

Minister

As secretary of Chesterfield Cycle Campaign I am writing to you in response to my MP Toby Perkins calling a Westminster Hall debate on 9th November 2021 about the Chesterfield East West walking & cycling route which Derbyshire County Council have been allocated Active Travel tranche 2 funding for and recently approved by Derbyshire County Council.

As with many cycle schemes funded by tranche 1 & 2 there has been a campaign of misinformation leading to objections about how the public consultation was carried out and the proposals for the route.

Derbyshire County Council (as the highways authority) claim to have engaged a company to mail shot 4000 homes on or nearby the proposed route. There has been some suggestion that this didn't happen, however I am aware of homes that did receive a letter on all sections of the route but also homes that say they didn't. Our Campaign wonders what form the envelope containing the letter took, if just addressed to 'householder' or similar perhaps many ignored it.

Despite the controversy about the consultation letter it was well advertised in local newspapers (and their websites), by the Borough Council and widely on social media. The County Council emailed all Chesterfield Borough councillors, affected County councillors and MP's. The consultation took place immediately before the County Council 'purdah' period and virtually all candidates of areas affected by the route publicised the consultation.

Our Campaign believes that with Covid restrictions in place the County Council advertised the consultation as much as possible.

The consultation was conducted online using 'Commonplace' (and paper based) and over 1100 responses were made about the various sections of the route. Every section of the route had a majority in favour, ranging from 60% to 85%.

The route is split into five sections, section one being the western end and section five the eastern. Sections two, three and four are an upgrading of an existing walking and cycling route (the Hipper Valley Trail).

Section one plans to build a two way segregated cycle path alongside a busy A road leading to the Peak District. Currently this road is a single carriageway

with a very wide hatched median strip in the middle. It is planned to relocate the eastern carriageway into the median strip and reallocate the original eastern carriageway as the cycle path. This road was identified as suitable by DfT's 'Rapid Cycleway Prioritisation Tool'. The speed limit will also be reduced from 40mph to 30mph. This route will serve around 250 homes which currently have no cycle infrastructure. It also passes a large secondary school and will provide safe cycle access directly into the school.

The 'waters have been muddied' regarding this section because there has been planned for 20 years an almost parallel route across fields to a village to the west of Chesterfield called Holymoorside. Derbyshire County Council have been negotiating with the land owners of the fields for 20 years without success and recently decided they could no longer spend officer time on that project. Our Campaign was disappointed by that and we support both routes because they serve different demographics.

There has been a call by our MP Toby Perkins to abandon section 1 of the tranche 2 route and use the funding to build the route across the fields. However the fields route already had funding allocated by Derbyshire County Council and there is no guarantee that an agreement can be reached with the land owners. It also doesn't satisfy DfT's requirement to reallocate road space.

At the eastern end section 5 proposes permanently closing a single track road which leads from the railway station to the rear entrance of Chesterfield's Royal Hospital, large hospital with several thousand staff and over 2000 car parking spaces. This road was closed using tranche 1 funding to provide a key worker walking and cycling route.

The Royal Hospital is on the top of a hill so from the town centre involves a steep climb either up a busy A road or this quiet single track road. Many have suggested it is too steep for cycling but our Campaign has observed many cyclists using the route and the Royal Hospital report several members of staff now cycling up there. Another local NHS trust has just introduced an ebike loan scheme for staff and the Royal Hospital are considering a similar scheme.

Not only is this a route to the hospital but it also provides a better alternative to the Trans Pennine Trail (TPT) which ends one of its 'legs' at Chesterfield railway station. Using the existing TPT involves three steep climbs whereas using section 5 means only one steep climb. The TPT links Chesterfield to many areas to the east and north and provides a leisure route as far as Southport, Leeds, York and Hornsea.

Again an alternative has been suggested by those that oppose this section but that involves a muddy climb through a golf course not satisfying DfT's requirements for funding tranche 2 walking and cycling proposals.

Our Campaign understand that Chesterfield MP Toby Perkins is seeking a meeting with you to discuss the consultation and to see if the alternative routes proposed meet DfT's criteria for funding the whole route.

We believe at the western end (section 1) both routes (east west tranche 2 proposal and the route across the fields) should go ahead because they serve different demographics. This section is compliant with LTN 1/20 and reallocates road space.

At the eastern end (section 5) the road closure is the most direct and best route to serve the Royal Hospital and further afield using the Trans Pennine Trail. This section complies with DfT's requirement to reallocate road space.

I would be grateful if you or one of your colleagues from DfT could confirm if funding can be reallocated to the alternatives with the original proposals abandoned. Our Campaign supports Derbyshire County Council's original proposals and does not want to see funding withdrawn. I look forward to receiving a reply.

Best wishes.

Alastair Meikle

Secretary, Chesterfield Cycle Campaign