



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

020 7219 4198

Monday, 5th December 2022

Dear Mark,

CLEVEDON SEAFRONT

I am writing to seek your guidance in preventing what I believe will be a major transport safety problem in North Somerset.

In 2020, North Somerset Council was awarded £473,750 as part of the government's grant award to create "safe routes for people to walk and cycle safely". Far from improving safety, I believe North Somerset plans to remodel (some would say vandalise) the historic seafront at Clevedon will create new safety risks for pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers alike.

I have visited the site on numerous occasions, accompanied by residents and traders, whose initial fears about the impact of the scheme have been more than borne out. We are keen to know if there are any mechanisms available to us to bring the scheme to a halt and whether there are any precedents of which your department is aware, where similar schemes have been stopped or compulsorily altered because of safety concerns.

The specific risks, and lack of proper consultation and advice, are as follows:

Road Safety Concerns (Ref. Appendix A – Annotated Scheme Plan for location of key concerns)

1. Introduction of new and increased risk of motorised/non-motorised user conflicts throughout the length of The Beach
- Pedestrians are still likely to cross at will between the east and western footway and will now be doing so at increased risk by crossing a two-way cycleway and then also between parked vehicles in the new proposed parallel parking arrangement, in turn masking their intervisibility with oncoming one-way northbound road users (App. A – A).
 - There will be a new risk of conflict between pedestrians and either cyclists or those alighting a parked vehicle when using the narrow 'pedestrian strips' between



the parallel parking spaces and the cycleway, this being a particular increased risk for safe pushchair movements, wheelchair users or visually/audibly impaired. In turn, when those accessing/alighting parked vehicles are on the narrow 1m strip, others will have to move around them and the only way to do so will be into the cycleway and the potential path of oncoming cyclists. A 1m strip also provides little buffer for a southbound cyclist if they veer to the left, with increased risk of being struck by an opening vehicle door (App. A – B).

- The position of disabled parking spaces to be provided through this scheme will introduce new risks to these more vulnerable visitors to the seafront. Use of the disabled space on the western kerbline (close to 'Five the Beach' café) would mean that a wheelchair user needing to access or exit a vehicle from the rear would be doing so directly into the path of one of the uncontrolled pedestrian crossing points to be provided along The Beach (App. A – C). Use of either of the two parking spaces to be provided at the northern end of The Beach would be even less desirable as the chances are that rear access will not be easily achieved from their position (App. A – D). Although the pedestrian strip is widened at this point, slow and steady access to/from the side of a vehicle is likely to cause localised congestion in the footway and knock-on obstruction and safety issues within this proximity of the cycleway entry/exit and a crossing facility to be provided on this arm of the junction with Alexandra Road.

- Safety issues within the proximity of the northernmost disabled spaces are further compounded by new loading and parking spaces to be provided immediately opposite, along the eastern kerb line (App. A – E). The provision of parking on both kerb lines serves to significantly reduce carriageway capacity on approach to the 'roundabout' style junction and it is hard to see how buses and other large vehicles will safely negotiate the turning movement at this junction without, as they are already observed doing, veering across the carriageway into the potential path of southbound traffic on Marine Parade.

- A further significant safety concern along The Beach is the dropped kerb on the western kerb line, just to the north of Clevedon Sailing Club which appears to facilitate vehicular access to/from the sailing club. This will require associated vehicles to cross both the footway and the two-way cycleway, potentially masked from oncoming one-way traffic by kerbside parking and, in turn masking west to east pedestrian crossing movements at the crossing to be provided immediately upstream (App. A – F).



2. Northern and Southern Tie-ins

The key element of this scheme is to encourage/promote increased cycle-based leisure and commuter travel. Despite the significant road safety concerns that this scheme presents for cyclists throughout the length of The Beach, some of the even more hazardous concerns are at the northern and southern tie-ins of the scheme with the existing carriageway, at its junctions with Elton Road (to the south) and Marine Parade/Alexandra Road (to the north). It is unlikely that commuter cyclists will deter from the main carriageway to use such a short section of off-road carriageway, but also because this will require negotiation of particularly hazardous access/egress arrangements at both the northern and southern ends of the cycleway. It is commonly accepted that commuter cyclists prefer to remain on-carriageway, and this is borne out by many cyclists observed cycling on-road against the 'one-way working' that is already in place during scheme construction.

