

A21 Lamberhurst Bypass Opening

The Foreword



[Pierce Barn Bridge]

Today's opening of the A21 Bypass marks the completion of a major road scheme to remove traffic congestion from the centre of Lamberhurst.

The new Bypass brings much needed relief from heavy traffic through the village, benefiting not only village residents but also longer distance drivers.

Building a new road through the sensitive landscape of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty was always going to be a challenge. With the help of our partners in the design and construction of the Bypass, and support from the numerous elected and non-elected representatives of the local community we have endeavoured to meet that challenge.

The scheme is distinguished by a unique feature, and a first for the Highways Agency, with the construction of the "land bridge" over the new Bypass. The land bridge, which will be planted with trees in sympathy with the natural environment, will maintain the historic access to the National Trust's Scotney Castle Gardens and Park for future generations and provide a safe corridor for wildlife across the Bypass.

On behalf of the Highways Agency, I hope that the new Bypass will be a catalyst to improving the environment in the centre of the village and the quality of life for residents, and thank the local community for their support in helping the Agency and its contractors to make this new Bypass a reality.

Archie Robertson, Chief Executive

History

Lamberhurst is in the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and is a Kent County Council designated Special Landscape Area (SLA). Much of the village is a conservation area.

The A21 in the Lamberhurst area forms an important part of the local road network acting as a north-south distributor road between Tonbridge, Tunbridge Wells and Hastings. North of the village, it links with the A262 eastwards to Goudhurst and Tenterden and the B2162 northwards to Horsmonden and Maidstone. South of the village it links with the B2169 westwards to Tunbridge Wells and the B2100 southwards to Wadhurst.

Several alternative options for a Bypass round Lamberhurst were considered and in 1988 two schemes were put forward at public consultation from which a preferred route was selected. The design of this preferred route was worked up to a stage where, in summer 1992, the necessary Orders under the Highways Act were published. At the same time, an exhibition was held in the village to explain the details of the scheme.

The proposals for the Bypass were approved following a Public Inquiry in December 1992.

The scheme was included in the Weald and Downland Design, Build, Finance and Operate project but this was cancelled in 1997. Following this the scheme was reassessed in the Government's 1997 Roads Review and subsequently included in the Targeted Programme of Improvements with award of contract scheduled for the financial year 2001/02.

Detailed design and discussions with affected landowners started at the beginning of 2000. In these discussions the National Trust asked if further mitigation of the impact of the Bypass on their Scotney Castle Gardens and Park could be provided by a "land bridge" over the Bypass to maintain their historic access which would be severed by the Bypass.

A land bridge is wider than a normal bridge with small trees and shrubs planted on each side of the drive across the bridge, not only to maintain the character of the historic access to Scotney Castle, but also to provide a corridor over the Bypass for wildlife.

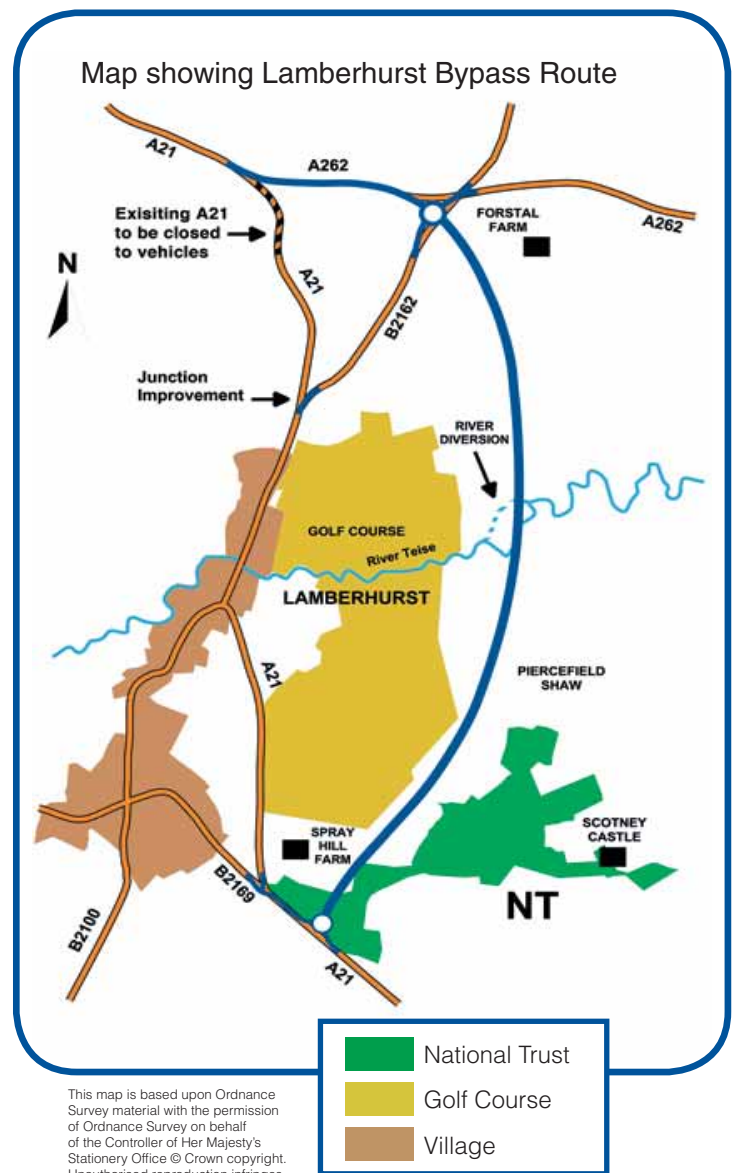
Following a feasibility study, detailed proposals for the land bridge were published in October 2002 and a second Public Inquiry was held between April and June 2002.

