

"The decision announced recently in the new Highways programme to dual the A421/428 from Caxton Gibbet towards Black Cat, and improve Black Cat, includes a commitment to start on such work within the next five years. This work is at a very preliminary stage indeed.

But the junction between the A428/421 will be the major junction within our region between N/S and E/W roads. The Black Cat grade separation is a major undertaking, effectively sealing the route of the A1 at that point for the foreseeable future. The Highways Agency is therefore taking the opportunity to consider the outstanding issues surrounding the A1 to the south, which includes the squeeze point issues south of my constituency and the roundabouts within it through Biggleswade and Sandy. That's all at this stage. There is no commitment for anything more specific, nor any timescale, nor budget.

It seems to me that it was inevitable this would be looked at again, but I did not know when. Looking again at the line of the A1 is not my decision or suggestion. It is a subject I have never pressed with the Government or the Highways Agency. I have always assumed that, apart from needing to do something about the Black Cat with some urgency, which I have pressed and believed should be done, there was no money for upgrading the A1 as a whole and other roads within the region had some priority.

I have not joined Mr Djanogly in his consultation or petition as I am more than aware that this is not a consensual issue within my constituency. But I know, and quite understand, some in Sandy would support a realignment away from the town, which is split currently by the A1. Public pressure for this until recently has been slight over my fourteen years. I am aware that current events will re-kindle it. I have never had any pressure from northern areas to re-examine the issue, for obvious reasons.

With the increased usage of the A1, and the certainty that this will increase, I think that the roundabouts must one day go, and it has obviously gradually risen up the agenda. I certainly favour any opportunity to remove those roundabouts, and also to examine what currently prevents the A1 being the major artery it must be. But I have not expressed any view on any route, as absolutely nothing is currently being proposed, and I have been careful at any public

meeting to say that the issue is bound to have differing views within my constituency.

My job is to seek the best for all my constituents, and see what can be agreed which suits all of them as best as possible. It is not impossible that the A1 will present such a chance, but we just don't know. I see no reason why all available routes should not be considered, and certainly I would want one, if it is to happen, with as least disruption as possible.

I know from speaking to the HA last week that they are not even at square one on this, and would have nothing to say to us at present. What might be best is that I offer the chance to them to address a meeting of parish council chairs at some stage when they have some idea about how this will be carried forward, timescales etc. I will obviously press for this to be as soon as possible."