

Cabinet Member
Transportation

Buckinghamshire County Council

County Hall, Walton Street
Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire HP20 1UA

Mark Shaw

Telephone 01296 382691

CMT@buckscc.gov.uk

www.buckscc.gov.uk

Cllr Dev Dhillon
Cllr George Sandy
Cllr Jamie Barnard
Cllr Roger Worthington
Nigel Smales

Date: 15th September 2017

Ref: A4SUSTRAV-007

Dear Sirs

Thank you for your letter dated 21 August 2017 about the proposed A4 Bath Road Sustainable Travel Scheme. I have addressed each of the points made in your letter as enclosed, and trust that this helps clarify the County Council's position regarding this scheme

Yours sincerely



Cllr Mark Shaw
Cabinet Member for Transportation



1. 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?

Response:

Yes, agreed.

2. 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?

Response:

Buckinghamshire's third Local Transport Plan (LTP3) identified the A4 Bath Road between Maidenhead and Slough as an Interurban 'Priority Congestion Management Corridor'. LTP3 details a Congestion Strategy in order to manage congestion on such routes, a key step of which includes: 'Encouraging travel by greener modes rather than the car, such as through supporting improved facilities for the promotion of walking, cycling and passenger transport'. The volume of pedestrians & cyclists along the A4 is currently low, but an increase is anticipated following the introduction of the scheme and the new housing developments in the area as well as the arrival of Crossrail in 2019.

3. 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?

Response:

Taplow Parish Council was consulted before bidding for the funding of the scheme. The County Council received an email outlining support from Taplow Parish Council for the bid. Below is an extract from Taplow Parish Council:

"Taplow Parish Council would support this bid. Anything which helps to improve the traffic flows on the A4 is surely to be welcomed, albeit by small improvements" (see attached email dated 03/04/2014).

The total spend to date on the scheme is in line with our expectations to do the required preparatory work to reach the completion of detailed design.

4. 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?

Response:

The Bishops Centre has a one-way system for deliveries. Articulated vehicles enter via Hitcham Road and exit via Station Road. The kerbline on the eastern side of the Hitcham Road junction will be built out with a small radius bell mouth kerbline to better accommodate the uncontrolled crossing via the central refuge on the side road junction. The design of Hitcham Road junction has been checked against the vehicle swept paths for articulated trucks entering Hitcham Road. Station Road junction has a signalised crossing which will be upgraded to a Toucan to enable pedestrians and cyclists to cross.

Thames Valley Police were consulted on the scheme proposal and raised no objection; all works are to be undertaken within the public highway.

5. 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?

Response:

Only short lengths of footway/cycleway widening into the carriageway is proposed and in these sections the remaining carriageway width is a minimum of 7.0m wide. As a standard fire engine is 2.55m in width there should be no impediment to their passage along the A4 resulting from the scheme. The current proposal will not result in additional queuing traffic.

6. 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'?

Response:

A4 Bath Road Sustainable Travel project was developed as part of a successful funding bid to central government to improve cycling access to a number of rail stations across the county where there are planned improvements. The bid also incorporated elements of bus infrastructure improvements, to help encourage bus-rail connectivity and to especially reduce increased car use to the train stations in light of Crossrail's train station (access) improvements. Upgrades to the Jubilee River route whilst welcomed, would not provide the improved connectivity to the rail stations and other destinations located along the A4 corridor.

7. 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?

Response:

The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead have decided not to allocate any funds to their A4 cycle proposal as there were safety concerns with their on-road cycle lane designs. Their scheme safety audit identified serious issues at a number of locations, including the Oldfield Road Roundabout and the Ray Mead Road roundabout. These could not be addressed without completely remodelling the junctions to replace the roundabouts with traffic signals.

RBWM are looking at alternative proposals that can be delivered between their town centre and Maidenhead Bridge, indicating in recent correspondence to the Council that they are continuing to look at how they can incorporate new routes exploring 'option for a cycleway route potentially linked with the regeneration programme we are developing with our Joint Venture Partner for the Reform Road Opportunity Area...which are immediately south of the A4'.

8. 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?

