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19th October 2023

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Relief to Rowstock (“the Scheme”) – Phase One Consultation

I am instructed to write to you on behalf of the Rowstock Residents Association (“the RRA”) and in respect of the Scheme and the way in which the Phase One Consultation (“the Consultation”) was conducted. The RRA has serious concerns about the veracity of the Consultation and the reassurances to the public about the proclaimed “benefits” of the scheme. To explain:

Statement Made During the Consultation

The Council’s webpage¹ for the Consultation run from 11th October 2022 to 8th November 2022 sets out the following:

*“The Relief to Rowstock scheme aims to provide **improved bus journey time** savings and reliability, and encourage sustainable modes of transport. It also aims to mitigate congestion at the Steventon lights junction (B4017 High Street), and provide improved connectivity to Milton Park and Harwell Campus” **(my emphasis)***

The Council’s Technical Work on the Scheme

The RRA is working with Motion Transport Consultancy (“Motion”) to analyse the impacts of the Scheme on current and future traffic conditions and to review the claimed benefits of the Scheme. As part of that work Motion has obtained (through requests made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (“the FOIA”) a copy of a Technical Note -TNA01 (“the Note”) from AECOM (enclosed) which in respect of a proposed bus lane (designed, the RRA understands, to meet the aims set out in the passage set out above) concludes:

¹ <https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/r2rproject-phase1>

“6.21 In summary, if the bus lane proposal was implemented, the results indicate that the junction would be operating over capacity and would experience significant queues for the majority of the day. It is for this reason that the bus lane option would not be recommended”

Motion queried as to whether or not the Note was the final report.. The same Note was re-disclosed on 1st September 2023 as part of the same FOIA request together with the following statement:

“The statement is different because all the other documents are in draft form. We can however confirm that the attached documents ‘R2R-ACM-HGN-ZZ_ZZ_ZZ_P2-RP-TR-0001_RevE.pdf’ and ‘R2R-ACM-HGN-ZZ_ZZ_ZZ_P2-RP-TR-0001_Rev7 Steventon Lights only.pdf’ are the complete copies of the technical assessment work including all calculations, drawings and reports) that demonstrates that the Relief to Rowstock scheme provides bus journey time savings and mitigates congestion at the Steventon lights junction? All other documents are in draft.”

Motion has now sought disclosure of any technical evidence that supported any claims that mitigation at the relevant junction would be reduced and, indeed, that bus journey times would be reduced. However, it seems clear to the RRA that the Note is the final technical appraisal prepared by AECOM.

The Adequacy of the Consultation

The Note was finalised and approved on 10th January 2022. This was some nine months before the Consultation was launched. However, it is not understood that the clearly identified and assessed limitation of the Scheme in respect of the proposed bus lane was highlighted in the Consultation or, indeed, made available for members of the public to see and consider.

In short, the RRA considers that local residents were misled as to the benefits of the scheme. It seems clear from the Note that it is impossible to implement the Scheme with the inclusion of a bus lane which appears to be a key piece of infrastructure designed to support the stated aims of the Scheme. Had members of the public been made aware of the Council’s consultants’ clear, and unambiguous, statement as to the limitations of what had been proposed, it is likely that consultation responses would have sought to address this issue. The Consultation, as run and concluded, was deeply flawed and unfair and the results cannot, and should not, be relied upon as providing support for the Scheme.

The Council should not have predicated the Consultation based on what it wanted to achieve, when the evidence appears to be clear that a key aspect of the Council’s aspirations for the Scheme cannot be delivered. Officers appear to be moving towards approving a Scheme the benefits of which are not supported by its own underlying evidence base.

However, it is not too late to remedy this issue and a further consultation could, and should, be run disclosing the Council’s technical appraisal of the Scheme so that the public can consider it and, indeed, address it directly in response to any further consultation.

As discussed at the start of this letter, the RRA and Motion have been working to assess the Scheme. That work was sent to Cllrs Povolotsky and Webber as well as Mr. Belcher (Principal Infrastructure Planner), the Council's "project lead" in respect of this matter on 18th August 2023. From Motion's report, the RRA has identified further flaws with the Scheme including that:

- a. The current designs for the Scheme do not meet road safety standards.
- b. The proposed cycle path fails to link from (or to) any existing or proposed cycle route.

Motion's report, and the RRA's concerns raised following receipt of it, remain unaddressed and responded to. I have enclosed a copy of the correspondence and Motion's report for your information. The RRA invite you to read it fully.

Mr. Belcher (yesterday) proposed a meeting to provide an update to the "*surrounding parishes/resident associations*) and has sought dates and times for this update meeting.

However, whilst the RRA welcome the opportunity for and update, I am instructed to invite the Council to set up a further meeting between members of the RRA, Motion, relevant local Councillors and the Principal Infrastructure Planner to discuss this deeply flawed and problematic Scheme and what the Council proposes to do to remedy the shortcomings in the Scheme and Consultation exercise. All work on the Scheme should be suspended whilst these discussions take place.

Such a meeting does not appear to be suited as part of a "concise" update meeting.

I look forward to hearing further from you.

Yours sincerely



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