

Press release from HTS – The Hitcham and Taplow Society Monday 31st July 2017

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TAPLOW A4 CYCLEWAY PROTEST

HTS launches its campaign against the intention of Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC) to proceed with the installation of a cycleway along the A4 in Taplow.

HTS is campaigning for a public meeting to be attended by the leader of BCC Martin Tett and Mark Shaw (Environment and Communities Select Committee) to justify this ill thought out proposal. At this time they have refused this request, which is unacceptable for publically accountable councillors.

After extensive and detailed objections were made during the initial consultation, BCC withdrew the scheme for re-evaluation. However, over six months later it is returning essentially unchanged.

HTS President Eva Lipman said “Concerns for the safety of cyclists and local residents, increased pollution and serious disruption to local traffic have fallen on deaf ears”.

The original HTS objection is attached and more detailed analysis is available. More recently the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM) has confirmed that it is not participating in the scheme, undermining its central purpose of connecting Slough and Maidenhead for cyclists. National Cycleways 61 and 461 already connect Taplow to Slough away from main road dangers and pollution.

The HTS campaign is in support of objections raised by Taplow Parish Council, South Bucks District Councillor George Sandy and BCC Councillor Dev Dhillon.

HTS has been in existence for over 50 years. It has a main objective to ensure that all development within the district is of the highest standard and preserves the quality of the environment. It represents a significant proportion of the residents of Taplow.

HTS Objection to the proposed A4 Sustainable Travel Scheme.

The Hitcham and Taplow Society raises objections to this proposal. The Society has been in existence for over 50 years. It has a main objective to ensure that all development within the district is of the highest standard and preserves the quality of the environment. It represents a significant proportion of the residents of Taplow.

Members of the Society have studied the proposals carefully, have attended the exhibitions and have talked to the project team. Most significantly, Society members have made extensive surveys at the Berry Hill junction and collected traffic behaviours across the day.

The project team has been given an extremely narrow brief to design a cycleway without any regard for suitability or its context in the locality, apparently simply because government funding was available. No evidence is supplied as to need or projected usage and no traffic data acquired other than a very narrowly drawn earlier private survey made for a different purpose.

Our detailed criticisms follow but the overall offering contradicts council declarations of evidence led policy and the importance of local involvement. The project has been running for two years and has spent very significant sums without any attempt at wider reality checks. It has not looked at developing cycling facilities away from main roads, recognising the rural nature of the area.

The offered consultancy questionnaire is wholly unfit for purpose. It is clearly intended to avoid acquiring critical information and is seen as a box ticking exercise for a forgone conclusion, forcing all the many objectors to write in explicitly to the only available address of the project manager.

We object in the strongest possible terms to the whole development, other than the bus related proposals which we welcome.

The Berry Hill Junction

The proposed layouts are based on completely inadequate and absent data. The identified data taken from the 2014 Granville survey was for rush hour only and was also inadequate, as our own surveys show. These are attached as an appendix and show that there is a continuous and significant volume of turning traffic across the whole day, far greater than the proposal numbers. No data is supplied on actual or projected cycle use. The project team claim to have modelled traffic flows but in the absence of ANY data its predictions must be highly dubious, especially as the project team were not aware of the blockage at the Maidenhead Bridge with its roundabouts on either side, saying specifically that it was outside their brief. The A4 is over capacity, as the council is well aware, and the proposed layout tinkering can have no effect on traffic flows.

The restricted brief of the project means that no recognition was made of consequences of banning right turns into Berry Hill.

- Turning north before Berry Hill. This is completely unacceptable for commercial traffic and heavy lorries, as it takes it through the narrow streets of the village and past the village school. These roads are already seriously overcrowded and are single lane only due to resident and commuter parking. Turning at Approach Road would

cause exactly the blockages the new layout is supposed to address at a point with an accident history (see www.crashmap.co.uk), limited sight lines and where the carriageway is proposed to be narrowed.

- Using the new Mill Lane roundabout and doubling back. In the rush hour this will add ten minutes to journey times, creating significant pollution and congestion. **Our traffic figures show that some 500 extra miles a day would be added to residents travel.**

Roundabout double backs are inherently dangerous, especially for heavy lorries (such as those servicing the Berry Hill quarry).