Response:

As stated previously, the main objective of the County's A4 STS project is to improve sustainable transport access to rail stations to bring about modal shift and mitigate predicted increased car use and congestion brought about by future planned station improvements. Whilst it is acknowledged the cycleway will benefit users from Slough and Maidenhead, it is anticipated that the benefits of reduced traffic, congestion and pollution will be primarily to residents of Buckinghamshire along the A4.

9. 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 nad the Burnham Beeches beyond?

Response:

Yes, the Council is proposing a signed on-road leisure route to local visitor attractions to encourage further tourism in the area. However, the main objective of the County's A4 STS project is to improve sustainable transport access to rail stations to bring about modal shift and mitigate predicted increased car use and congestion brought about by future planned station improvements. A signed route is proposed to connect to local visitor attractions to encourage tourism.

10. 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?

Response:

From experience of delivering similar schemes across the County the council considers the level of consultation response to be representative of the nature and size of the scheme proposed. Cycleway consultations tend to elicit a negative response due to the perceived safety concerns and direct impacts on local residents; the relatively small negative overall response has been considered carefully against the wider benefits provided by the scheme.

11. 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?

Response:

We can confirm that letters promoting the consultation were delivered to 1- 24 Alvista Avenue, 1-28 Hurstfield Drive and 1-24 Minton Rise, prior to the start of the formal consultation, as well a press and social media releases. The result of the consultation was a slight majority opposed to the proposed scheme (56% against, to 44% for, from 97 responses received).

12. 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?

Response:

The consultation questionnaire provided the opportunity for residents to give their support or opposition to the scheme in general, as well as particular aspects including the Berry Hill junction, north/south route and shared use cycleways. We received 33 letters of objection during the consultation period.

We have followed a robust consultation process to listen and respond to residents views and concerns relating to the A4 STS; we have also undertaken a further review of the scheme to incorporate suggested changes, such as the removal of the right turn ban into Berry Hill.

13. 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?

Response:

The consultation process provided excellent feedback in order to evaluate the scheme and identify any design issues that needed addressing. The fact that scheme concessions were introduced to address local representations acknowledges the importance the Council places on local participation and engagement.

14. 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?

Response:

The main objective of the County's A4 STS project is to improve sustainable transport access to rail stations to bring about modal shift and mitigate predicted increased car use and congestion brought about by future planned station improvements. The changes proposed to the Berry Hill Junction will reduce the attractiveness of the route for would-be cyclists, but it is considered that the wider benefits provided by the overall route outweigh the removal of the controlled crossing point at this location, and whilst the uncontrolled crossing point now proposed is not the ideal solution this will be monitored going forward to determine if any amendments are required.

15. 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?

Response:

The additional filter lanes proposed as part of the Berry Hill junction realignment that would have realised additional junction capacity have been removed as a result of the recent public consultation. This assertion was modelled using industry standard transport modelling software and ratified through additional data collection to confirm design effectiveness post completion of Mill Lane junction amendments.

16. 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?

Response:

The original bid produced for this scheme did not mandate the production of a Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR); this was due to the size of scheme and amount of funding bid for, being under the threshold for detailed bid submission. The council is aware that both Maidenhead and Slough undertook a BCR for their schemes resulting in values of 1 and 1.4 respectively. It is our expectation that this scheme would achieve comparable values.

17. 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)?

Response:

The A4 STS proposal has been subject to current traffic design practices including staged road safety audits to ensure robustness of design by leading design consultants – Jacobs and AeCOM. We have followed national guidance on cycling infrastructure design, and have taken into consideration factors such as speed limit, current and future pedestrian and cycle volumes, site constraints and the need for coherence and directness of the cycle route.

18. 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?

Response:

The Council actively participates in the M4 smart motorway liaison meetings organised by Highways England and will ensure that the construction programme is managed to avoid any conflicts.

19. 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?

Response:

The drainage concerns highlighted have been passed to Transport for Buckinghamshire to address and the works will be prioritised alongside other routine works within the available maintenance budget.

20. 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?

Response:

The provision of cyclist dismount signs does not guarantee adherence by users, however it provides a warning and reminder to users to be aware of a change in situation is ahead and to react accordingly. It is highly likely that any users of the route will not be 'one-off' users and so once they have travelled the route they will be able to use their own judgement and common sense to determine whether they cycle or dismount. As highlighted previously, the pavement is already being used by pedestrians and cyclists and therefore the footway widening proposed will improve the current situation for existing and future users.

