

# **Military Road Current Assessment March 2024**

## **Assessment of Transport Impacts**

### **1.0 Purpose**

1.1 This paper sets out the historical / strategic context of Military Road (A3055); a strategic assessment of the long-term transport impacts of the closure of a severance of the A3055 through route from Brook to Freshwater Bay, and review of alternative routes.

### **2.0 Background**

#### **History of the Road**

2.1 The A3055 Military Road is situated on the south western coast of the Island and links Freshwater Bay in the west with Chale in the east. The original road was constructed as part of a defence network in about 1860 and remained as a private gated road for about 70 years. It served as a link between forts and barracks and fluctuated between private and military use with private rights vested in the Seely family.

2.2 In 1930 or thereabouts, the landowner Sir Charles Seely donated what was then a narrow track to the Highways authority for public use. The track was vulnerable to erosion and a new road was constructed further inland. Some vestiges of the original alignment are still visible along the coast from Shippards Chine to the north west of the slumped area. The construction of the new road took place in the early 1930 with the formal opening of the last section in March 1936.

2.3 This area of coastline is constantly changing. The sedimentary nature of the rocks and effects of the sea, have had a dramatic impact on the land and man made features in this area. A number of coastal properties, together with hectares of farmland and amenities have been lost over time and the Blackgang Chine pleasure park has been undergoing a lengthy and planned retreat over a number of years.

2.4 The ongoing erosion has also had an impact on roads in the area and the road constructed in 1936 was unable to follow the original route and had to be moved generally further inland and at a higher level due to land loss and ongoing erosion and landslip.

2.5 The council has been aware of these issues for some while and in the mid 1980s sought to divert the road inland at Afton Down so as to avoid an area of deep seated cracking and potential slippage. The planning application submitted in 1985 involved the excavation of a new cutting further up-slope through the downland owned by the National Trust.

2.6 The land in the area is of international environmental significance and the National Trust was not prepared to sell their land and at that time opposed the scheme at the public inquiry. The Inspector considered the proposal and recommended that planning permission for the realignment should not be granted.

2.7 The council subsequently commissioned engineering / geological consultants to review the situation and their report of January 2000 identified three areas of immediate concern. They were:

- Two sections on the elevated section east of Freshwater Bay, between the bay and Compton Chine. One approximately 100 metres long whilst the lower section to the east was approximately 150 metres in length.
- The section at Shippards Chine, just north of the National Trust car park.
- Adjacent to Brook Bay between the National Trust car park and Hanover Point.

2.8 The council acted on the recommendations of that report and submitted a planning application to stabilise the elevated section and reconstruct the road on the original alignment, plus realign the road just north of Shippards Chine.

2.9 The planning application was approved in December 2002 subject to 23 detailed conditions, on the basis that the piled elevated section shall be “dismantled and removed” following its failure or after 50 years from the completion of the works, whichever ever occurs first.

2.10 It was this factor that swayed the decision which was only considered acceptable in that that “it would have a relatively short-term impact on the candidate Special Area of Conservation, thereby not being contrary to the conservation objectives of the designated area and in accordance with Policy C9 of the IW Unitary Development Plan”.

2.11 The works were carried out in 2003 at a cost of some £3m. This approval was given subject to a legal agreement between the council and National Trust which requires that, even if still intact and open to traffic, at the end of 50 years from approval the road will have to be closed and the piles removed at a cost to the council. It would be unlikely that the council would be able to successfully challenge this condition, in effect bringing about the closure of the Military Road as a through route in 2053.

### **Ongoing Erosion**

2.12 Erosion is a growing problem at locations all along the western end of the military road, to such an extent that several key sections are now of real concern. There are a number of deep longitudinal fissures which run alongside the high level section of the road at Afton Down. Considerable sums were spent underpinning this section of the road and whilst the planning consent ultimately limits its life to another 29 years, premature failure here would effectively close the road and serves to highlight the fragility and uncertainty of the whole route.

2.13 The coastline at Shippards Chine is also under threat and despite comparatively recent works to realign the road locally and drain the area as part of the above project. The drainage system which was constructed to take away excess water dramatically failed, the land in the area continues to slump with the result that the road here is under threat again.

2.15 Single lane working was introduced between Brook Bay and Hanover Point in February 2010 so as to move traffic away from the encroaching cliff edge. Following consideration of the options informed by public consultation in October 2010 Cabinet resolved to retain the road on its current alignment for as long as is possible by intercepting groundwater from the adjoining land. A drainage system was installed which was successful in reducing the rate of erosion and the full width of the road reopened to traffic although the area continues to recede and retaining the current alignment is not tenable

### 3.0 Policy Context:

3.1 Much of the Military Road, including the three areas in question is subject to a number of important national local environmental designations. The entire area falls within the Area of Outstanding Natural beauty (AONB) and Heritage Coast. The coastal strip is designated a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) a European designation under the Habitats Directive. Land between Brook Bay and Hanover Point and some sections north of the road are also designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). There are also a number of individual Sites of Importance Nature Conservation (SINC) in the area.