3. The Beach – tie-in with the existing carriageway at the southern junction with Elton Road

- The most significant safety concern at the southern tie-in is that cyclists leaving the off-road cycleway and continuing south-westbound on Elton Road will be required to cross the north-eastbound carriageway where inter-visibility is significantly reduced by a bend in the carriageway on this approach. The risk of conflict between cyclists and other road users at this location is further increased by the proximity of an existing bus stop on the western kerb line of Elton Road and new parking spaces to be provided on the eastern kerb line. When the bus stop is in use or passengers are waiting for a bus, cyclists are likely to be masked to oncoming north-eastbound road users. Where a stationary bus may be anticipated as a safe opportunity for cyclists to join the carriageway, other road users may seek to overtake it, directly into the path of a cyclist (App. A – G). Adequate visibility of cyclists during hours of darkness is also a concern as the tree canopies at this location serve to throw shadow/darkness on the foot and cycleway at the point of access/egress. The canopy is also currently low hanging which will present a further hazard to a cyclist.

- A westbound contra-flow cycle lane is also being provided through this scheme on Seavale Road, which is located on the eastern side of The Beach, immediately on entry to the one-way system. It is unclear how cyclists using this lane will then safely access Elton Road should they wish to continue south-west or north-eastbound (App. A – H).



4. The Beach – tie-in with the existing carriageway at the northern junction with Marine Parade/ Alexandra Road

- The terminal junction at the northern end of The Beach will represent the introduction of a significant safety hazard at a location where one did not previously exist, specifically given the unclear nature of the layout and potential confusion with regards priority of movements and the risk of conflict between any combination of motorised and non-motorised road-users (App. A – I). It has been made clear that this is not a roundabout, which raises significant concerns as to safe use and accommodation of movements and implications in the unfortunate incidence of a collision. It is unclear whether swept path and/or network modelling has been undertaken to assess capacity and safe operation of this junction. Specific road user concerns include safe pedestrian use of the crossing points to be provided on each arm, ability for larger vehicles (HGVs, buses) to safely negotiate the circulatory carriageway (and already observed crossing into the southbound carriageway on Marine Parade), cyclists accessing/egressing the cycleway directly from this junction and the localised carriageway restrictions and obstruction associated with access to/from and use of the disabled parking and loading bays on The Beach approach to the junction. Concerns at this location are further compounded by the steep downward gradient on the Marine Parade southbound approach to the ‘roundabout’ type feature and that re-alignment of the carriageway on The Beach to the east will now further reduce intervisibility between these opposing traffic movements (App. A – J).

- For cyclists leaving the cycleway and continuing northbound on Marine Parade, the introduction of the need now to navigate a ‘roundabout’ type feature junction and negotiate the significant gradient from a standing start are neither desirable or safe, particularly as this also requires passing through a pedestrian crossing and potentially being forced into the centre of the carriageway when the bus stop immediately upstream of the junction is in use (App. A – K).

- There are no proposals for lighting at this junction, which raises further concerns regarding adequate visibility during hours of darkness.

As well as these safety issues, we believe that the consultation undertaken by North Somerset was fundamentally flawed.

The consultation opened 5 Feb 2021 at 15:00 and ended on the 7 March 2021. This was during the third Covid Lockdown when most people were more concerned about keeping safe than looking for consultations from North Somerset Council about the seafront at Clevedon.



Any consultation could only have been online or in the very limited press as it was illegal to meet during this period face to face, and therefore would potentially have not been visible to older generations and those without internet access (the poorer in society). This is discriminatory. It was effectively buried under the COVID pandemic.

NSC state “All these groups were consulted: The Sailing Club, Sea Swimmers, Gig Rowing Club, Canoe club and Pier fishing Club”. As this consultation was when we were in lockdown, I cannot understand quite how this consultation took place.

The Timeline of the Development of the Plans

I also note that the plans were first developed by the council before 2020 as outlined in a letter from Lucy Shomali, Director of Place, North Somerset Council to me on the 21 February 2022 15:15 where she states:

‘The cycle lane on The Beach will benefit from future connections both south and north towards Portishead as part of the North Somerset Coastal Towns Cycle Route which is included within the council’s Corporate Plan and Active Travel Strategy. Connecting Somerset via the already delivered Brean Down Way to Bristol, this route will be a fantastic attraction for locals and visitors and provide an economic boost for the area (see Objective 3 of the North Somerset Active Travel Strategy). However, we cannot deliver the whole route in one go due to funding restrictions and because of the length of route involved.’

