



# A47 Wansford to Sutton

## *Alternative Visions*

4<sup>th</sup> July 2018

**Wansford Parish Council**

**Sutton Parish Council**

# A47 Wansford to Sutton

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### 1 Introduction

#### 1.1 Purpose of this Document

This document has been produced by Wansford Parish Council and Sutton Parish Council, as the elected representatives of the local community, in consultation with the A47 Community Consultation Team (ACCT) comprising members of both parish councils and residents. The purpose is to set out an alternative vision for the upgrading of the A47 to dual carriageway between the A1/A47 junction at Wansford and the start of the existing dual carriageway at Sutton.

#### 1.2 Why This Document is Needed

Both parish councils have asked repeatedly to discuss the project as a group with Highways England and the various statutory planning and environmental organisations involved but Highways England has excluded the Parish Councils from these meetings. The parish councils are very concerned that a balanced view of the issues has not been presented to the other parties. This document sets out the arguments involved and explains why we believe that Highways England has taken the project down the wrong path. This view has been explained to Highways England repeatedly but they appear to have taken little notice of it.

#### 1.3 Background to the Project

The declared aim of the project to upgrade the A47 between Wansford and Sutton is to

- Support the economic growth of the region
- improve the capacity of this stretch of road,
- improve its resilience to disruption
- improve safety
- improve the environment along the road
- give value for money
- improve access along the route for cyclists, pedestrians and horse riders.

Wansford Parish Council and Sutton Parish Council fully support these aims and, at meetings with Highways England, the councils expressed a wish to work to maximise the benefit to the local communities and all users of the A47 while delivering value for money and minimum environmental impact.

#### 1.4 Progress of the Project to Date

In March and April 2017, Highways England carried out a non-statutory consultation on the selection of the preferred route for this project. The information that was published consisted of a constraints map, shown as Figure 1 below, and three route alternatives shown as Figures 2, 3 and 4.

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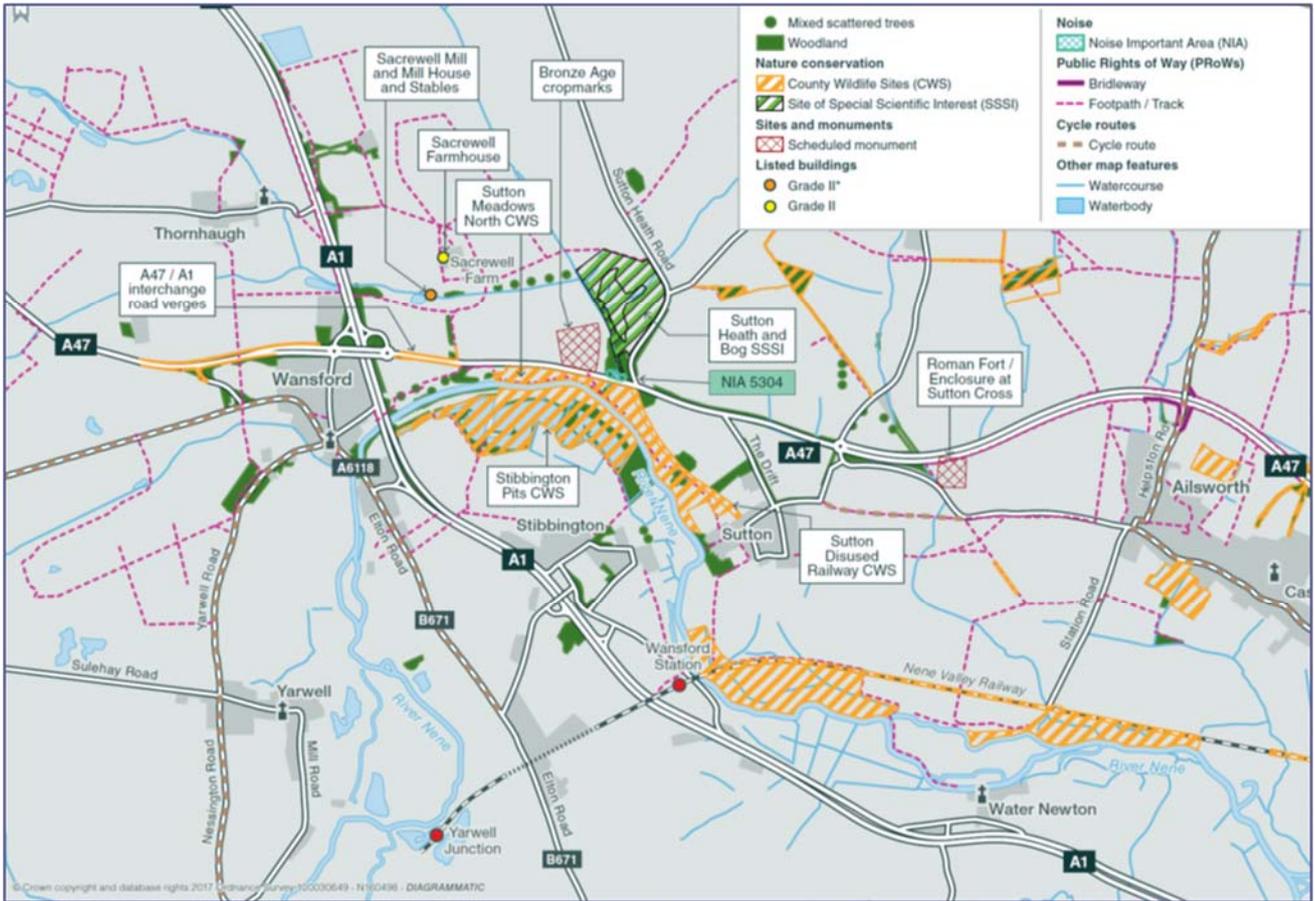


