

THIRD READING BRIDGE – LATEST NEWS AND MAP *Cllr David Bartholomew*

I promised residents I would keep them up to date with the unfolding saga of the proposed 'Third Reading Bridge' – and here's the latest news. Of particular interest is the detailed map I have obtained of the proposed route, and this is shown below.

To recap, for many years various Berkshire councils and enterprise groups have been campaigning vigorously for a new Thames crossing known as the 'Third Reading Bridge'. The bridge would link the end of the A329(M) in Berkshire to the junction where Caversham Park Road meets the A4155 (the main road between Henley and Reading). Some of the scheme's ardent supporters suggest the four-lane super-bridge would take 55,000 cars a day out of the centre of Reading (and I think we know where they would go!). Understandably, the enthusiasm of the scheme promoters is not shared by many Oxfordshire residents who are concerned about the large amount of extra traffic that would be deposited on to rural roads. Looking at the map, you will see that once cars and lorries come across the bridge they will have two choices when travelling north: either via the A4155 through Shiplake, then the already heavily congested streets of Henley; or up Caversham Park Road to the B481 where they would travel through Sonning Common, Rotherfield Peppard and Highmoor on their way to the M40 or Oxford. Remember, HGVs are not allowed over Sonning Bridge, but no such restriction is likely to apply to the new bridge.

Historically, both Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) and South Oxfordshire District Council have shared residents' concerns, but both councils last year agreed to contribute funds to what was initially publicised as a traffic modelling study. It was only recently I learned that this study was to be just a part of what is known as a 'Strategic Outline Business Case' (SOBC) proposal. This led me to raise questions about the matter with the OCC Cabinet and in Full Council. OCC has now made it clear to the other partners in the SOBC that the council, by helping to fund this work, is not inherently supporting the scheme and will await the results before taking a position on whether to support a full business case submission for funding. This decision process will also involve further consultation with the communities the scheme could impact upon. An initial report is due this autumn – again, I will keep you updated.

Residents must not underestimate the enormous will of the Berkshire parties behind this scheme and should be aware that the bridge would not only bring traffic, but might also put pressure on Oxfordshire's land to help fulfil Reading's housing needs.

