**Councillor Mark Shaw
Bucks County Council
County Hall
Aylesbury**

**Bucks HP20 1UA**

**21 August 2017**

**Dear Cllr Shaw WITHOUT PREJUDICE**

**Subject - Proposed A4 Cycleway**

You will know from the number of times you have been asked to address a public meeting that many residents of Burnham & Taplow have major concerns about the above proposition.

Although not exhaustive, this letter comprises a compilation of many of the issues raised by locals which need to be answered and we the undersigned call upon Bucks County Council, and particularly you as Cabinet Member for Transport, to come to a public meeting to address these questions before any further commitment is made to spend any more taxpayers money on this dangerous and wasteful project.

- Does BCC agree that the implementation of its policies should be evidence-based, and that it should never implement any change to its infrastructure without giving careful consideration to the need, benefit and detriment in the broader context?

- Surveys in October 2016 indicated a low demand by commuting cyclists and a negligible demand by leisure cyclists to travel along the Taplow / Burnham stretch of the A4 between Slough and Maidenhead. What BCC research has demonstrated a significant current and / or projected demand?  Where do these cyclists live? If in Slough or Maidenhead, why should BCC invest for their benefit when the detriment to Bucks residents is so significant? If no research has informed BCC's conclusion or the demand is insignificant, how can it justify the creation of an A4 Cycleway?

- How can BCC justify expenditure of over £300,000 in developing the design of the A4 Cycleway, especially without previously consulting locals or even Taplow Parish Council at a conceptual stage?

- Does BCC dismiss as minimal the risk that large vehicles accessing the Bishop Centre will cross the A4 Cycleway twice - firstly to enter by Hitcham Road then to exit via Station Road? Does BCC also dismiss the concern of Thames Valley Police regarding its access to Taplow Police Station via Station Road? Did BCC actually obtain agreement and approval from Thames Valley Police for the cycleway to crossover the Police Station access to the A4?

- What thought was given to the effect that narrowing of the A4 in places and by queuing traffic would have upon the passage of emergency vehicles?

- What consideration did BCC give to improving and promoting the Jubilee River as an alternative cycleway between Slough and Maidenhead which is and can be enjoyed by people cycling for fun or fitness as well as for those who ride to work, and which would be safer, less expensive, less polluting and therefore significantly more 'sustainable'?

- How can BCC justify looking forward to an "aspirational" extension of the A4 Cycleway into Maidenhead when Simon Dudley, Leader of RBWM, has stated unequivocally that Maidenhead has no such intention?

- Has BCC considered investing instead in north-south cycleways which would better serve the local Bucks council-taxpaying community rather than commuters living in Slough and Maidenhead?

- Has BCC considered investing instead in the resurrection of the footway along Cliveden Road which could conceivably could provide pedestrians and cyclists with safer access to Cliveden and the Burnham Beeches beyond?

- What thought has BCC given to why there were only 119 responses to its October 2016 Questionnaire? Why does BCC take it as positive that the majority of the responses to the Questionnaire were negative?

- Why did BCC fail to advise residents of the small residential roads on the north side of the A4 - Alvista Avenue, Hurstfield Drive and Minton Rise - of the proposed scheme or the consultation exhibitions? Why does BCC not acknowledge publicly that over 90% of residents living in 140 dwellings along the north side of the A4 or in these adjoining roads are totally against the scheme?

- Could it be that the Questionnaire was designed to avoid collecting critical comments, thereby deterring many correspondents from expressing their objections? How many letters of objection did BCC receive? How does BCC justify quoting positive correspondence and ignoring that which was critical? Does this not point to the fact and confirm that BCC is undemocratically selective in its attitude towards feedback from its constituents?

- Well-reasoned objections in October 2016 focused primarily on three aspects: crossovers, Dumb Bell Bridge and the Berry Hill junction. This resulted in the scheme being withdrawn for re-evaluation. It then re-emerged in July 2017 with no material change. However, when the strength of opposition was realised, BCC quickly retracted its proposals for the Berry Hill junction and modified those for Dumb Bell Bridge. Is this not clear evidence that no attention whatsoever was paid to these same objections raised during and after the consultation period. These ill-thought-out propositions were only redesigned at the last-minute when it became clear that such incompetence would be exposed?

- Consequently,in its most recent Consultation Report, BCC confirms that, having analysed existing and expected pedestrian and cyclist flows at the Berry Hill junction, the need for controlled crossings was found to be low. Having made such a clear statement contradicting its original arguments in favour, how can BCC now justify proceeding with any part of the scheme?

- BCC claim the scheme would improve eastbound traffic flow yet this is only true if modelling is restricted to a very short length of road in which traffic would diverge into two lanes then merge once more would mean there would be no reduction in the time traffic took to reach Slough or the M4. Is BCC happy to rely on such selective analysis and the ill-founded conclusions it leads to?

- The recent BCC Consultation Report claims the scheme is "value for money" but fails to offer evidence. Has BCC prepared a cost benefit analysis considering both the advantages and disadvantages of this scheme? If so, will BCC make it available for public scrutiny? If not, why not?

- Does the design of and construction plan for the A4 Cycleway comply with Highways England's Design Manual for Road & Bridges, Volume 7: Pavement Design and Maintenance, Section 2: Pavement Design and Construction, Part 5, HD39/16 (February 2016)?

