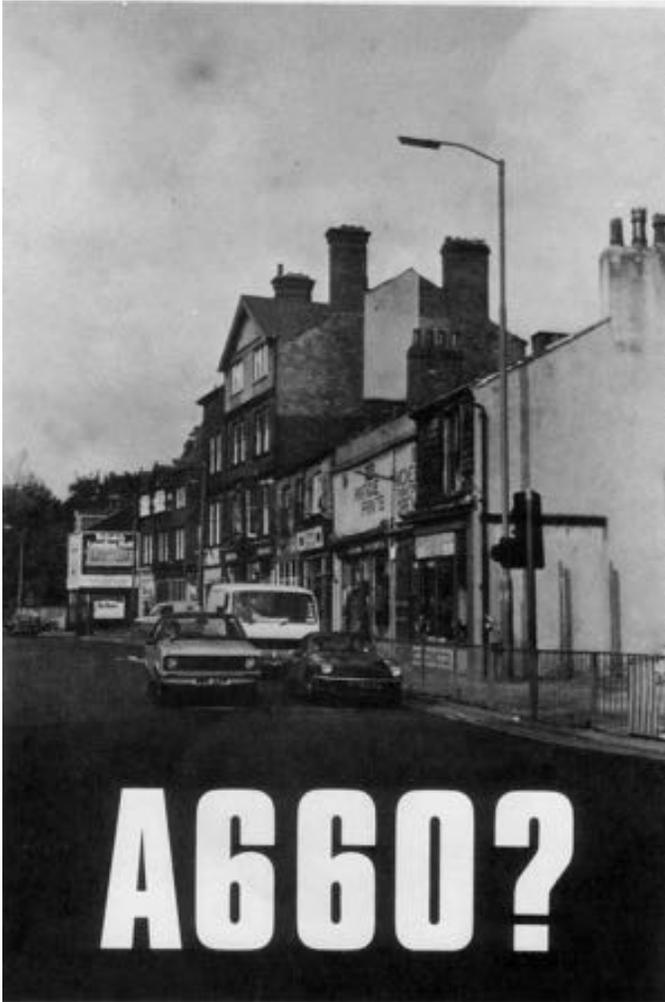


A660?



INTRODUCTION

a backlog of blight

For as long as anyone can remember, it seems, there has been talk of 'improving' the A660 route out of Leeds. The first proposal for a Headingley 'by-pass' was made over half a century ago and the idea has been revived periodically ever since. It is not many years since a multi-level interchange, a smaller version of Birmingham's notorious 'spaghetti junction.' was planned for the junction of Otley Road and Shaw Lane. Closer to the city centre, most of the buildings on the eastern side of Woodhouse Lane have been threatened with clearance at various times. In the mid 1960s it was planned that a greatly widened Woodhouse Lane would cut down every building between Woodhouse Moor and the Inner Ring Road. (Indeed, Blenheim Terrace would have been demolished and replaced by a University Vice-Chancellor's Lodge set in a wooded park!). Such were the dreams of a decade obsessed by expansion, growth and change, regardless of its human and social cost. In

the early 1970s Leeds prided itself on being the "Motorway City of the '70s" - as if the title were something to be proud of. Motorways carved up much of South Leeds, destroying whole communities. Throughout the city, once pleasant shopping streets, centres of local life, were re-fashioned as pure traffic arteries: North Street, Dewsbury Road, York Road and Kirkstall Road are examples. The wishes of the local population were not considered - traffic engineers ruled and the sole aim was to speed commuters to and from the city centre.

The West Yorkshire County Council has been the highway authority in Leeds since local government re-organisation in 1974. Changes in political control have not affected its unswerving devotion to the urban motorway. In recent months, the 'A660 corridor' issue, dormant for some time, has been revived. The County Council has spent a great deal of money on an elaborate consultation exercise. Glossy brochures have been distributed and a rather misleading exhibition shown at various places, the farthest, Otley, being some eight miles from any of the destruction which would be caused by the various proposals. The brochure offers the public a series of options (or 'themes'), ranging from minor changes to the existing road pattern (and the County's officers are not enthusiastic about this option) to a full-scale Headingley by-pass with corresponding 'improvements' for the car-borne commuter through Hyde Park to the Inner Ring Road. The A660 Joint Council exists to co-ordinate informed opposition to such plans. The Victorian Society (West Yorkshire Group) is represented on the Council and supports fully its view that these grandiose, costly and extremely dated proposals are neither desirable nor necessary.

