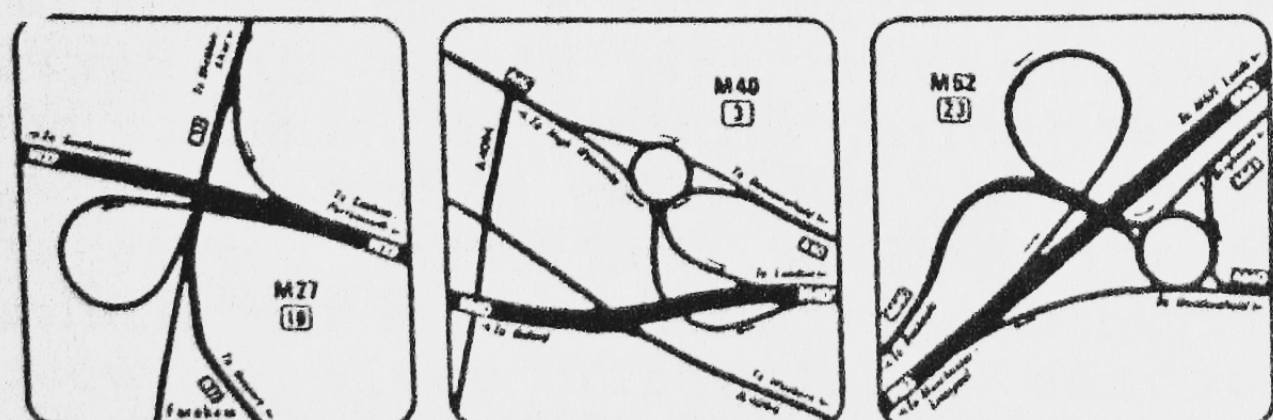


M40 What price the M40?

Almost 20 years after the first study was carried out on the feasibility of a motorway linking the Midlands with Oxford and London, work has finally begun on the construction of the M40 in Warwickshire.

There has been much talk about the effect of the Motorway from, on the one side, the developers who welcome the M40 as offering great potential for economic growth and the recovery of the Midlands from the recession. On the other side, concern is expressed by environmentalists about the visual impact, noise and pollution they fear it will create across what is undoubtedly one of the most attractive parts of the County. But what about the impact on the residents who live near the route of the Motorway?

The character of these towns and villages will certainly be affected to some degree. Settlements such as Henley in Arden, Shipston on Stour and Stratford upon Avon, which currently have huge volumes of traffic passing through them, should benefit from the diversion of much of this to the Motorway. However, people living in villages close to the junctions are worried about increasing traffic as people travel to and from the Motorway. As in Barford, for instance, where residents recently brought traffic to a stand still with a 300 strong demonstration to show their concern about the M40.



Until the Motorway is completed the effect of traffic flows is only speculation, whereas house prices in the area are already rising rapidly in anticipation of the M40. According to local estate agents inquiries are increasing from customers interested in second homes and holiday cottages. After the Motorway opens it is expected that people from the South East of England, used to commuting an hour or more to work, will be attracted by the relatively low (by London standards) house prices in Warwickshire.

Even now, local young people who have spent their lives in villages often cannot afford to become owner occupiers and in most villages there is little or no housing to rent. This means they may have no alternative but to move to urban areas for affordable housing.

If fewer young people are able to remain in villages and highly mobile people move into replace them, this will have an effect on the community as a whole; it is less likely to be able to support a school, and facilities such as shops or buses may become unviable.

People in South Warwickshire villages who do own their own homes may be welcoming the effect that the M40 is having on the value of their property. However, if thriving village communities are to be maintained, the problem of lack of accommodation within the price range of local people is an issue with which all rural people should be concerned.

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