



LRAG Press Release

For immediate release

21 April 2023

What's been happening about the cycling scheme? An update and outstanding questions 15 weeks after the public meeting.

Background

Surrey County Council (SCC) plans to introduce an Active Travel Scheme along the length of London Road, from the New Inn Lane roundabout to the York/Waterden Road junction. The scheme will deliver cycle lanes on both sides of the carriageway to enable a safer and better environment for cyclists travelling between Burpham and Guildford.

The original scheme, between New Inn Lane and Boxgrove roundabout, was due to start construction on January 9th 2023, but after many written complaints about the lack of advanced notice, and a five-month closure of the northbound carriageway, the scheme was postponed. A public meeting was set up by the London Road Action Group at George Abbot School on January 5th to enable the public to have its say. It was attended by well over 400 local residents.

Promises made at the public meeting



At this meeting Cllr Tim Oliver, the leader of Surrey County Council, and SCC officials acknowledged that they had not consulted adequately, either about the design of the scheme or the planned road closures and associated diversions. They committed to review the design and amend the implementation plan, as well as to a new consultation with the local community.

Unfortunately, many of the claims made by SCC Officers at the meeting, as justification for the scheme's introduction, were subsequently shown to be inappropriate or incorrect. For example.

- The frequently quoted figure of 58% public support for the scheme was revealed as being obtained from just 77 telephone calls to local residents, obtained as far back as the early part of 2021. The details and effects of the design and implementation plans had not been made public at this stage.
- A widely-reported statement about accident statistics to cyclists along London Road was later accepted as an error. Figures had been exaggerated nearly 10-fold.
- The plan to narrow the main carriageway, to the absolute permitted minimum of 6 metres, alarmed many users, especially several local bus operators, who also denied having been consulted at a relevant time.

On the night a number of other commitments were also made, that the following evidence would be made public:

- the effects of reduced road width on congestion and pollution,
- emergency vehicle access during urgent responses,
- safety assessments for persons with limited mobility, sight or hearing, at "floating bus stops",
- safety assessments at transition points between segregated and shared paths.

But, despite the promises, *none* of this information ever appeared on SCC's London Road Active Travel Scheme webpage. It has taken persistent questioning by individuals and groups of concerned residents to learn that a lengthy, permanent, partial road closure is no longer planned, and the minimum carriageway width will be 6.5 metres, where feasible. Other revisions are anticipated, but SCC says it is not yet ready to share revised design and implementation plans.

Will these revisions be enough to regain public trust, confidence and support when the new plans are announced? The declared SCC position is that a "reset" has taken place and an engagement exercise is being prepared, supported by the Consultation Institute. This engagement process will not just address the Burpham section, but the 2 other phases of the scheme:

- the conversion of Boxgrove roundabout to a "Dutch-style" roundabout
- the section from Boxgrove roundabout past Guildford High School to the York and Waterden Road junction.

SCC's new consultation process

The new consultation is described by SCC as an engagement process. It comprises determining stakeholders (those affected by the scheme), creating a selected group of representatives from the stakeholders, and co-producing, with them, methods of making everyone aware of what the revised scheme will look like and how it will be implemented. The aim is to provide opportunities for everyone who wishes to have a say, to be able to do so.

This public engagement is not intended to produce a quantitative result (it's not a vote); it is a qualitative process to find out "the mood". So, why were the public so aggrieved back in January?

- Was it the 5-month road closure?
- Was it because of concerns that frequent congestion could only be made worse by constricting the road further?
- Was it because the addition of cycle lanes had insufficient space in several places and might create new hazards for cyclists, pedestrians, emergency services?
- Was it because it was believed the benefits couldn't justify the cost?
- Or was it just frustration at being ignored?

LRRAG's current view

There is no argument against good cycling facilities being provided wherever and whenever feasible. However, it is crucial that SCC understand and address the public's concerns when determining if the local community support or oppose the alterations to the A3100.

We believe it is essential that the plans for both the design of the road and for the implementation are made public before the engagement process can start. The public need to see what is planned.

Disappointingly, at very short notice, the meeting at which the petition against the closure of London Road for 5 months - signed by 1092 residents - was to have been heard by the SCC Cabinet Member responsible was cancelled. No new date has been set.

SCC must be fully prepared to deal with every single concern expressed and be able to offer a genuine answer. As the recommendation in the guidance document, Cycle Infrastructure Design, says: "*When communicating the proposals be confident about it and absolutely be clear about your intentions, the benefits and disadvantages. Proposals must be clear and unambiguous, as detailed as possible, including good maps and drawings, and frank about the disadvantages, to build trust and discourage misrepresentation.*"

This time around the public need to know:

- Will traffic management during construction be realistic and not create chaos?
- Will their views really influence the design of the scheme?
- Will the new engagement really affect the decision on whether the scheme goes ahead – or not?