Much of the discussion on the proposals will, inevitably, centre around the technical issues - such as the likely traffic growth in the next decade - and social issues - Should the inner-city and the inner suburbs be sacrificed for the convenience of outer suburban commuters? Is a five minute delay in getting through Headingley very serious? Is it worth spending £10M to remove such delays? This report does not attempt to answer such questions. It points out instead the destruction of the fabric of a much abused city which the County's proposals imply. This is not to say that buildings can be considered apart from people. The area which would suffer is one unique in Leeds, still largely intact, socially mixed, an area where many people like to live, in short, an area of truly human qualities in contrast to so much of the new Leeds created since 1945.

The apparently endless saga of the A660 has already brought blight to the buildings and land along the line of the road: decaying buildings opposite the University, empty or under-maintained houses in Headingley owned by the County, a grim strip of waste land behind the Headingley Arndale Centre which was the site of a recent brutal murder. In our view, the time has come to end the blight by deciding that the speed at which traffic moves is a less important matter than the quality of life for a considerable proportion of the people of Leeds. Leeds is no longer the "Motorway City of the '70s" and its future lies in conserving its heritage of pleasant streets and fine buildings.

WOODHOUSE LANE

a forgotten historic area

The destructive plans of twenty years ago which would have obliterated the fine early 19th century houses of Blenheim Terrace (now part of a Conservation Area) have long been abandoned. The terraces of decent brick houses off Blenheim Walk which would have been destroyed for the diverted Woodhouse Lane are now being rehabilitated by a housing association.

The expansion plans of the University of Leeds in the 1960s envisaged the demolition of every old building between Clarendon Road and Woodhouse Lane. Whatever one thinks of the post-war buildings of the University, it is the survival of older structures which makes the campus interesting. The University still has a proper townscape setting. The surviving buildings provide more than visual interest. The shops and pubs on Woodhouse Lane are intensively used by students and staff and some of these are seriously threatened by the road proposals. Leaving aside the 'do nothing' (theme 4) option, all the possible schemes involve the demolition of both the 'Eldon' and 'Pack Horse' pubs and surrounding buildings. The University's engineering buildings would look out on to a bleak expanse of new, impassable road - not that there would be much incentive to cross the road.

Maurice Beresford's fascinating Walks around Red Brick reveals that the area of Woodhouse Lane was a fashionable one in the 1820s and 1830s. The 'Eldon' was built in 1839 and later named the 'Cemetery Tavern,' whilst the 'Pack Horse' existed in the 1790s.

The present pub (recently cleaned) dates from the 1860s, an attractive design in brick with stone dressings and ornament (including the carved horse over the door). The interior, though shabby, is well-preserved, with its traditional room divisions still intact. It is a popular pub of tremendous character. The neglected shops between the two pubs also date from the 1830s - surviving shops of this period are very rare. They have great potential for refurbishment and indefinite life. Just behind the 'Eldon,' in St. Mark's Street (with its view of the 1820s Church of St. Mark), is the former 'Wesleyan Protestant Chapel' of 1829. This plain Classical building (closed for worship as long ago as 1917) housed a splinter group from Brunswick Chapel. Again, it is a building which could be put to profitable use but it stands rotting and empty. Kingston Terrace, begun in 1826, has been long neglected but the tall brick Georgian houses are truly elegant and one is now being carefully refurbished as an architect's residence. 'Theme 1' would cut off the end of Kingston Terrace and destroy the last remnant of the contemporary Eldon Terrace. (The 1890s Eldon Chapel, long disused, and the fine Eldon House, a Greek Revival house of the 1830s have conveniently already gone.) The sum effect of the road proposals would be to destroy the fragmentary remains of the area's elegant past. Surviving buildings could, in contrast, be repaired and could play a part in the revival of the area. As it is, they will all (including the celebrated 'Sweat's' fish and chip shop) be sorely missed as local amenities.

At the corner of Woodhouse Moor and Raglan Road, a substantial group of mid-Victorian brick shops would be destroyed by all the possible schemes: again the result would be a loss of amenity in every sense of the word. Just as serious would be the loss of trees on Woodhouse Moor brought about by road widening.





UNDER THREAT

the city's first public park

Woodhouse Moor was an ancient common, owned by the lords of the manor of Leeds, where local people had grazing rights. It became a place of recreation too - the 'lungs of Leeds' - and when threatened with enclosure and possible sale for housing development it was acquired by the city. In 1857 it became Leeds' first public park. For more than fifteen years little was done to improve the Moor: it remained a rather bare expanse, being described in 1870 as 'a standing disgrace to Leeds, being little more than a quagmire

desecrated by all the diseased cattle in the town.' Soon after, serious planting began, so that the Moor became a proper park.

