

CHESTERFIELD AND DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY

Chairman: Philip Riden
9 Owen Falls Avenue, Chesterfield S41 0FR
email: chairman@chesterfieldcivicsociety.org.uk
Telephone 01246 554026

Head of Paid Service
Derbyshire County Council
County Hall
Matlock
DE4 3AG

Under signed-for cover

20 October 2021

Dear Sir or Madam,

Proposed East–West Chesterfield Walking and Cycling Route Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman’s reference 21 010 542

As you know, the Civic Society indicated some time ago that, if the county council resolved to continue with the implementation of the above scheme, it would lay a complaint before the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman, stating that the county council’s purported ‘public consultation exercise’ conducted earlier this year was not executed in accordance with the authority’s declared intention; that for this reason the statistics derived from it, claiming to show that there was widespread public support for the scheme, were meaningless; and that such statistics were an unsafe basis on which to make a decision to proceed.

Further details of the worthlessness of the ‘statistics’ produced by the county council’s consultants and the failure of its contractors to do what they were contracted to do, are set out in the memorandum enclosed with this letter.

In addition, the Civic Society considers that the county council has not adequately considered the alternative route via Greendale Avenue for the western section of the scheme, which would avoid severe damage to Chatsworth Road between its junctions with Holymoore Road and Storrs Road, making the road more difficult and dangerous to negotiate for both pedestrians and motorists.

In the case of the eastern section of the route, which involves the permanent closure to motor traffic of part of Crow Lane, the county council has taken no account of a petition signed by 711 local residents opposing this closure. No reference to this petition is made in an email issued on 15 October 2021 by the county council over the name of the cabinet member responsible for this scheme to the large number of taxpayers who wrote to him expressing opposition to the scheme.

I might add that the decision to send a common-form email clearly written by an officer, not the elected member to whom the complaints were addressed, has caused considerable offence among recipients, including myself, as has the inappropriate salutation.

In addition, the Civic Society considers the reasons to go ahead with the scheme given in the report submitted to the county council's cabinet facile and of no merit. We do not believe that the creation of this 'walking and cycling route' will have any measurable effect on the number of people who either walk or cycle in Chesterfield, whereas it will undoubtedly cause inconvenience and danger to users of one of the busiest roads leading in and out of the town.

The Civic Society also wishes to complain at the suggestion in the cabinet paper that 'doing nothing is not an option'. On the contrary, there would be a significant saving to public funds if the county council abandoned this scheme and indicated to the Secretary of State that it does not wish to draw the money offered. This action would not only avoid inflicting considerable inconvenience on residents of Chesterfield but would make a small contribution to the Government's attempts to bring public expenditure under control.

On all these grounds, the Civic Society considers that the county council's decision to go ahead with the Chesterfield East-West Walking and Cycle Route is based on inaccurate and incomplete information concerning public opposition to the scheme and is not in the best interest of taxpayers.

The Ombudsman's response to the Civic Society's complaint is that, despite our sending several letters to the cabinet member concerned, the county council has not yet had the opportunity to consider our complaint and to reply.

This letter constitutes a complaint to the county council on the lines required by the Ombudsman. I shall be obliged if you will acknowledge receipt and make an appropriate response in due course, preferably in considerably less than the twelve weeks allowed by the Ombudsman.

Yours faithfully,

Philip Riden
Chairman
Chesterfield and District Civic Society