Figure 1 – Highways England environmental constraints plan

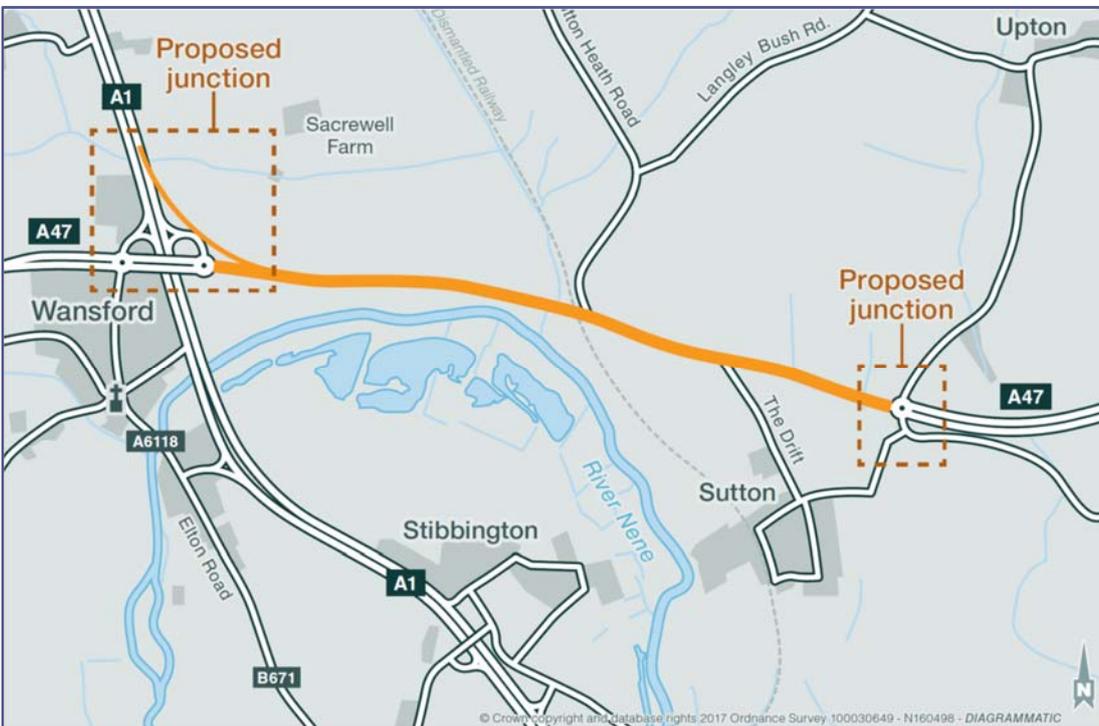


Figure 2 – Highways England Route Option 1 – Construction on the Existing Alignment

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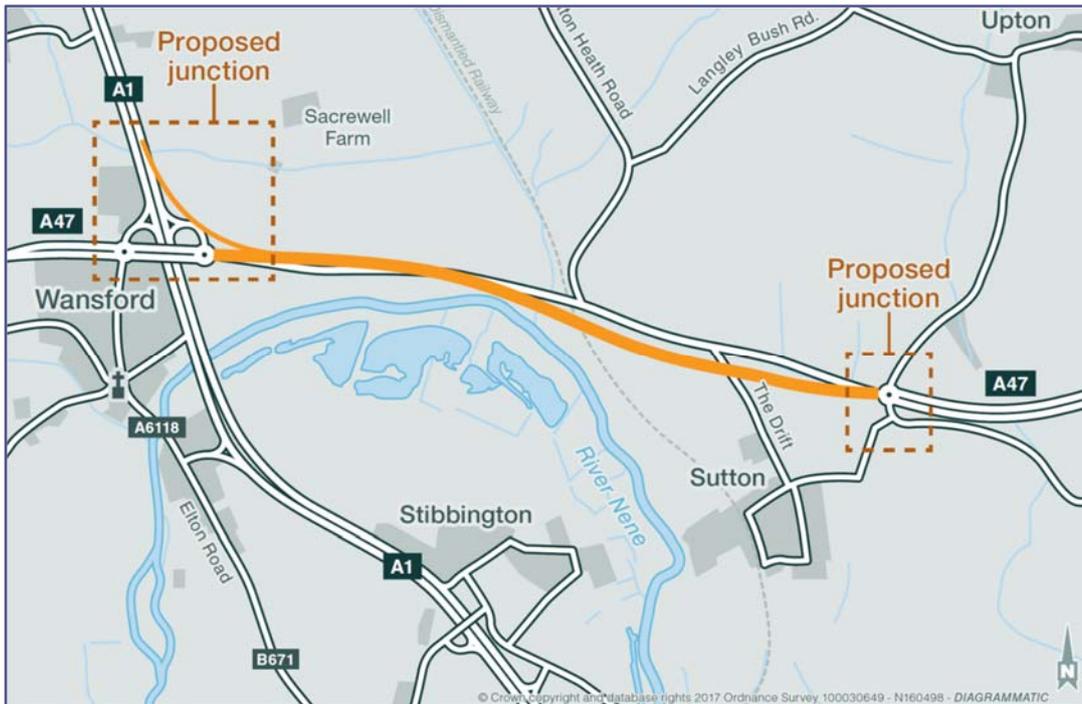


Figure 3 – Highways England Route Option 2 – The Southern Route



Figure 4 – Highways England Route Option 3 – The Northern Route

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62% of those who responded to the consultation favoured the northern route but in August 2017, Highways England published the preferred route as the southern route. The reasons given for this were:-

1. The northern route impinged on a Scheduled Monument (shown as “bronze age crop marks” in the constraints plan).
2. The northern route crossed the Sutton Heath and Bog SSSI.