- These necessary detours show that the scheme cannot possibly be labelled “sustainable” as it clearly is no such thing.
- The proposal is sublimely unaware of the consequences of flooding, to which the whole surrounding Thameside area is very prone. All suggested diversion to the east of Berry Hill cross the railway line via very narrow tunnels that flood after even moderate rain to become impassable. The only exception is Approach Road (but see earlier comment) and would again take traffic through the narrow village roads. The proposal also ignores the problem that the Cookham Bridge route also gets closed for days during heavy rain. When this occurs traffic diverts via Berry Hill creating massive traffic tailbacks. If this traffic were prevented from turning up Berry Hill in the evening rush there would be absolute chaos.
- The lane realignments on the A4 that lead to the banning of the right turn into Berry Hill appear to be entirely based on giving a full traffic light phase to cyclists. This is totally unjustified and unsupported by any evidence.

Inherent dangers

The cycleway is bi-directional shared use and varies in width. The proposal to take this under the railway bridge is very dangerous. This is an extremely narrow pinch point with limited sight lines to the east. It is highly likely that movement clashes at busy times will push users off the cycleway onto the carriageway with obvious risks to life. If any member of the project team had actually watched traffic flows here they would have realised how unsafe it would be.

The narrowing of the A4 makes it much harder for emergency vehicles to pass other traffic in the hours of heavy traffic. The A4 is the only ambulance route for Maidenhead casualties to reach Wexham Park A&E.

Further to the east the cycleway cuts close to the driveways of houses, creating severe risks as cars reverse out of their drives with very restricted sight lines. Experience from other such situations is that cyclist revert to the main carriageway for safety, which cannot be a desired outcome.

The flooding referred to earlier also affects the A4 itself. This has been the subject of repeated complaints to the council over the years with no results. In practice the northern edge of the A4 floods very easily and will wash over the cycleway. Cyclists will divert to the main carriageway to avoid, with associated risks to life. Mr Shaw’s response to earlier emails makes it clear that nothing is to be done about this.

Overall planning failures

The aspirations and intentions of the Local Sustainable Transport Fund Revenue Application 2015/2016 are clear and laudable. It projects that Taplow station traffic may treble with Crossrail with an implication that much of this may come from cyclists. This is almost certainly incorrect. Local volume cycling commuters will be from Maidenhead and Burnham/Slough and will use those stations respectively. Cycling traffic to Taplow station will be a small number of Taplow residents, many of whom already walk. Any other cyclists will be travelling north or south. The same also applies to the leisure traffic that the funding application identifies - all to destinations north or south of the station. The cycleway does not address any of these users. The total absence of expected directional traffic flows shows that no thought has been given to actual usage. **In summary, the proposals do not support the aims of the funding application.**

Station commuting by cyclists is identified as important but there are no plans to provide any facilities at Taplow station in support of this.

No evidence whatsoever is supplied to justify the cycleway or the sums involved in completing it. Maidenhead has graded all its roads for cycling suitability and has declined to take part in the scheme. It must be embarrassing to the council that the objections we have made have not been considered in the two year spend already incurred and that no thought at all has been given to looking at genuine cycling facilities away from the main roads. We believe it is highly desirable to improve cycling access in the area but this is far better done through bottom up discussion locally, perhaps by the Neighbourhood Plan in development for Taplow, rather than bureaucratic edict from remote planners with no awareness of local situations. Cycling is essentially a local activity.

Berry Hill traffic statistics

Period			Vehicles (excluding Bicycles)			Bicycles			
Start	End	Date	Total	BR West	Right BH	Total	BR West	BR East	BH
7.30	8.30	4 Oct 2016	686	647	39	24	14	10	0
10.30	11.30	6 Oct 2016	627	589	38	9	5	4	0
15.00	16.00	3 Oct 2016	703	667	36	7	4	3	0
18.00	19.00	5 Oct 2016	848	802	46	38	22	16	2
Total for 4 Hours			2864	2705	159	78	45	33	2
Average per Hour			716	676	40	19	11	8	0.5

Figures courtesy Nigel Smales