

# New roads still required

*Any initial positive response to Government's Roads Review soon evaporated in Tunbridge Wells, Kent, my parliamentary constituency, as the immediate consequence was the cancellation of a fully funded, planned and developed DBFO improvement programme for the A21.*

*The A21 is the main road between London and Hastings: its state in places illustrates clearly that this country is not done with building new roads. The nation may have most of its motorway and trunk road network in place but there is still a very real need in Britain to remove bottlenecks and provide roads around rather than through beleaguered communities.*

*The A21 is a notoriously congested route. The road is a dual carriageway from the M25 until just outside Tunbridge Wells where the road narrows to a single carriageway of two lanes, one carrying northbound traffic, the other south. Further along the route the road again widens to dual carriageway. The bottleneck is horrendous.*

*A little further south the A21 becomes little more than a country lane, passing through the picturesque village of Lamberhurst. The lives of villagers there are being blighted by high levels of traffic, accidents and pollution, especially from HGVs grinding up and down the village's steep approaches, and around its bends. Lamberhurst has needed a bypass for many years and would be in the course of getting one now, if the proposed DBFO scheme had been allowed to proceed.*

*This scheme had been through the whole process of assessment, including a public enquiry in 1992. Throughout the long process the scheme was green-lighted at every stage.*

*The current road is unsafe. There have been 227 injury accidents, according to the Highways Agency, since August 1992. Recently there has been a fatality and a serious injury precisely at the point where the road narrows from two carriageways to one. Glass and the remains of plastic bumpers litter the grass verges of what is a heavily trafficked route, especially in the summer.*

*Since late last year the date for the publication of the results of the roads consultation process has continually shifted. At the beginning of May 1998 the Government line was that the results would be published in 'late spring.' When John Prescott represented Tony Blair during Prime Minister's Questions he contradicted the previously announced line by stating that the results were to be published in June. Now we hear it is to be July at the earliest. Thereafter it is possible that even non contentious schemes will take many months to get off the ground.*

*Earlier this year our local newspaper drew up a petition calling for 'Action Now!' Nearly 9,000 people signed the petition. I presented it to the Minister for Roads, Baroness Hayman, although it took repeated approaches for her to actually agree to accept the petition.*

*There are many other roads in a similar position to the A21 across the country. The seemingly endless, black and white 'review it all' policy adopted by this Government is only adding to the backlog. The time has come for some pragmatic common sense.*



Archie Norman

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