Both these issues were known about before the consultation and so it seems strange that Highways England included the northern route at all. Subsequent investigations have shown that the northern route does not need to cross the SSSI.

No further details of the decision process were given but the minutes of the meeting were finally published in April 2018 some 10 months after the decision meeting was held.

### **2 Shortcomings of the Preferred Route Decision**

In the minutes of the decision meeting, Highways England stated that the meeting was being held early because of time constraints on the project and that some information was incomplete. Normally the Preferred Route Decision is taken at the end of the Project Control Framework Stage 2 but in this case PCF Stage 2 was only part complete. Two months after the preferred route announcement was made, the project timetable was extended and it has since been extended further. Highways England has not revisited their decision despite the extended time frame.

Taking the published constraints plan and the decision meeting minutes as a guide, it is clear that the project team was not aware of many of the significant features of the area notably:-

1. The extensive archaeological interest in the area in addition to the Scheduled Monument.
2. The presence of the Nene Way footpath along the banks of the river. This is the most popular long distance path in the area. Only the much less popular Hereward Way is mentioned.
3. This area of the Nene valley is a designated Nature Improvement Area as part of an extensive regional programme.
4. The significance of the Nene valley as a wildlife corridor.
5. The status of the Nene valley as an area of High Landscape Value.
6. The Tree Preservation Orders that apply to the woodland to the south of the A47. These woods include significant numbers of oaks with girths in excess of 3 metres meaning they are of considerable age.
7. The presence of three locally listed buildings, the A47 bridge across the old Wansford to Stamford railway, Station House close to the bridge and Heath House further to the north.
8. No reference was made to the geotechnical risks associated with building a road between the existing A47 and the river Nene. This whole sloping area is known to be unstable with both the nearby filling station and the Anglia Water pumping station having moved down the slope. Highways England had been made aware of this.

When the Scheme Appraisal Report was finally published in February 2018 (6 months after it was written), it was clear that no proper desktop study of historic remains in the area had been carried out and that almost all the ecological and environmental studies were incomplete. The document is very

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generic with little information directly relating to the road alignment. This was picked up by the Planning Inspectorate in their March 2018 review of the Environmental Scoping.

### 3 Advantages and disadvantages of the Preferred Route

The southern alignment published as the Preferred Route by Highways England has the following advantages and disadvantages.

<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
Avoids the Scheduled Monument	Cost estimated at £6 million more than the northern route
	Introduces serious geotechnical risks with the likelihood of much increased costs
	Destroys two County Wildlife Sites
	Destroys numerous trees with TPOs
	Impinges on the area of High Landscape Value
	Disrupts the wildlife corridor along the river
	Makes the provision of a safe through route for cyclists, pedestrians and horse riders very difficult
	Moves the road closer to houses increasing noise
	Opposed by the majority of residents from the surrounding communities because of landscape damage to the Nene Valley
	Destruction of archaeology south of the existing road
	All of the proposed route is land in private ownership requiring compulsory purchase from several land owners.

### **4 Optimisation of the Preferred Route**

Since the preferred route announcement, Highways England has expended considerable effort on optimizing the southern route. The results of this have been discussed in meetings between the parish councils and Highways England.

The road alignment has been moved closer to the existing road, reducing the impact on Sutton Village and keeping the road further from the river. Although these changes are welcome, their effect is marginal and the main disadvantages remain. As part of keeping the road away from the river, the embankments have been steepened which significantly increases the geotechnical risk. The steeper embankments also make it more difficult to make provision for cyclists and horse riders.

Highways England has claimed that these changes substantially reduce the costs relative to the northern route. They have been asked to substantiate this but they have stated that the cost estimates are confidential, an unusual view to take on a publicly funded project. In the absence of any demonstration of reduced costs, it has to be assumed that the £6 million cost difference between the northern and southern routes still stands.

### **5 Discussion of the Preferred Route**

Since the preferred route announcement, Highways England has held two public meetings to discuss the project. At both meetings it has been clear that most residents attending strongly oppose the use of the southern route.

In May and June 2018 Highways England held two meetings with representatives of the parish councils and various cycling and footpaths organisations. These discussions have been interesting but they have yielded very little factual information.