3.2 The future of the Island coast is considered in the Island's Shoreline Management Plan (SMP). This document provides a broad assessment of the long-term risks associated with coastal processes. It offers guidance to coastal engineers and managers to identify and recommend strategic and sustainable coastal defence policy options for particular lengths of coast to reduce these risks to people, the developed and natural environments.

3.3 The SMP is an important part of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) strategy for flood and coastal defence. It has taken account of existing planning initiatives and legislative requirements and uses the best present knowledge on the possible effects of climate change and sea level rise. The plan informs and is supported by the statutory planning process.

3.4 The SMP is a 'living' document and as well as being used by us as a decision making tool it is also used by a range of other organisations such as Environment Agency and Natural England to consider the planning and implementation of sea defences and other maritime works. It is also used by Defra when considering applications from the operating authorities to fund various coastal defence works.

3.6 Under the SMP the coastline of the Island has been subdivided into discrete "policy units", which are based on natural sediment movements and coastal processes as opposed to administrative or other boundaries. For each policy unit four coastal defence options are considered. These are set out below:

Policy	Comment
Hold the line	Maintain or upgrade level of protection by defences
Advance the line	Build new defences seaward of existing defences
Manage realignment	Allowing retreat of shoreline with management to control or limit movement

No active intervention	Not to invest in providing or maintaining defences
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3.7 The south west coast of the Island falls under three policy units: Compton Chine to Freshwater Bay, Brook Chine to Compton Chine and St Catherine's Chine to Brook Chine. In each of these locations the SMP takes into consideration the location and use of the Military Road, proximity to the cliff edge and the effects of erosion, impact on the road and areas of nature conservation interest. It acknowledges the possibility of relocating the road inland, but recognises that the impact on the SAC, SSSI and other nature conservation / habitats would be "environmentally unacceptable". The SMP strategy for this area is therefore to do nothing – no active intervention.

#### 4.0 Strategic Assessment

4.1 Although classified as an A road the Military Road does not link any major settlements and even by Island standards is lightly trafficked. Traffic use is monitored across the road network and historic surveys show that the number of vehicles using the road between Niton and Freshwater Bay approaches 2500 vehicles per day.

4.2 The distribution size and demographic make up of the settlements in the West Wight is such that historic traffic flows are generally lower than those experienced elsewhere on the Island. Historically the main road between Newport and Yarmouth (A3054) with its cross Solent ferry port has carried on average 6000 vehicles per day while the B3399, which links Chale to Chessell and then onto Freshwater, carries in the region of 3000 vehicles per day on the Newport Road section, near Tapnell Cottages. The "middle road" B3401 which links Carisbrooke and Newport to Chessell carries in the region of 4,500 vehicles per day.

4.3 By comparison during the same period the number of vehicles using Medina Way, is in the region of 30,000 vehicles per day and Fairlee Road 19,500 vehicles per day.

4.4 There is a belief therefore that the majority of the traffic using the Military Road does so because it is there – for the views or access to the coast and beaches, rather than as a strategic link between settlements. This idea is underlined by the historic representations received from Brighstone Parish Council and recorded in the local press and elsewhere. Our traffic data reinforces the seasonal nature of this and shows an increase in weekend flows and large seasonal variations, something which our strategic network does not experience elsewhere.

4.5 In view of the issues relating to funding, land designation / protection and ownership the pragmatic alternative is to terminate the existing road at an appropriate point and create turning point and improve car parking as required. The creation of an alternative cycleway / footpath through the upgrading of the remaining verge or improvements to the existing rights of way network would help to maintain the coastal path and cycle route.

4.6 The signing of cross-Island traffic would be revised so as to divert traffic away from this area onto alternative roads such as the A3054, Newport to West Wight road and B3401 "middle road" Newport to West Wight route. Any remaining local traffic would be diverted inland and onto the middle road from junctions at Chale, Brighstone, Brook and Freshwater Bay.

4.7 Traffic figures would indicate that the possible inland diversion route through Brook is operating at a fraction of its capacity and is more than sufficient to carry the additional traffic flows which would result from a diversion of the Military Road traffic.

4.8 In terms of the safety and traffic speed on the inland route, there is no reason to assume that there would be any greater risk of accidents on this route than on any of the island's other roads. It is considered that speed limits already in place are appropriate and the council has no reason to assume that those would not be respected by motorists.

4.9 Whilst there is scope to make capacity improvements to the key junctions on the local diversion route:

- Military Road / Brook Village Road (A3055 / B3399)
- Brook Village Road / Brighstone Road (B3399)
- Brighstone Road / Middle Road (B3399)
- Middle Road / Afton Road (B3399 / A3055)

These junctions currently meet the relevant design standard and further improvement is not necessary for either safety or capacity; please see appendix 1 for the relevant assessments.

4.9 Similarly there would be no need to introduce additional parking restrictions to ensure adequate capacity, which is a particular local concern in Brook Village, although occasionally people would have to give way to those travelling in the opposite direction if parked vehicles were encountered.

4.10 As with any planned change to traffic routes, the council would monitor speeds, traffic flows and accident rates carefully in Brook village where there are a number of individual private accesses with restricted visibility and along the whole route and make whatever interventions are thought necessary to ensure that the route continued to operate