- Has BCC sought advice from Highways England regarding the A4's role as a major relief road in the event of the M4 being blocked or limited in its flow by an accident or by its parallel upgrade to a 'smart' motorway? If so, what advice was received, and what account has been taken of it in the design, construction plan and timing of the A4 Cycleway?

- BCC intend to address local flooding by clearing drains. But is this just A4 drains or also those under the Station Road, Hitcham Road and Taplow Road railway bridges? And given that flooding has been a problem ever since the railway embankment was built in 1839, will BCC commit funds for the ongoing maintenance necessary to prevent the problems recurring?

- BCC has recently acknowledged that, under Dumb Bell Bridge, the "proposed shared-use cycleway is sub-optimal width, but it is the best that can be accommodated within the site constraints” and that signs will be erected asking cyclists to dismount. Does BCC really think cyclists will dismount? Does this statement not confirm the design is eminently unsatisfactory and (even worse) that BCC is attempting to absolve itself of any damage, injury or fatality that might be caused as a result?

- Does BCC accept that it is right and reasonable for all users of its roads - including cyclists - to be liable for any accident, damage or injury caused by their criminal incapacity, negligence or carelessness? If so, will BCC either indemnify all residents driving over crossovers into or from their properties or require all cyclists using the A4 Cycleway to be insured and their bicycles registered so they can be identified. If not, how can BCC justify giving cyclists priority at residential and commercial crossovers, thereby placing liability with Bucks council-taxpaying drivers using these crossovers?

- What consideration has BCC given in its analyses to the reduction in value of adjacent residential and commercial properties as a result of this increased risk of accidents at crossovers and of the increase in noise and pollution these properties will experience as a result of the removal or reduction of trees and hedges? What justification is there for diminishing the rural feel of the road and increasing its 'urbanisation' within The Green Belt?

- How can BCC argue that the A4 Cycleway will be as successful and as its A413 Cycleway when the schemes are so fundamentally different? The former will run along a major trunk road between two busy urban conurbations, it will cross dozens of north-side driveways and 12 junctions (including those to the Bishop Centre and Taplow Station). The latter A413 is in a rural area, it peters out on reaching Winslow and Buckingham and the few driveways or junctions it crosses all have excellent sight-lines.

- Land Securities has stated that its S106 contribution can be spent on any publicly beneficial scheme at local authority discretion. Consequently, how can BCC justify its contradictory claim that this contribution cannot be used to fund any other scheme except the A4 Cycleway?

- Why has BCC avoided having any meaningful meetings to explain and justify its policy and associated decisions and to hear the views of those who would be directly affected by the scheme? Why did BCC promise County and District Councillors that it would hold such a meeting only to renege on that commitment the very next day?

- Given that BCC has demonstrated its inability or unwillingness to engage with locals, how can its actions justify its aspiration to become a County-wide unitary authority?

Now that the banning of right turns into Berry Hill has been 'shelved', the following questions are less pertinent. However, given that the word 'shelved' implies that the idea could be taken off the shelf and implemented at some future date, it is worth keeping them in mind.

- The word 'sustainable' means simply 'capable of being sustained'. However, in this context, it can also mean 'capable of being maintained at a steady level without exhausting natural resources or causing ecological damage'. How could this latter definition be sustained when all alternatives to right-turning into Berry Hill would require vehicles to travel further either through roads with numerous difficulties (poor sight-lines, narrow bridges often flooded, many parked cars etc) which would increase accident risk as well as widespread pollution and inconvenience to many residences, or double-back on the A4 (often crawling in nose-to-tail traffic).

- The original BCC Consultation Report claims the Station Road, Hitcham Road and Taplow Road options "would not require any further travel distance". An analysis carried out on 18 October 2016 showed, every one of the five options would involve longer travel distances to five different local destinations. Where did BCC measure from and to? What consideration did BCC give to the impact of extra traffic (and associated risk, inconvenience and pollution) on those who live on these alternative routes, or to people trying to get to Taplow House Hotel, Taplow United, Taplow Court, Taplow village (St Nicolas' Church, St Nicolas' School, the Oak & Saw, the Village Centre and the Village Green), Cliveden, Hedsor and Burnham Beeches beyond?

- BCC claims that, in contrast to local surveys (October 2016), its traffic survey in December 2016 counted fewer vehicles turning right into Berry Hill. Will it offer this survey for public scrutiny?

- BCC proposes two eastbound lanes through the Berry Hill Junction. What benefit does BCC believe will result given that these lanes begin only 70m west of the junction and end less than 100m east of it, where the lanes merge to pass under Dumb Bell Bridge.

- Why can't the traffic lights simply have plain old buttons that cyclists can push to cross Berry Hill. Drivers must stop at red lights, what does BCC believe prevents cyclists from waiting briefly for their own safety and the convenience of other road-users?

- Did BCC seek comments from two business - Sytner (car sales) and Miller & Carter (restaurant) - to which right-turn access would be made very difficult (all but impossible) by having to cross two lanes of eastbound traffic just as they were being forced to merge into one lane? What was the reaction of these companies?

**SIGNATORIES**

BCC Councillor Dev Dhillon – Burnham, Dorney & Taplow

SBDC Councillor George Sandy – Burnham Lent Rise & Taplow inc. Dorney

Councillor Jamie Barnard – Chairman Taplow Parish Council

Councillor Roger Worthington – Taplow Parish Council and Secretary of The Hitcham & Taplow Society

Nigel Smales – Compiler, Researcher & Editor of the Hitcham & Taplow Magazine