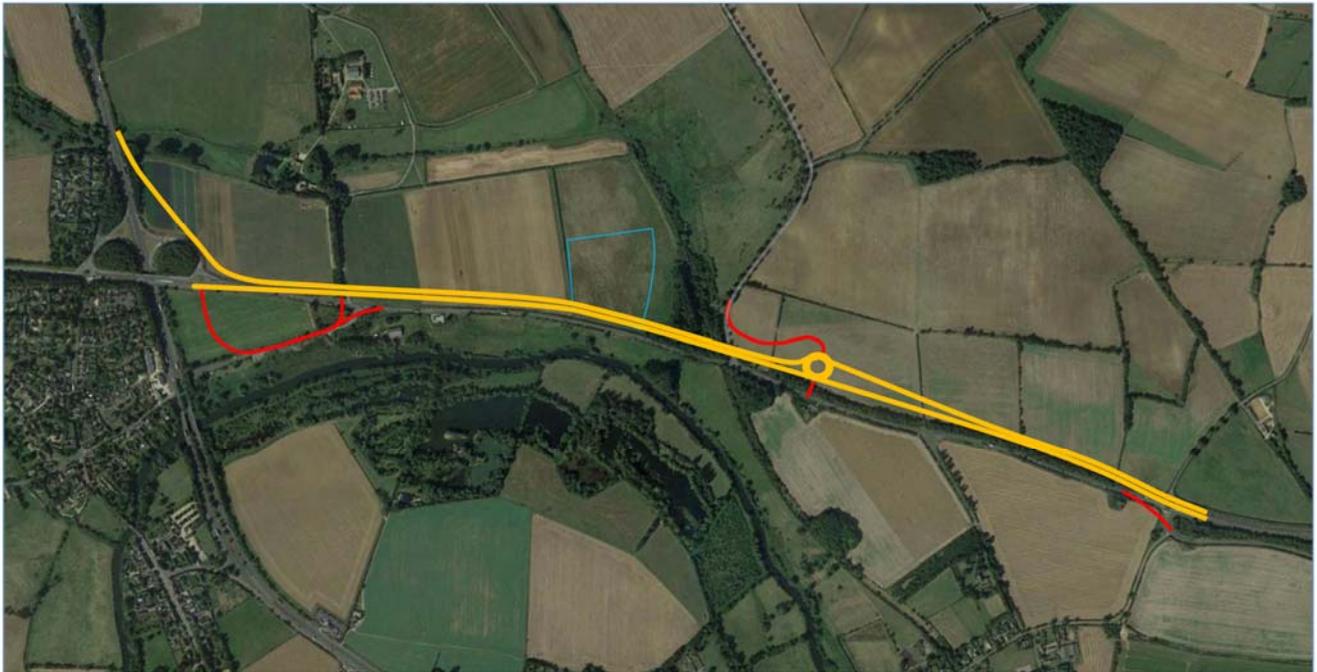
Highways England has met three times with Historic England and recently held a meeting with a group of all the environmental organisations who have an interest in the project. The parish councils have asked repeatedly to join these meetings but Highways England has excluded them despite the parish councils being statutory consultees in the project planning process. No minutes from these meetings have been shared with the parish councils despite repeated requests.

It is understood that Highways England have carried out non-intrusive ground investigations to look for buried features in the area. The results of the investigation of the Scheduled Monument have been given to the parish councils, but nothing else. Highways England have given copies of the reports on the other investigations and maps showing their extent to Peterborough City Council and Historic England but they have told the parish councils that they are not available yet.

It is understood from those who have seen the investigation report that there is no identified archaeological interest on the northern road alignment east of the old railway line. This is supported by an independent desktop study of the area commissioned by the parish councils.

### 6 Alternative Visions for the A47 Dualling

The local community has consistently backed the use of the northern route and, when subject to optimization similar to that applied to the southern route, the result is a layout as sketched in Figure 5



*Figure 5 – An Alternative Vision of the A47 Dualling*

The western end of this scheme is identical to the Highways England preferred alignment. It impacts the Scheduled Monument (see Section 7 for discussion of this), crosses the old railway line to the south of the Sutton Heath and Bog SSSI and joins a new roundabout just to the east. This roundabout provides a connection to the Sutton Heath Road and also to the existing A47 which is retained as a local service road. The new road then links to the existing dual carriageway with the existing Sutton roundabout being removed. The Upton road is closed with that village being accessed from Sutton Heath Road.

There are several possible variations of this scheme all using the same basic route:-

1. To leave the Sutton roundabout where it is and provide an underpass to link the Sutton Heath Road to the existing A47.
2. To remove the Sutton roundabout completely, use an underpass for the Sutton Heath Road, and have all access from Sutton and Ailsworth along the existing road to join the new road at the eastern Wansford roundabout.

Variation 1 is slightly more expensive while variation 2 will put more traffic on the existing road.

The advantages and disadvantages of this group of schemes are listed below. Comparison with the similar table for the Highways England Preferred Route makes it obvious why the parish councils believe the wrong decision has been made.

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Advantages	Disadvantages
Cost estimated at £6 million less than the southern route	Passes through the Scheduled Monument
Very low geotechnical risk	Requires the relocation of the old station building
Safeguards the County Wildlife Sites and woodland to the south of the existing road	
Keeps the Nene valley landscape intact	
Allows the use of the existing road for local traffic, cycling walking and horse riding	
Keeps the road away from houses	
Supported by the majority of local residents	
The eastern section of road is on land already in government ownership	

Although the old station house is classified as a building of local importance it is, because of its location, almost completely unknown to the residents of the area. The building is completely hidden from view with dense tree coverage and a very dangerous access onto the A47. The site is frequently subject to fly tipping from the Sutton Heath Road. The building has been substantially altered with white UPVC windows and other non-period features. It would be of considerably greater significance if it was relocated and there are a number of possible sites for this along the route of the long abandoned Wansford to Stamford railway. The best location is probably at Ufford Halt to the north. At this location there is an open area of land adjacent to the track bed with views across the countryside. The station building would be visible from Sutton Heath Road. The nearby Heath House would not be affected by the proposed road alignment and the old railway bridge would be retained for its existing use.

The land to the north of the existing A47 and to the east of Sutton Heath Road was purchased by the government in the 1970s as the site for the proposed Castor Township and for the upgrading of the A47. Neither of these projects happened under the Peterborough Development Corporation and, after the closure of that organisation, the land has passed through several ownerships within government and is at present owned by the Homes and Communities Agency. In the current revision of the Peterborough Local Plan, the HCA put forward this land for housing development. The western section of this development close to the A47 dualling project failed to get past the first sifting stage and the eastern section, due north of Castor village, did not get into the final plan. It is very unlikely that the western section of this land will be needed for housing in the foreseeable future. It seems very strange that Highways England is proposing to compulsorily purchase land for the A47 improvements when the government already owns land purchased for this purpose.

