

Chesterfield and District Civic Society
Proposed cycle super-highway at Chesterfield
Email correspondence 25 April 2021 to 26 April 2021

A) Email sent to Derbyshire County Councillor Simon Spencer (Deputy Leader, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport & Infrastructure) and others. Sent by Philip Riden, Chairman of Chesterfield Civic Society, 25 April 2021

Dear Coun. Spencer,

I assume you have been briefed by officers and by Coun. Boulton concerning the mounting local opposition to the proposed cycle superhighway which the county council has announced its intention of building between Chatsworth Road, on the western outskirts of Chesterfield, and the Royal Hospital, on the eastern side of the town. In particular, large numbers of local residents are very unhappy about two aspects of the scheme: the building of new cycle lanes on Chatsworth Road between its junctions with Holymoore Road and Storrs Road, and the permanent closure of Crow Lane, which runs from near the railway station to near the Royal Hospital.

There is also considerable cynicism about the online 'consultation' which was conducted on the county council's behalf by Local Transport Projects, since this appears to have been designed to obtain responses in favour of the scheme.

Perhaps more seriously, as chairman of Chesterfield Civic Society I have been approached by several people who did not receive the circular said to have been delivered door-to-door to over 4,000 homes affected by the scheme. As you are presumably aware, I made an FOI Act request to your officers to be supplied with a list of the streets involved. I have now received a reply. I do not for a moment believe that your officers' reply is in any way untruthful or incomplete, but the fact of the matter is that I have so far been told by six residents of three different streets on that list that they did not receive the circular. I assume this number will grow as our campaign against the scheme in its present form becomes more widely known.

On the evidence I have already assembled, I believe that a case could be made to the Local Government Ombudsman that the county council has failed to consult properly. The council could have chosen not to send out a circular to households, but having decided to do so it is fundamental in any exercise of this sort that all households must be treated equally. They have clearly not been. It is particularly unfortunate that one of the roads apparently omitted from the delivery is Chatsworth Road, which is the one most seriously affected. The only conclusion I can draw is that there was no backchecking of the work of your distribution subcontractors before their invoice was paid. I think taxpayers are entitled to be annoyed about this.

I assume the county council would prefer not to have to deal with a complaint to the Ombudsman over this, coupled as it would be by further damaging press publicity. There is a very simple way of avoiding this, which will have the further benefit of saving a considerable sum of public money. May I suggest the following course of action:

1. Abandon the proposal to build a cycle superhighway along Chatsworth Road. Make renewed attempts to negotiate with the landowners to use the path between Somersall Lane and Greendale Avenue (in Holymoorside) for a cycle route. The landowners have repeatedly stated that they are in principle in favour of this. In the meantime, point out to the small number of people who wish to cycle from Holymoorside to the town centre or Royal

Hospital that they can use Walton Back Lane, which is very lightly trafficked, for the first stage of the journey, to the point where the existing cycle route begins in Somersall. This would involve no new expense, except possibly for some signage.

2. Follow the suggestion of Coun. Brittain, the retiring county council member for the division concerned, and encourage cyclists who wish to go from the railway station or town centre to the Royal Hospital to use the existing bridle path (which is open to cyclists) through Tapton golf course. This would enable Crow Lane to be reopened to motor traffic. The only expense would be to improve the surface of the route through the golf course to make it easier for cyclists to negotiate.
3. Carry out the proposed improvements to the existing cycle path between Somersall Lane and the station, to which little objection has been raised, and which will presumably cost a relatively small share of the £1.26m of taxpayers' money which the county council is proposing to spend on this scheme.

A solution on these lines would defuse most if not all the opposition to the scheme as at present proposed, including that of the 700 signatories of a petition in favour of reopening Crow Lane, and the many residents of Brookside (who appear not to have been sent the circular referred to above) who are very angry about having a cycle superhighway imposed on them, which will seriously damage the appearance of Chatsworth Road and make it more dangerous than it is at present for pedestrians and motorists. My suggestions would also save a good deal of public money.

The only people who will not be happy with this solution will be the cycling groups who appear to have pressed the county council to devise the present scheme. Few if any people in Chesterfield, I suspect, have anything against cyclists but it is worth remembering that the vast majority of Chesterfield residents do not cycle. They walk, catch buses, use taxis, ride motorcycles or drive their own cars. They are entitled to have their views taken into account and to be able to use the mode of transport of their choice with reasonable freedom.

I hope you will give these suggestions serious consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Philip Riden
Chairman
Chesterfield and District Civic Society

B) Response by Councillor Spencer to email of 25 April 2021, dated 26 April 2021

Dear Mr Riden,

Thank you for your email. As I'm sure you can appreciate at this moment in time we are working under purdah regulations and I am not able to personally deal with the issues you have raised. I have forwarded your correspondence to the officer who is dealing with the consultation process in Chesterfield and I am confident that your views will be taken into consideration.

Following the election, I will be more than happy to discuss the options available with officers. Obviously this is dependent on the result of the election.

Thanks again,

Kind regards

Simon

Deputy Leader | Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport & Infrastructure | County Councillor for Dovedale Division

C) Further email from Philip Riden to Councillor Spencer (and others), dated 26 April 2021

Dear Coun. Spencer,

Thank you for your prompt and courteous reply to my email.

I understand the position in which elected members of the council are currently placed and I am grateful to you for passing my email to the officer dealing with this matter.

I would be further grateful if you would also convey to your officer additional information which has reached me since I wrote to you.

First, I now have the names and addresses of sixteen householders on four different roads, two at the eastern end of the route and two at the western end, who state that they did not receive the circular which your subcontractors, Letterbox Distribution.com, claim to have delivered to those addresses. In addition, Coun. Boulton has stated to a Civic Society colleague (and former chairman) that in the course of canvassing his division he has yet to find one household which did receive the circular.

Second, my colleague also advises me that work has begun today to alter the operation of the traffic lights at the Storrs Road/Chatsworth Road junction. He suspects (drawing on his own professional experience) that this is preliminary work connected with the building of the cycle superhighway. If so, this makes the county council's 'consultation' exercise even more bogus than many people already believed it to be.

In these circumstances, pressure is building up among those opposed to this scheme for the Civic Society to lay a complaint before the Local Government Ombudsman.

If your officers wish to avoid this, I would like to receive a response from a senior member of your staff within the next 48 hours on both these matters. If I have not heard anything at officer level by the close of business on Wednesday this week I will consider very seriously going to the Ombudsman and to seek national as well as local press publicity for the the county council's actions. I will also ask the divisional Member of Parliament to take this matter up with the responsible Minister. In the meantime I would suggest you speak to John Boulton to get some idea of how angry people in his division are.

My earlier email suggested an alternative strategy for both the western and eastern ends of the cycle route. In my view a solution on these lines would satisfy the vast majority of those opposed to the scheme in its present form and could be presented by the county council as a reasonable change of mind in the face of strong local opposition. If you insist on pressing on with the present scheme I think you are laying yourself open to having to deal with very serious opposition locally and probably

a run-in with the Ombudsman. I just do not see that this is the best course of action for the county council, either administratively or politically.

Please do not trouble to reply to this email but please try to ensure that I receive a response at officer level in the next two days.

Yours sincerely,

Philip Riden
Chairman
Chesterfield and District Civic Society

ENDS

Posted on Chesterfield and District Civic Society website 27 April 2021.
<http://www.chesterfieldcivicsociety.org.uk/>