Woodhouse Moor is threatened by the A660 scheme in several ways. Widening of Woodhouse Lane near Raglan Road is a common feature of all possible options: dozens of trees would be felled. Closer to Hyde Park Corner, more trees would be lost to further widening and the open space of the Moor invaded by roads. One serious proposal is to build a new road link between Woodhouse Street and Hyde Park Road across part of the Moor. A triangle of land between Hyde Park Road and Woodhouse Lane would be left stranded, islanded by roads. The tennis courts would be mostly under the road . . .

It has been argued by the County that this latter proposal would allow pedestrianisation of the shopping centre at Hyde Park. That is, that short stretches of road on Hyde Park Road and Woodhouse Street would be closed to vehicles. But the problems in crossing these roads are not nearly so great as crossing the A660. The problems of Hyde Park as a shopping centre arise from heavy traffic passing along Headingley Lane/ Woodhouse Lane - and this would continue. As at Woodhouse, the various alternatives put forward offer no hope of anything but worse condition for local people. Encouraging more traffic to use the A660 and enabling the traffic to travel faster, in fact, make these conditions much worse than ever.

HEADINGLEY

wrecking the classic suburb

Headingley is Leeds' classic Victorian suburb. In 1834 it was claimed that

'in no village in Leeds except Chapeltown are the effects of the prosperity of Leeds more visible. Numerous mansions and elegant villas have been built by those whose commercial enterprise or manufacturing industry have elevated their families to opulence.'

Some of the first houses were built on Headingley Hill. One of these was Ashwood, the Tudor Gothic birthplace of the Poet Laureate Alfred Austin, built in 1836. The Greek style Rose Court dates from 1840, built for a wealthy banker. There were old village centres around St. Michael's Church and at Far Headingley. The steady development of new houses,

both villas and terraces, throughout the century made Headingley into a comfortable middle-class suburb. The population in 1851 was 6,000; in 1881, 19,000. Towards the end of the century large numbers of cheaper red brick terraces were built, particularly in South Headingley.

Headingley has suffered from bad modern development (for example, the 1960s Arndale Centre) but its character is remarkably intact. It is a varied character, ranging from the tree-lined streets of Headingley Hill, some still recalling the scenes painted by Atkinson Grimshaw, to the random village character of Far Headingley and even the streamlined 1930s houses of Grove Lane. All this is now in a Conservation Area (and there are strong arguments for extending this area to include some of the streets around Hyde Park, (for example, Woodhouse Cliff). Headingley has many listed buildings and, on the whole, they are well maintained and used. The area is prosperous and much admired. Derek Linstrum wrote in his classic West Yorkshire:



'it was (and still is in parts) a place of high stone walls, narrow ginnels, overhanging trees leaning out from private gardens - and silence.'



Of all the proposals which emanate from the County Council's present discussion document none, perhaps, is more objectionable than to widen Headingley Lane along virtually its entire length, providing four lanes of traffic. If carried out, this proposal would wreck one of the finest suburban townscapes in Northern England. Headingley Lane is closely bordered by stone walls (often very high) for most of its length - all those on the north-east side would need to be moved back some ten or twelve feet. In effect, they could not be properly rebuilt. Hundreds of trees would need to be felled, totally altering the appearance of the whole street. Headingley Terrace of 1845, its five houses all listed, is a prominent feature. Its setting would be seriously compromised by the advance of the road. The nearby Headingley Hill Chapel, a listed building and a major work of Cuthbert Brodrick (built 1864-66), would suffer similarly. The same destructive process would continue along Headingley Lane, slicing off the fine gardens which are so vital an element in the suburban scene. (The south-west side would be largely unaffected, though the shops near the junction with Victoria Road would all

be demolished). These plans would be questionable in any residential area. In the heart of the Headingley Conservation Area they seem iniquitous and quite unacceptable.

BY-PASS VARIATIONS

The continued popularity of the Headingley shopping centre (between St. Michael's Church and Shaw Lane) suggests that most people do not find the presence of through traffic there a serious discouragement. The shops on both sides of Otley Road thrive, so that it is not easy to find one vacant to rent. It has been suggested that, were a full-scale bypass built (as favoured by County officers), the shopping centre would be largely pedestrianised. It must be seriously questioned whether this would be desirable, given the high costs involved. The predominant impression would then be of a large area of empty road. The full-scale by-pass (as outlined in the County's 'theme 1') would be very destructive. The road (which might be single or dual carriageway) would cut across open pasture in front of the convent of the Little Sisters of the Poor. The quiet of Shire Oak Road would be destroyed.