### 7 The Scheduled Monument

The Scheduled Monument is in the area known as Toll Bar Field immediately to the north of the existing A47 and to the west of the Sutton Heath Road. The official record for the monument contains little information except that it was declared in 1962 as a result of crop marks appearing on aerial photographs. The listing in the Peterborough local records describes it as a Roman settlement. Since the original listing, little investigation seems to have taken place apart from a series of walkover surveys in the 1970s. The area was ploughed, land drained and used to grow sugar beet and other crops up until 2006 since when it has been set aside or used as pasture. All surface archaeology will have been destroyed. On the surface there is nothing to see except a sloping grass field and the site is generally unknown to the local community and visitors.

Figure 6 shows the approximate area of the Scheduled Monument superimposed on an aerial photograph that shows the crop marks. It is clear that the boundaries of the monument have been drawn to match local field boundaries rather than the archaeology and perhaps the scheduled area should extend further north.



*Figure 6 – The Scheduled Monument showing crop marks*

In June 2017 Headland Archaeology carried out a magnetometer survey of the Scheduled Monument site and produced a report describing their findings. The main plot of the magnetometer survey is attached as Figure 7.

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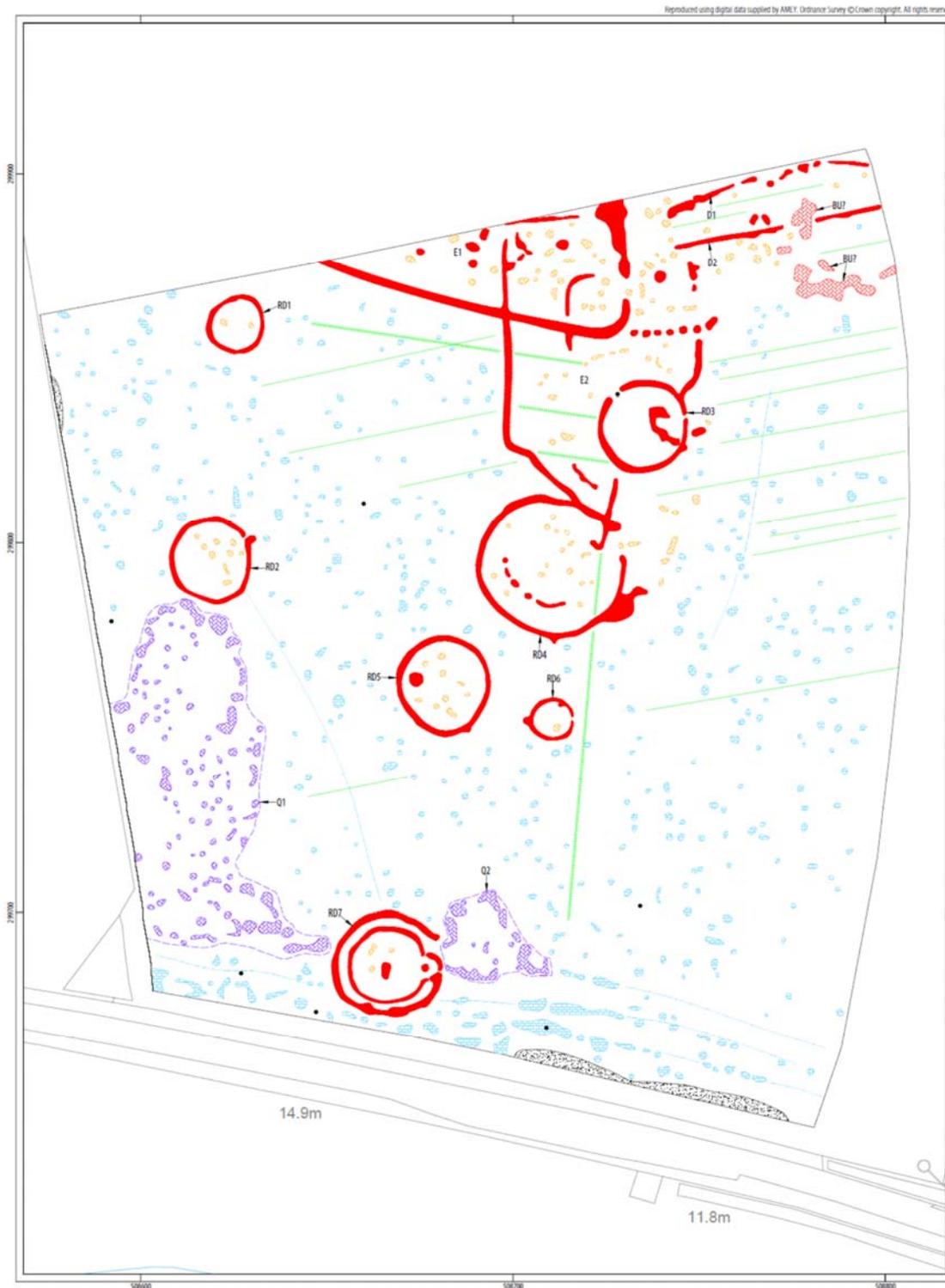


Figure 7 – The Scheduled Monument magnetometer survey by Headland Archaeology on behalf of Highways England

This survey shows a series of outlines at the northern edge of the site which are interpreted as the remains of a Roman settlement. Further south there are 7 ring shapes which are interpreted as bronze age

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barrows. On the southern edge of the site there are also two areas of quarrying which are thought to be more recent than the barrow structures. The rest of the southern area of the site is generally clear of identified targets except for modern field drains.

