

LRAG News Update – 19 April 2024

In the last newsletter I advised: “There are still on-going challenges; one to Surrey CC about why they have refused a Freedom of Information (FoI) request for sight of the Road Safety Audits; another to DfT, asking for explanations of the Highway Code for the difference between prohibiting cyclists from riding on pavements, but allowing shared paths protected only by “blue signs” and “ground-painted bicycle symbols”.

The wheels of bureaucracy grind exceeding slow, but responses (though not precise answers) have now been obtained. The Minister for Roads and Local Transport, Guy Opperman MP, has written indirectly to me. He reiterates that:

“... the conversion of a footway to shared use should be regarded as a last resort. Shared use facilities are generally not favoured by either pedestrians or cyclists”, but

“Design of cycle facilities, including shared-use tracks, is a matter for local authorities and it is for them to ensure any facilities are designed to be safe and fit for purpose.”

So, Surrey Highways is judge and jury (comparisons with the Post Office should be avoided) about whether their design is “safe and fit for purpose”.

That leads nicely to my other challenge: What is the opinion of the (independent?) Road Safety Auditors about the design? The answer from the initial FoI was that it was “not in the public interest” to disclose details until such time as the iterative design process has been completed.

However, the decision not to proceed with the Boxgrove to York Road section should have meant that there was no reason to now withhold details, and it had been asserted “Surrey County Council **holds the information you requested.**”

In seeking an internal enquiry for the rationale why disclosure was not now possible, the response was “The York Road section ... has **not had a road safety audit carried out** ...” The foregoing 2 statements are contradictory, and a dim view has to be taken if statements to the public cannot be trusted. This is not worthy of a public body.

The Minister’s letter also stated: “Active Travel England ... provides advice to local authorities to assist and guide them towards active travel infrastructure which is designed and built in line with current guidance.” Indeed, it was observed that the Leader of The Council was referring to this current guidance, The [Active Travel Route Check Manual \(published Feb 2024\)](#), at his Decision Announcement Meeting.

Yet Surrey CC officers have placed in writing that they do not consider the Manual to be relevant, other than when making an initial bid, despite it stating:

” The Route Check is also intended for use throughout the scheme design process, meaning that you can identify critical issues and other problems at the feasibility stage and design them out ...”

To an external observer, this appears to be a schism between the politicians and officers at Surrey CC, judging by the keenness of officers to dismiss the opinions of Active Travel England, particularly when Active Travel England declare, in the Route Check Manual, their Number 1 Policy for assessment: **ARE CYCLISTS SEPARATED FROM PEDESTRIANS?**

Does all this undermine confidence in the integrity of what SCC says and does?