The oldest building in the road is Headingley Hall which is, indeed, probably the oldest building in Headingley. It certainly existed in 1663 and in 1711 was said to be the largest house in Headingley. It was later in the possession of the Earls of Cardigan (Lord Cardigan stayed here in the 1820s) and the present appearance of the Hall suggests that it was extensively rebuilt in the early 19th century. Shire Oak Road became a prestigious residential street after 1885 when George Corson, the architect of the Grand Theatre, Municipal Buildings and much else in Leeds, developed it with large villas to his own design. Many of the houses were built in the present century and they include fine Edwardian examples by the partnership of Francis Bedford and Sydney Kitson. The road is a peaceful enclave, typical of the best of suburbia. One version of the by-pass would cross it at surface level, whilst another would throw a bridge across the road. In Wood Lane, number 6, an attractive late Victorian house would be demolished. In Alma Road, numbers 3-5, long allowed to remain in a scandalously derelict state, would be destroyed and this attractive road cut off from Otley Road. Near the junction of Shaw Lane and Otley Road, a whole group of buildings would disappear, including the Red Cross headquarters, a pair of stone-built semi-detached houses, and the shops at 46-54 Otley Road. This last

group was built as Melbourne Terrace, about 1870, a terrace of houses, but later converted to shops and the gardens paved over. They are attractive buildings, with at least one good shop front of about 1900 still in situ. The pleasant houses of Princes Grove would face the massive new junction, exposed to greatly increased noise and pollution. This terrace was built in the 1850s on land sold by the Earl of Cardigan. The new junction could

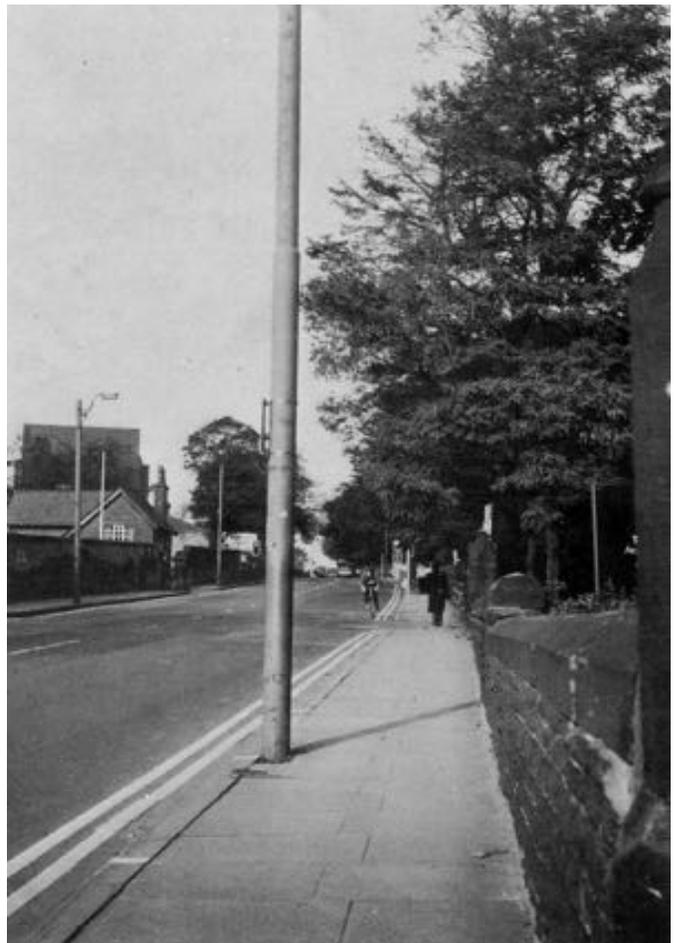




take one of several forms: all would mean the demolition of the properties at 75 -83A Otley Road, a fascinating group, largely Georgian in date and including cottages and farm buildings but somehow unlisted. These are buildings of great interest and potential use. Indeed a firm making kitchen furniture has recently opened a shop in part of the block. Behind this group are well-used allotments, a pleasant feature of the area, which would again disappear under at least one variant of the by-pass plan.