The ring patterns are assumed to be bronze age barrows based simply on their shape. There appears to be no other evidence to support this assumption. The southern barrow shows a different form to the others and expert opinion indicates that this may be from a different period to the other rings. It may be that the southern ring is part of a separate group closer to the river but with no survey results outside the Scheduled Monument it is impossible to confirm this. Bronze age barrows exist at numerous sites in the area and across England and Historic England's claims that these particular barrows are of national significance is not supported by any published evidence.

### **7.1 The Status of Scheduled Monuments**

The position of a Scheduled Monument within the context of a Development Consent Order application for a national infrastructure project is governed by the *National Policy Statement for National Networks (NPSNN)* (Dept. of Transport, December 2014)

This document states that that projects doing substantial damage to a Scheduled Monument will only be approved in exceptional circumstances. This essentially sets up two tests, whether the damage is substantial and whether the circumstances are exceptional.

In this case there is no doubt that avoiding the Scheduled Monument will do permanent and irreversible damage to the Nene valley and risks destroying other unrecorded archaeological assets. Whether that is an exceptional circumstance is debatable.

The other question is whether it is possible to build the new road across the Scheduled Monument without doing substantial damage. This is examined in the next section.

### **7.2 Crossing the Scheduled Monument**

There are four main options for crossing the Scheduled Monument which are discussed below.

#### **7.2.1 Crossing the Scheduled Monument to the North of the Southern Barrow**

The Headland report shows a gap of 45m between the southern barrow and the next feature to the north. The proposed dual carriageway requires a 25m wide corridor including verges and fence lines. The Headland magnetometer survey shows no targets in this area that the road would traverse so it would appear that there is no damage to any known archaeology. This approach would separate the southern barrow from the others but there is some indication that it is from a different period historically and not necessarily linked to the other barrows. If it is proved that there are further archaeological remains between the A47 and the river, this approach would group the south barrow with them which may be correct for the context of this barrow. This route is illustrated in Figure 8. Before this route could be adopted there is a need to investigate in detail the proposed road route through the Scheduled Monument. There are a number of ways of doing this either by trenching or by more sophisticated non-intrusive methods.

