

Proposed Motorway Service Area at Ongers Farm, Brookthorpe

The majority of the Special Landscape Area south of Gloucester that lies to the North West of Upton Lane lies within the bounds of Brookthorpe-with-Whaddon Parish, as does part of the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty that lies to the south east of Upton Lane. Over many years, this Parish Council has fought hard for the preservation of this beautiful area.

Fifteen years ago, there was a proposal by Road Chef to build a Motorway Service Area on land at Ongers Farm, Brookthorpe. Once again, with strong backing from the local inhabitants, the Parish Council fought the proposal. It was turned down by Stroud District Council, but it went to Appeal. The Inspector, Mr. R. Boyland, rejected it, saying that "the proposed MSA would harm the character and appearance of the surrounding countryside, and that such harm is not outweighed by the needs of motorists for an MSA on this site." Again, the beauty of the area was preserved.

In 2005 we were faced with an almost exact repeat of the 1994 proposal for an MSA, again at Ongers Farm, though this time it was disguised as an 'Eco friendly MSA' that was going to save a third of all sleep related accidents on the M5 between Strensham and Michael Wood, it "would provide up to 200 jobs" and "raise £1 million per year for Charity", all designed of course to appeal to one's better nature. In fact, little had changed since the last application, and it would desecrate the area between Robinswood Hill and the Cotswold escarpment. Apart from all the restaurant, shopping and toilet facilities, there would have been a filling station and parking for 200 cars and 100 lorries on each side. The site would have occupied just over 80 acres - some 55 football pitches - and would have been a continual source of noise and exhaust fumes, with severe light pollution at night. Upton Lane, already made dangerous by excessive traffic, was to be the only access to both sides of the M5. Partly because of almost unanimous opposition, the Application was not submitted to Stroud D.C.

We are now faced with a third Proposal to build an MSA on the same site, this time backed by Westmorland Limited, the owners of Tebay Services on the M6 in Cumbria. The Proposers have retained Pegasus Planning Group to oversee the project. Little has changed from the previous Proposals, except that this time they are promoting the 'environmental benefits' of the overall design. They have also increased the number of jobs they expect to provide from 200 to 300, and they claim that they will give £10 million to local Charities over a period of 20 years. Prior to taking any action, Brookthorpe-with-Whaddon Parish Council conducted a plebiscite in the two villages. 11 people voted in favour, 6 were undecided and 174 voted against the Proposal. On the basis of this result, the Parish Council are instructing a professional group of consultants to advise and work on their behalf in helping to defeat the anticipated forthcoming planning application.

We are told that a full Planning Application will be made to Stroud District Council some time in early December, when full details will be known and local and national objections can be registered with the Council.