The Inquiry report, approving the land bridge, was published in November 2002 and the "design and build" contract for construction of the Bypass was awarded to May Gurney in March 2003. Construction began in June 2003.

Description of the new Bypass

The Bypass starts to the north of the village at the junction of the existing A21 and the A262, Goudhurst Road. The existing single carriageway A262 has been widened for a distance of 500 metres between this junction and that of the A262 and the B2162, Horsmonden Road, where a new roundabout has been constructed.

From the new roundabout the dual carriageway Bypass heads south in a gentle curve skirting the golf course to the east of the village, crossing the River Teise valley.



The gradient of the Bypass falls sharply on the approach to the River where a new bridge has been constructed across a diverted section of the river.

After crossing the river the Bypass continues southwards passing under a new bridge, provided to maintain access to farm fields and a residential property at Pierce Barn, before rising up Spray Hill through a cutting up to 16 metres at its deepest. Through the cutting the Bypass is aligned to minimise the effect of a notch on the skyline when viewed from St Mary's Church and the village.

Passing under the land bridge just beyond the crest of Spray Hill, the Bypass rejoins the existing A21 at a new roundabout some 200 metres south of the entrance to Scotney Castle.

CONTRACT STATISTICS	
Length of scheme	Single carriageway - 0.7km (about ½ mile) Dual carriageway - 2.5km (about 1 ½ miles)
Excavated material	331,718 m3 - (283,261m3 re-used in the works)
Volume of structural concrete	2,917 m3
Tonnage of steel reinforcement	655 tonnes
Tonnage of structural steelwork	12 tonnes
Area of carriageway surfacing	59,000 m2
Area of footpath / cycleway / bridleways	2250 m2
Number of trees to be planted	About 50,000

New combined footways and cycleways have been provided alongside the widened section of the A262 and adjacent to both roundabouts. The numerous public footpaths that cross the river valley have been diverted under or over the new bridges and new paths have been constructed to link otherwise severed footpaths. The old A21 from its junction with the A262 to Grantham Hall Farm will be closed to traffic shortly after the Bypass is open and a new bridleway will be provided along this length.

Environment

The Bypass passes through an area of very high landscape value, designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The Highways Agency is committed to reducing the impact of new road schemes on the environment and especially on an area as attractive as that around Lamberhurst.

Therefore, the alignment of the Bypass has been chosen to minimise the impact on views from the village and to be as low as possible across the river valley. Construction includes landscape features to help to integrate the new road into the surrounding countryside as much as possible. Earth mounds have been built alongside the Bypass to screen it from prominent view points such as St Mary’s Church. Where possible slopes of the mounds have been rounded to help further integration into the rolling form of the existing landscape and planting on the slopes, including

native trees, wildflowers and grassland, has already begun.

Ecology

The area through which the Bypass passes is a valuable ecological resource being the home to dormice, badgers, great crested newts, roosting bats, nesting birds and grass snakes, all of which are protected by legislation. Under the supervision of licensed specialists, site clearance and ecological mitigation was carried out before the start of the main Bypass works. This included trapping and relocating protected species and encouraging them to move away naturally as a result of the removal of trees and shrubs which provide their home and food source.

Dormice live mainly in the branches of low trees and shrubs and are reluctant to travel across open spaces or along the ground. Nesting boxes were put up prior to their hibernation and over 50 animals were moved away from the route of the Bypass. Monitoring of the dormice population has continued and of the 101 animals found in adjacent woodlands during construction, 46 had been born since relocation indicating the success of the relocation.

Five species of bat have been found in the area. Great care was taken during site clearance to inspect trees for roosting holes prior to felling and bat boxes have been put up to replace lost roosting sites.

The numerous ponds in the area are home to great crested newts. Before the start of construction temporary low plastic fences were erected on each side of the Bypass corridor to exclude newts and grass snakes. Those trapped inside the fences were relocated. New ponds have been created to replace newt habitats lost in construction of the Bypass.

To help prevent small wildlife populations becoming isolated and dying out due to disease or in-breeding a number of small diameter tunnels have been constructed under the Bypass. The land bridge at the southern end of the Bypass also provides a wildlife corridor, not only for terrestrial species but also for bats which navigate by following the line of trees and shrubs. To prevent animals getting onto the Bypass wire mesh has been fixed to the boundary fences and the temporary newt fencing has been replaced by a permanent less obtrusive half sunken semi circular barrier.

Archaeology

Before the start of construction the remains of an old quarry, believed to be ironstone workings, were examined and recorded in the Ruffets woodland. An important part of Kent's heritage in the form of two hop pickers huts on the line of the Bypass was examined and recorded prior to demolition.

Throughout construction there was an archaeological "watching brief". In the early stages, findings of small pieces of medieval pottery on Spray Hill led to an extensive investigation which uncovered evidence of 13th century small scale metal working. Slag found on the site suggests that iron produced from the local ironstone was not very pure but nevertheless could have been used for nails, horseshoes, arrowheads and small agricultural implements.

Highways Agency working in partnership with:

May Gurney - Main Contractor

URS - Contractor's Designer

WSP - Highways Agency's Site Representative

Driving through roadworks



If you do have to drive through roadworks, please take extra care.

- Keep to the speed limit – it's there for your safety
- Get into the correct lane in good time – don't keep switching
- Concentrate on the road ahead, not on the roadworks
- Be alert for works traffic leaving or entering roadworks
- Keep a safe distance – there could be queues in front
- Observe all signs – they're there to help you

Remember that tiredness can kill. Take regular breaks from driving.

For further information on the Highways Agency call our information line: 08457 50 40 30