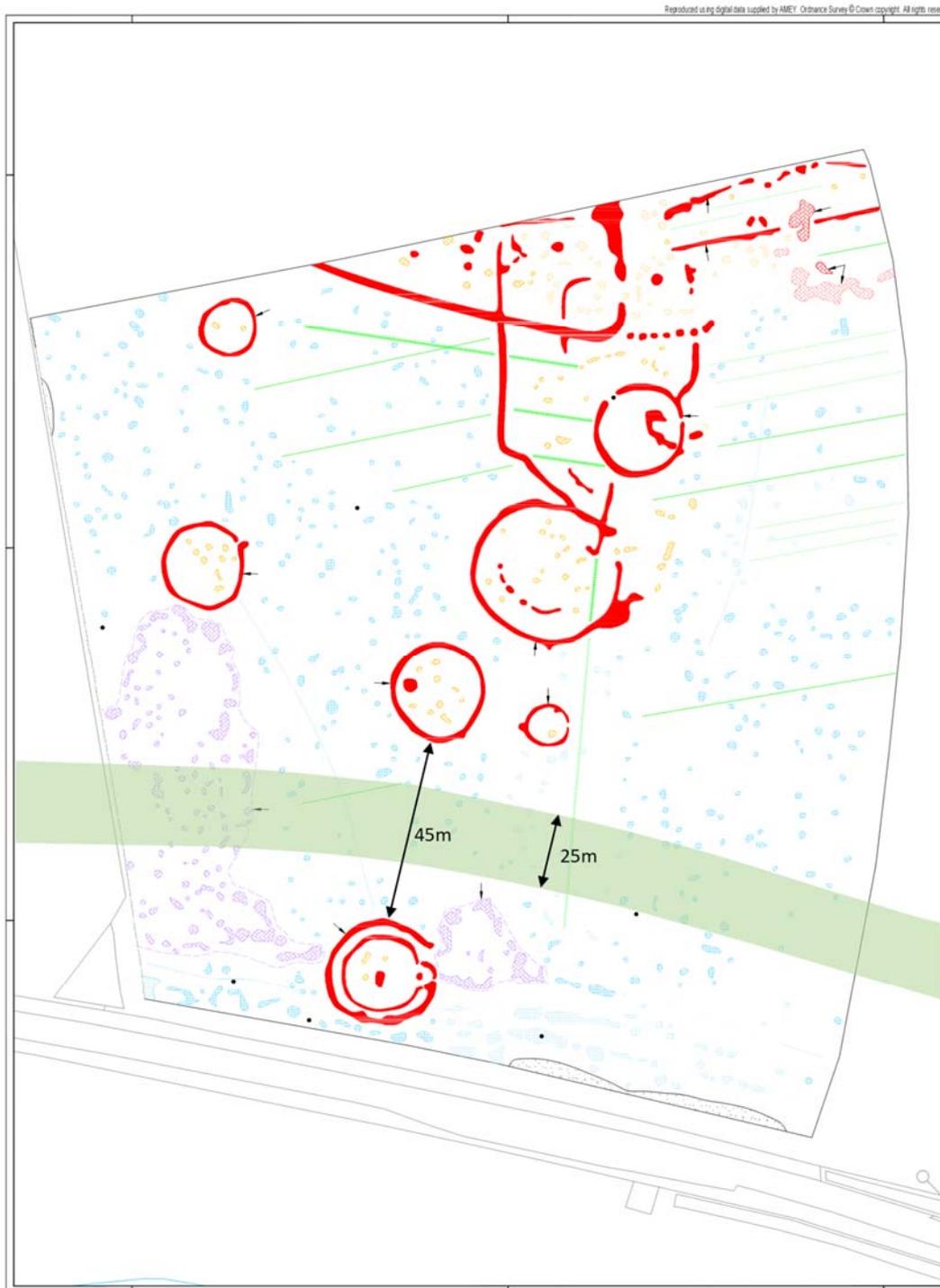


Figure 8 – Crossing the Scheduled Monument to the north of the south barrow

### 7.2.2 Through the Southern Barrow

If the Scheduled Monument did not exist, the logical route for the road would run along the southern edge of the Scheduled Monument through the southern barrow. For this option to be followed, it would be necessary to fully excavate the barrow using the latest techniques. If there are significant finds these could either be displayed locally, in a custom built visitor centre, or in the Peterborough museum. The

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£6 million difference in cost between this and the southern route would allow significant expenditure on the excavations and display. Excavating this barrow would leave the rest of the site completely untouched and considerably increase the understanding of the rest of the monument for both professional archaeologists and the public. This option is shown in Figure 9.

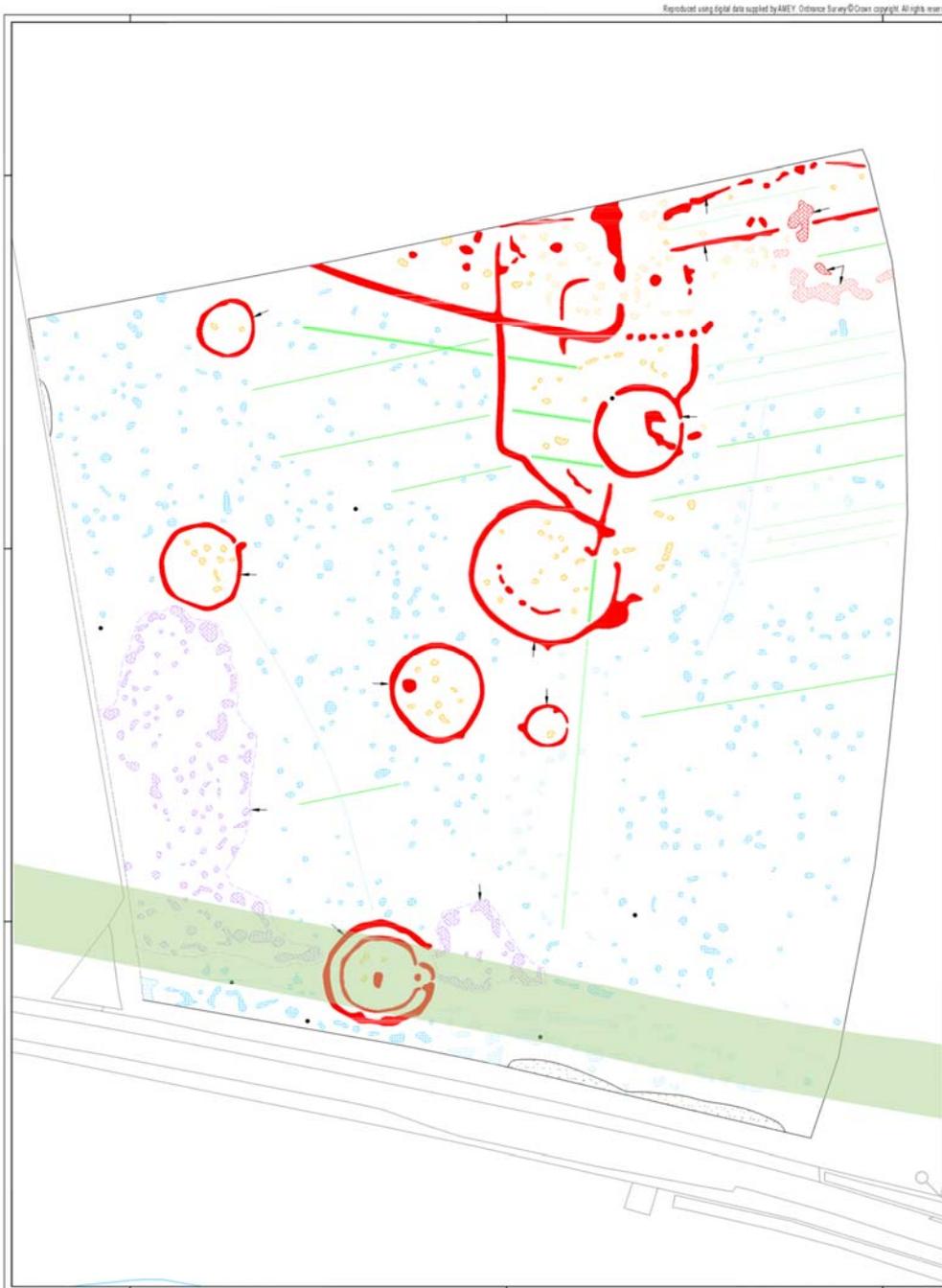


Figure 9 – The A47 Routed over the Southern Barrow

### 7.2.3 Bridging over the Southern Barrow

The southern barrow has a diameter of 27m according to the Headland report. It would be possible to bridge across this area, leaving the barrow completely untouched. Although such a bridge is expensive,

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it would still leave the northern route considerably lower in price than the southern option. This solution has been used at other locations. The plan layout for this is the same as in Figure 9.

