

LRAG News Update - 28 November 2023

It is only just over 2 weeks away now that the engagement period for the Burpham to Guildford Active Travel Scheme, set by Surrey County Council, will end. There is one more drop-in event planned for 6th December (at George Abbot School from 6 – 8 pm).

According to SCC assurances, over 6000 residences have been alerted to the process by letters, repeated in triplicate because of early delivery failures. The engagement has been running since 18th September, 10 weeks, with 5 drop-in presentational events. Correspondence has been extensive in local online media, and LRAG has regularly circulated news to its extensive network of local community groups, businesses, schools and transport providers. The only people who may not have been made aware might be the thousands of motorists who use London Road on a regular basis, but do not live in the local area.

So, it seems that a large swathe of the local population ought to be providing a clear indication of the worth of the Scheme. The decision to proceed may be in their gift. At the time of drafting then, why are there only 535 respondents to the SCC survey? That is less than 10% of those alerted, or even fewer given the evidence that some commenters come from far and wide, outside Surrey (an Oxfordshire cycling group self-identified).

Is it just that optional surveys attract so little interest? How many people bother to react to the “How Did We Do?” follow-up emails? Probably mostly only dissatisfied customers, reacting to failings to achieve what used to be expected as “the norm”. Is the SCC survey (created by The Consultation Institute but not supported by a significant number of involved stakeholders) too positively biased, and not providing the chance to address issues in detail? Is this putting people off bothering because they feel it is already a *fait accompli*, and the whole process is a tick-box sham?

Some agitated local residents decided that enough was enough. They considered that the subterfuge and obfuscation in the information being pushed out by SCC needed a strong challenge, and launched their own survey. It led to a very defensive reaction by SCC on both their websites:

“Surrey County Council are aware that a survey is being circulated within the Burpham area asking residents to respond to a set of questions about the Burpham to Guildford Active Travel Scheme. **The council need to stress that this survey has not been created or distributed by Surrey County Council, indeed it's not clear who has done so.**”

We would also like to point out that the survey contains a number of statements relating to value for money, accident rates, parking, emissions, junctions, the proposed Dutch Roundabout, and journey times which are either incorrect or misleading. These statements have been made in the past and we have publicly corrected these.”

LRAG notes that even this latter response statement may, in part, be misleading, because the survey website declares all statements had been checked and verified as accurate. Bias can exist in both directions, and it then becomes a matter of whose assessment and analysis is most believable.

The “rogue” survey does differ in one fundamental area, however. It actually asks respondents directly for an opinion that SCC have deliberately set out to avoid, via the construct of their consultants, about the commitment made by the leader of SCC on 5th January, about not going ahead in the face of overwhelming opposition from the local community.

It would be interesting to learn the rate of response to the second survey in the 2 to 3 weeks since its publication, with this basic yes or no question, compared to the 10-week availability of the SCC survey. Will the responses be sufficiently regarded, when it comes to the decision-making discussions? SCC assure everyone that they will. Hopefully, as with any survey, sources will, indeed, be verifiable:

“Surrey County Council welcome views on the scheme in any form that respondents feel enables them to have their say.

We will of course review all submissions to ensure the source can be verified.”