A possible alternative to the full-scale by-pass, with its high cost and considerable disruption, is the construction of a one-way by-pass along a shorter route (from St. Columba's Church to Wood Lane). There is nothing to be said for this scheme. The effect on Wood Lane and Shire Oak Road would remain damaging. Fast moving one-way traffic on Headingley Lane would make conditions worse for pedestrians. The listed 18th century Ivy Cottage (recently renovated) would be surrounded by roads, whilst the attractive lodge to Headingley Castle would be demolished. The setting of Headingley Castle, a Gothic house of the 1840s, would suffer in all these bypass schemes. Beyond the one-way by-pass, Otley Road would be widened. The Methodist Church (1845 and listed) would lose its fine gates and most of its garden. Nearby houses would lose parts of their gardens - the traffic would be brought closer to people's homes. Numbers 75 - 83A Otley Road would still be lost, though the shops across the road would survive under this scheme. Even those versions of 'improvement' which do not provide for a by-pass require the loss of the Georgian group and of nearby front gardens and open space to provide for road widening. None of the alternatives offered for Headingley in an attractive one. None is, in fact, designed to provide for local needs.

It has been claimed, with some justification, that none of the schemes would involve massive demolition (such has been the skill of the planners in protecting the sacred by-pass route over the years). Yet Headingley is, as most local people realise, a place notable for its quiet streets, gardens, trees and even for its oddities, as much as for fine buildings. It deserves to be left alone and protected from the erosion and destruction which the by-pass proposals would bring.



CONCLUSION

Many of the statements in the County Council's consultative document need to be questioned (for example: 'The A660 is busy throughout the day' - in truth, the A660 is subject to delays at peak periods in school terms). But there is a very great deal which the document chooses not to mention at all. It is written from the viewpoint of the outsider to the areas affected by the 'improvements.' The emphasis is placed firmly on the 'indisputable' need for action, regardless of its consequences. Even the myopic apologists of the County do not venture to suggest that their plans would bring any environmental improvements in Woodhouse. Serious efforts are made to convince the residents of Headingley of the need for and benefits of a by-pass, yet the arguments are unconvincing. On the basis of very unreliable predictions of future traffic growth, it is proposed to demolish buildings and destroy open spaces and gardens. The loss of community involved would be permanent, yet it is impossible to predict what might be the pattern of employment and traffic in Leeds in the 21st century. It is extremely unlikely that the boom in office employment which transformed the city in the 1960s and '70s will be repeated. The rapid advance of the micro-chip and the computer may make the office block as we know it redundant.

The fact that most of Headingley is a Conservation Area seems to have been disregarded by the County planners. At worst, their plans would cut Headingley in two. It is amazing that a major authority can be so oblivious to the cause of conservation. Neither can the seemingly inoffensive option contained in the County's 'theme 4' be accepted. The deliberate encouragement of increased traffic on Weetwood Lane and Church Road/Parkside Road, Meanwood, would be highly irresponsible. Neither of these routes is suitable for heavy traffic and the likely consequences of such an increase would be the eventual widening and straightening, at great cost, of what are now virtually country lanes. One of the delights of Leeds is that such lanes survive, so close to the city.

The desire of the road planner to make traffic flow more quickly has blinded them to all other considerations. The implication is that traffic flow is of prime importance. Such a sentiment would have been regarded as orthodox wisdom in the "Motorway City of the '70s." Yet Leeds has jettisoned that dated image. Tourist posters proclaim that Leeds is

'England's Northern Capital' - and they show not motorways but historic buildings. Leeds is more than a city of commuters and office blocks. It is an historic place where many people actually enjoy living. The 'A660 Corridor' themes show an active contempt of that fact. The County Council must think again.

Notes on the illustrations:

Front cover: a peaceful scene near Headingley Castle, under threat from the by-pass.

Page 2: Hyde Park Corner - there would be no real improvement for local people under any of the themes.

Page 3: upper left - the character of Headingley Lane comes from its trees and high stone walls, both threatened; lower left - the gates of Brodrick's Headingley Hill Chapel would be displaced by the widened road; upper right - one version of the by-pass would pass close to St. Columba's Church; lower right - another part of the by-pass route

Page 4: left - trees behind Wood Lane which would be felled; right - Headingley Terrace which could lose much of its setting if Headingley Lane is widened; lower right - the lodge to Headingley Castle would face demolition if the one-way by-pass scheme is implemented.

Page 5: left - Ivy Cottage would be surrounded by traffic; upper right - shops at Shaw Lane which would be demolished if the full-scale by-pass was built; lower right - Princes Grove, a surprisingly peaceful enclave which could be on the edge of a large roundabout.

Page 6: left - this large house in Wood Lane would be demolished for the by-pass; below - a typical mid-morning scene in Headingley Lane; traffic is no problem.

Acknowledgements: text and illustrations by the Victorian Society West Yorkshire Group; design and layout by the Leeds Civic Trust; printed by the Leeds Community Press.