21. 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?

Response:

It is correct to say that all users of the highway should obey the rules of the Highway Code. Pedestrians and cyclists will have priority at vehicle crossovers and it is accepted that there will need to be greater vigilance from all users. Rule 206 of Highway Code requires drivers to 'give way to pedestrians and cyclists on the pavement'. We would expect all highway users to obey the Highway Code including the need for drivers to take care when exiting their property, as they do currently. This will ensure that they minimise the risk of collisions with all vulnerable road users, be that pedestrians, joggers, children in prams, the visually impaired or cyclists.

22. 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?

Response:

The Council has not been made aware of any circumstances where minor works such as widening and conversion of footways to shared use has resulted in de-valuing of properties; if anything the opposite occurs as the renewal of footways, kerbing, signing and lining has a positive impact on the local environment. The cutting back and removal of vegetation has been kept to a minimum and it is highly unlikely that this will have any detrimental effects on the 'rural feel of the road'. As highlighted later in your correspondence the A4 is a 'major trunk road between two busy urban conurbations', the proposed improvements are only widening of existing pavements.

Regarding any potential claims for compensation as a result of the proposed alterations on the A4, the Council would consider these under the Land Compensation Act 1973. In doing so, we would consider the potential

devaluation that has resulted to your property as a result of the highway alterations in terms of seven defined physical factors covered by the Act- including noise, vibration and lighting. The Act stipulates that any such claim can be considered one year after the alterations have been completed.

Notwithstanding your right to submit a claim for compensation please be assured that we will endeavour to ensure that any adverse effects resulting from the alterations are abated or minimised. This would be undertaken through assessments undertaken by Bucks CC environmental consultants. The County Council has already undertaken a range of surveys (noise, air quality, vibration) pre-construction and will again post completion of the works to ascertain actual changes in levels. We would expect noise and vibration to be improved post project if there is some modal shift.

23. 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.

Response:

The Council acknowledges there are significant differences between the two schemes in terms of situation; traffic speeds, volumes and composition; as well as other site constraints such as existing highway layout and adjacent properties and junctions, but all these factors and others have been taken into account when designing the scheme and determining the best solutions, as they were for the A413 and other similar schemes across the County over the last 20-30 years.

The objectives of both schemes are similar; to improve travel choices and mitigate traffic impacts of increased patronage at rail stations. Our experience of introducing similar schemes across the County has found that the fears and concerns regarding shared use cycleways, difficulties exiting driveways and increased collisions have not materialised after implementation, and actually residents have a change of opinion and welcome the renewed footways and local improvements once works are completed.

24. 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?

Response:

The S106 contribution by Land Securities in relation to the development of the Bishop Centre has been designated for use on the A4 sustainable travel scheme. These funds cannot be used for anything other than towards a cycleway along the A4 outside the Bishops Centre without a Deed of Variation signed by all parties. The Council secured these monies for this project and so this change is not something that will be supported by the Council. If the A4 scheme is put on hold, this money will be returned to the Section 106 reserve and ultimately, if unspent, will have to be returned to the developer with interest.

25. 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?

Response:

I believe I have not ignored your request for a public meeting. A group of residents were invited to a meeting in County Hall to discuss their concerns in detail with me, Deputy Cabinet Member Paul Irwin, senior officers and members of the project team - the intention being to run the plans and other information in a structured manner and appropriate setting. The offer was declined, and instead, the group suggested a meeting on-site to walk the scheme. A meeting was arranged on 18 July 2017 at Costa Coffee, at the Bishop Centre, Taplow for discussions ahead of walking the route. The number of people attending was greater than planned and the meeting was not as productive as had been hoped when originally proposed to meet at County Hall.

26. 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?

Response:

To follow.

27. 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.

Response:

As advised in my letter dated 7th August, I have listened to the views of residents and in doing so to reduce the impact to drivers at the Berry Hill junction I have removed the proposed right turn ban from the scheme. This situation will be kept under review particularly with regard to pedestrian and cyclist safety and therefore I have not responded to the following questions.

28. 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).
29. 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?
30. 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?
31. 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.
32. 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?
33. 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?