

LRAG News Update – 4 April 2023

As planned, the first meeting of the Sustainable Travel Reference Group (STRG) took place on the evening of 29th March. It was chaired by the Surrey County Council (SCC) Cabinet Member for Transport (Councillor Matt Furniss), assisted by a Consultant from the Consultation Institute (CI). Additionally, 2 Officers involved with the development of the Active Travel Scheme (ATS) were present.

The following stakeholders, representing various sections of the community, had been invited:

Cllr Fiona Davidson – Guildford South East
Cllr George Potter – Guildford East
Representative from Guildford Borough Council (by the Transport Officer)
Representative from G-BUG
Representative from George Abbot School
Representative from Guildford High school
Representative from Guildford Residents Association
Representative from Surrey Coalition of Disabled People*
Representative from Surrey Chambers of Commerce*
Representative from London Road Action Group
Representative from Boxgrove Park Residents' Association
Representative from Stagecoach bus company*
Representative from ClockHouse Place Retirement Village*
Representative from Surrey Youth Parliament*

Unfortunately, with no reasons given, those invitees marked with a * did not attend.

It is worth emphasising that the role of the STRG is not to assess the justification, feasibility, design or implementation of the ATS. Its mandate is to assist SCC in ensuring that - as the invite stated - “all those who wish to have their say are able to do so”.

The Chair briefed attendees:

- that Surrey CC had listened and learnt from the Jan 5th meeting, and were looking for a 'complete reset' i.e., a fresh start to the public engagement process,
- that they hoped that a consensus in favour of the revised scheme will be achieved but they won't go ahead if there is strong opposition,
- that each member of the group held equivalent status (i.e., irrespective of the scale of the network they represented),
- that STRG was not a decision-making body,
- that only 4 or 5 meetings were anticipated lasting just 60 minutes each.

The Consultation Institute Consultant explained that:

- the proposed new consultation will be an “engagement process” and there is no requirement to hold any form of formal public consultation,
- feedback would be “qualitative” rather than quantitative (that it would not be a head count of those for or against)
- STRG invitees had been selected on the basis of a stakeholder mapping exercise (i.e., the identification of those most likely to be affected by the scheme).

The conversation that followed quickly homed in on the draft engagement timeline. This projected that by the next meeting the group would be able to produce a proposal document/survey, including, for example, survey questions. The question asked by several of the group was: about what?

The SCC participants proposed that the engagement would focus on design principles. However, the majority view of the stakeholders was that it would not be possible to create any form of opinion-gathering engagement unless clear final proposals are available to be presented to the public for their

consideration. Otherwise, the new engagement would be no different than the original 2021 consultation.

This strong message appeared to be taken on board by the SCC participants, but we await the minutes of the meeting to provide confirmation of this important requirement, and a revised timeline for STRG meetings.

A few other topics and views were aired (e.g., how to gather views from the 60-80% of motorists whose journeys are not local and would not have the option of any other travel means), and the meeting finished after 90 minutes.

In summary

- The main conclusion of the meeting was that SCC would work out how quickly design and implementation information can be made available before further discussions about how engagement of the wider public will be carried out, and what questions will be asked.
- No task assignments were allocated, and there was no indication of how much effort would be expected of participants in creating the engagement.
- No firm dates for future meetings, pending a probable reassessment of the timetable, were suggested.