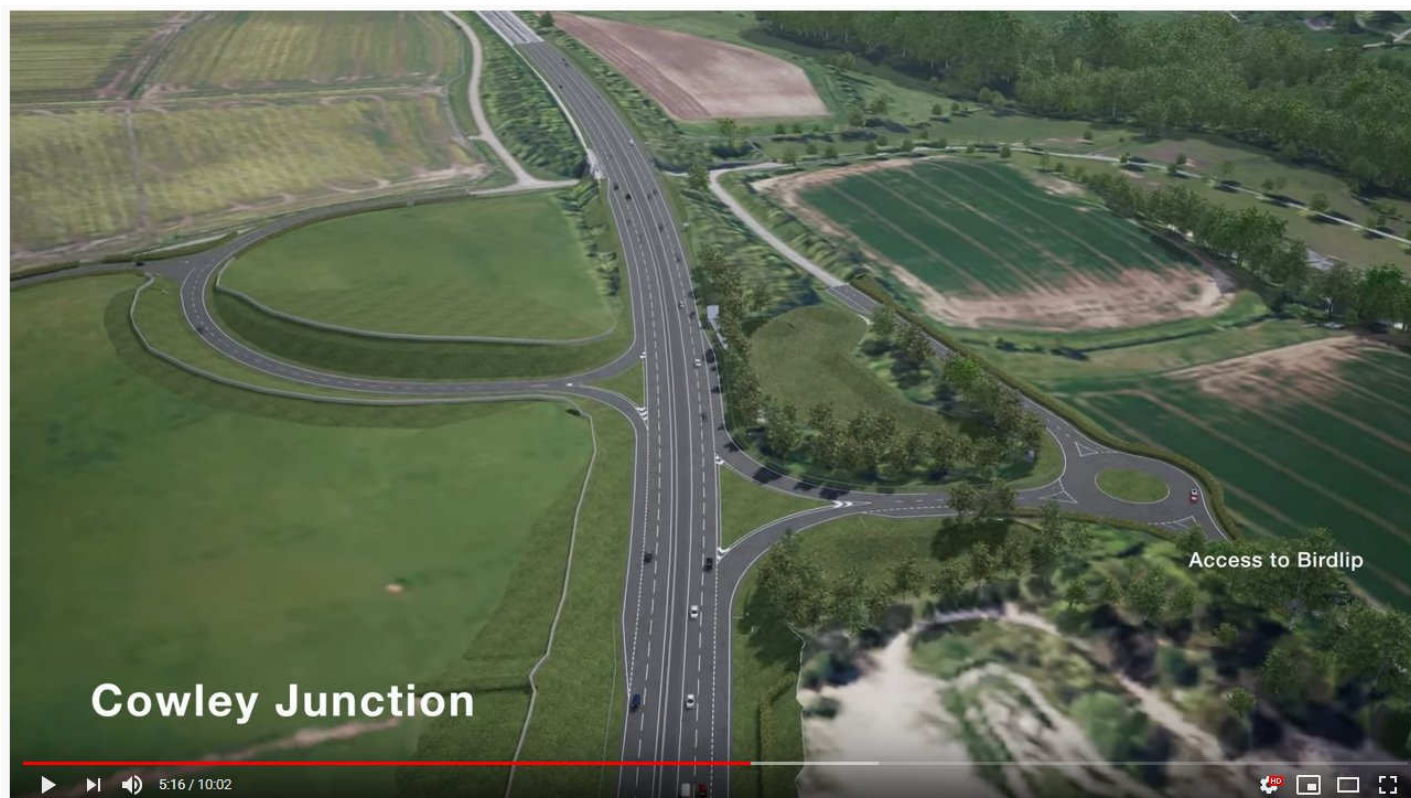
Plan4 shows the gradient of the proposed A417 through Stockwell Lane and Stockwell farm track. Also highlighted the main traffic flows east and west onto the new A417.



Below the proposed bridge for Stockwell Lane farm track marked as a footpath ACY22. The quarry can be seen off to the right and just in front of the bridge the present line of the path. The track is historically wide – some 10 metres.



Cowley Junction



The video caption to the right says there is 'Access to Birdlip' from this junction (for local traffic). However Highways England has proposed closing (repurposing) the road to all traffic at Stockwell Farm Cowley Lane junction.