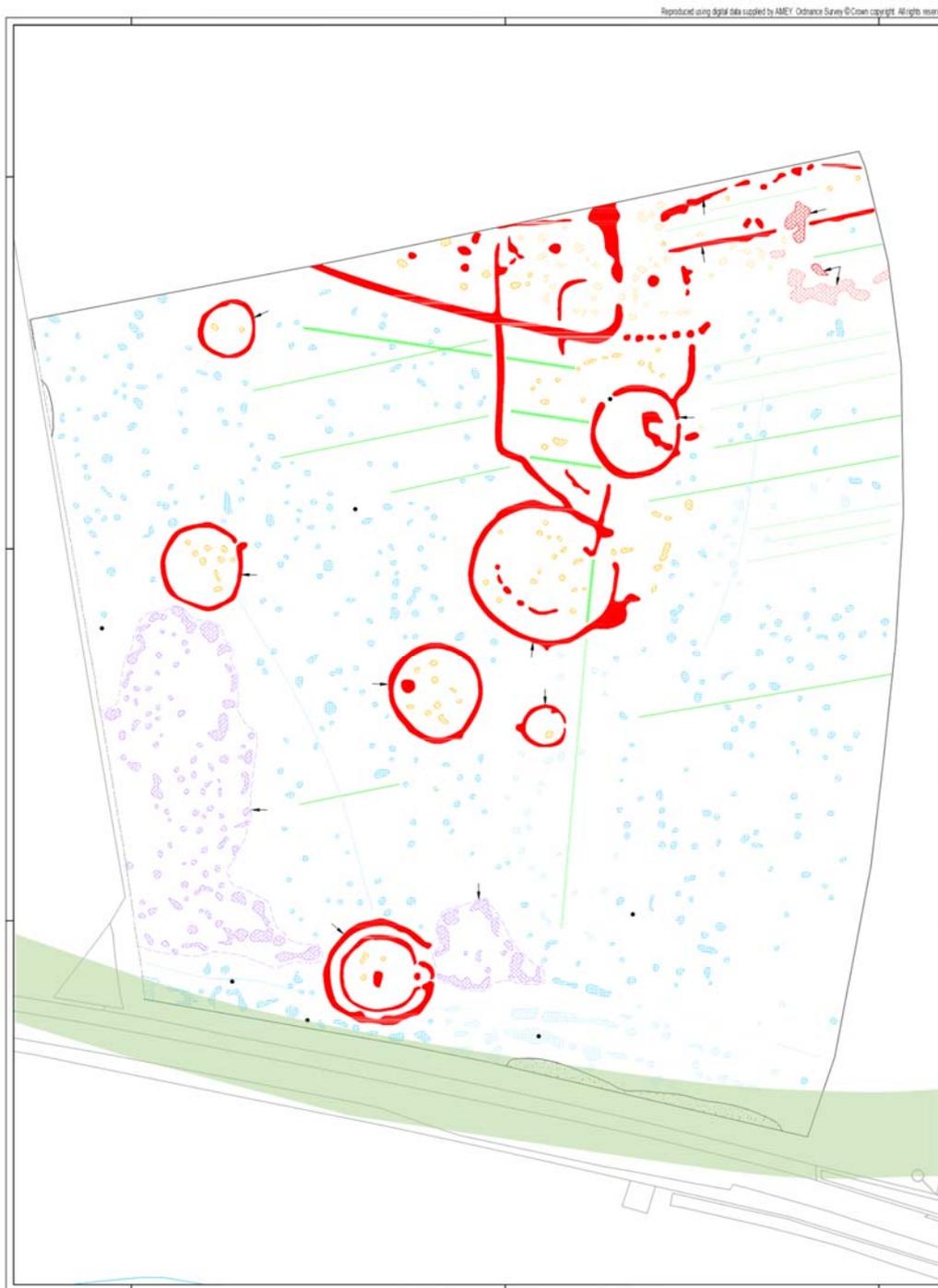


Figure 10 – Passing to the south of the barrows

### 7.2.4 Passing Through the Southern Corners of the Scheduled Monument

The fourth option would be to build the road across the south west corner of the Scheduled Monument, passing approximately 10m south of the southern barrow and then re-entering the area and cutting across the south east corner. This leaves all the barrows intact. The only areas of the Scheduled Monument

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being covered are those which have been quarried in more recent times. This option, whilst enabling the northern route to be adopted to the east of the monument, fails to overcome concerns about the impact on the Nene Valley and the difficulty of providing a continuous parallel cycling/walking/horse riding route. It is shown in figure 10,

### **7.2.5 Passing Close to the Southern Boundary of the Scheduled Monument**

This option is similar to that shown in Figure 10 except with the road moved south to avoid impinging on the actual footprint of the Scheduled Monument. This pushes the new road further into the river valley, with all the complications described above, but would still allow the use of the northern alignment east of the Scheduled Monument.

## **8 Conclusions**

It is clear that the use of the northern route for the A47 Wansford to Sutton Dualling saves a great deal of money when compared with the southern route and avoids the permanent destruction of the ecology and landscape of the Nene valley. It also avoids substantial geotechnical risks in the construction of the road.

Using the northern route will impact the Scheduled Monument but it seems possible to build the road without touching any of the features for which the site is listed. This does not appear to represent substantial damage to the site.

The issue is where the balance between these options lies. In the view of the two parish councils and the local residents, a northern route minimizing impacts on the Scheduled Monument is the preferred option.

To take this forward, the section of the Scheduled Monument in the proposed road alignment should be investigated in more detail to check that nothing of significance will be damaged. These investigations should be undertaken by Highways England to unlock a potential saving of approximately £6 million on the project cost.