

LRAG Update from Meeting with SCC on 22nd February 2023

In response to a request from London Road Action Group, members met with Surrey County Council Highways' senior managers on 22nd February. LLAG's objectives were to:

- try and clear some of the historic shortcomings that led to the public outcry
- provide detailed concerns about the current published design
- provide detailed concerns about traffic management during the construction phase,
- learn of progress with the design review
- learn of progress with the delivery (implementation) review
- ensure that any future traffic management plans were alerted well in advance
- ensure that future liaison/meetings between LLAG and SCC cleared the vast majority of concerns before further public consultation
- learn of SCC's plans for the new consultation
- learn of the integration of plans for Phases 1, 2, and 3 (from New Inn Lane roundabout, through Boxgrove roundabout, to York/Waterden Road junction)
- to learn future timescales.

This list was clearly not going to be completed in the one hour that had been allocated for the meeting, but it provides an idea of the scale and scope of the level of detail that LLAG are going into.

So, what did we achieve?

1. We made it clear that SCC needs to establish a means of regaining public confidence and trust. Given previous errors, unsubstantiated assertions about the level of support, and failures to meet commitments to provide answers after the 5th January meeting, we explained that only by reaching out through a trusted source i.e., LLAG, would trust about the validity of their plans be regained. We know what we said... but we don't know what they heard.
2. We handed over many pages of concerns and commitment shortcomings, which they have committed to answer in writing by March 24th.
3. Due to the lack of time only 2 pieces of definitive information were forthcoming:
 - carriageway width targets have been increased to 6.5 metres from 6 metres, though there will still be some pinch-points where this is unachievable;
 - no full-time, single direction road closures were planned. There will be 2-way traffic on 80% of the scheme, and directional closures on 20%.
4. We sought, and had agreement, that any future traffic orders associated with London Road would be distributed to LLAG at the time of posting, so that the general public would be guaranteed advance notice, instead of being surprised at the last minute.
5. We asked for, and believe it was agreed, (though there has been some subsequent prevarication) that there should be a series of meetings to clarify all achievable concerns, before any future public consultation, to avoid continued questioning.
6. SCC shared a stakeholder 'mapping plan' that grouped interested parties by their level of "influence and interest". It was clear that they regard LLAG as a 'sideshow' and want to engage separately with businesses, schools, emergency services, transport providers, residents' associations, care homes, disability organisations, postal services, etc. We told them that LLAG actually represents many of those mentioned, but again this did not seem to fit with their view of the world.

We were told that consultation with stakeholders would be broken into 2 parts: a) Design principles, and b) Delivery, and stakeholder reference groups would be set up on these two topics.

7. SCC suggested that the consultation engagement should encompass the 'corridor' of the entire active travel scheme, not just Phase 1. We noted their idea, because the design has to be homogenous from end to end, but recognise that until their plans are substantially complete for all of the scheme, it would be difficult to undertake a meaningful consultation.
8. We asked for a timeline for the next steps. SCC agreed that they would provide this week commencing February 27th.

At a meeting with our local councillors (Cllrs Fiona Davidson and George Potter) the following day, SCC confirmed the following.

- The 'corridor' approach has been adopted by SCC.
- This means that the construction of the scheme is unlikely to start before the beginning of 2024.
- Although the consultation for all 3 phases of the scheme will be combined, it is likely that construction will be in sequential phases over around 18 months.
- Initial consultation meetings with stakeholders are likely to be held in April / May this year and more probably May.

All journeys start with a first step, and perhaps this is SCC's first step in understanding and improving their relationship with those impacted by the active travel scheme. It may be pure coincidence, but having re-stressed the advice at Point 1 above, in a follow-up email from us, SCC updated their website on 24th February with this statement on their opening page:

"We have removed the previous plans as we are working on new designs and traffic management options. Once this has been completed the webpage will be updated."

LRAG will continue to press for clearer plans and for continuing engagement before the public consultation occurs. It would be "madness" for SCC not to be fully transparent in advance of seeking further public opinion.