This plan was for 2020 – 2025 so must have been written before 2020. So, there are even more questions about the future cycle lane connections and where they will go. Will they go along Clevedon Road to Portishead through Walton and Weston in Gordano (along Wellington Terrace, for example)? Where are these plans and who has approved them? Have the public been consulted about these plans yet? If not, how can they be mentioned before they are agreed and consulted on?

The North Somerset Active Travel Strategy, which was written before this consultation about the seafront took place but has no dates on it and is a mere 91 pages long, shows the seafront scheme on page 60, as it is now. This therefore



leads me to think that the plan was a 'Done deal' already as no changes have been made to the scheme as North Somerset Council are using the exact same images now to promote this. How is this consultation if the plans are already decided?

Many of those who run businesses on the seafront wrote letters of objection and when questioning NSC if the letters had been received, were told that their letters of objection were conveniently lost in the post. The businesses on the seafront are 100% against the plans and say they have not been consulted. One even employed a barrister to fight the plans which cost over £10,000 but had no response from NSC so had to reluctantly give up.

Over 6,000 have now signed a petition against these proposals.
<https://www.change.org/p/north-somerset-council-stop-alterations-to-clevedon-seafront>. That is 12 times the number that took part in the consultation.

There are a number of other issues of which you should be aware, although these do not fall within the remit of your department.

Firstly, the scheme is already horrendously overbudget. Recent estimates have suggested that this may be around £275,000, which is a huge amount of money for a small local authority. Local opinion is outraged that when the council is strapped for cash, it will have to find savings out of other, much more important programmes to fund the incompetent management of their obsessive attachment to this scheme.

Secondly, the stated objective of the project – to create a pier-to-pier cycleway (Weston-super-Mare to Clevedon) – is nothing of the sort. There are regular breaks where cycle traffic will be forced back onto the main carriageway and the designation of country roads (some inappropriate) to create the illusion that there is continuity of the scheme. It appears that the whole project is designed to justify some sort of political ideology in the council and has become an expensive vanity project.

Thirdly, we will have the loss of a major amenity. For decades, people have been coming to Clevedon's historic seafront, parking their cars so that they can look at our unique, restored pier and look across the Channel to Wales and its famous sunsets. In particular, we tend to have a lot of elderly visitors and families who can sit in their cars and enjoy a cup of tea or a picnic before walking along the seafront, visiting the pier or enjoying the facilities provided by local traders. In future, if this



plan goes ahead, cars will be unable to face the sea, and there will be the additional hazards, as detailed above, when crossing between the seafront itself and local shops and facilities. Photographs of those parked to look at the sea will be consigned to the history of an era when common sense prevailed and before our current "rainbow coalition" council wrecked the heritage of the town.

In summary, a vast amount of public money is being spent to solve a problem which does not actually exist. We do not have major road safety issues on Clevedon seafront at present, despite it being a Victorian amenity. We will, however, have safety issues in the future as a result of the incompetent plans of the current North Somerset Council. The council claim that some 750 people supported the scheme but over 6000 have signed up to oppose it. It is, indeed, difficult to know who benefits other than those who simply want to claim, falsely, that they have created some pier-to-pier cycle scheme, whatever their personal motivations.

The project is not popular, not safe, not affordable, not properly consulted upon and not necessary.

It damages historic amenity, will disadvantage visitors (especially the elderly), will disrupt local trade and impede access to local residents.

Above all, as far as your department is concerned, it will utilise taxpayers' money in a way that will increase the risks to pedestrians, cyclists and motorists in the future.

The original claim of North Somerset Council that "the scheme package will improve the provision and awareness of safe walking and cycling facilities to local shops and businesses" would be laughable were it not so potentially tragic.

We are aware that there may be limited ways in which your department can help us in the face of a determined and unyielding approach by North Somerset Council, who seem blind to either public opinion or the risks in their obsession to complete a project which has already horrendously overshot its budget, but we would hugely value any guidance you are able to provide us with in what many of us believe to be a vital and historic battle.

Yours ever,
A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "James", with a horizontal line underneath.