



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

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Ms Jo Walker
North Somerset Council
Town Hall
Weston-super-Mare
BS23 1UJ

29th November 2023

Dear Jo,

In my 31 years as member of Parliament for North Somerset, I have seldom known such public anger as that which has been generated over North Somerset Council's management of road and traffic issues in recent times.

I enclose a short summary of these issues, including those which are still being considered by the council and which are provoking an extremely strong reaction from local residents.

Clevedon Seafront and Hill Road

On 5th December 2022, I wrote to the Secretary of State for Transport on the issue of Clevedon seafront, saying:

'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's plans to remodel (some would say vandalise) the historic seafront at Clevedon will create new safety risks for pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers alike.'

I went on to conclude that 'a vast amount of public money is being spent to solve a problem which does not actually exist.'

We now know that the initial scheme for Clevedon seafront was £201,000, but that the final cost is £1.357 million, a £1.1 million overspend which must be met from the existing council budget funded by council taxpayers. It also appears that an extra £375,000 will need to be found by the council to return the seafront to its original condition.

As you know, I have referred the council to its auditors to examine this scheme in detail as part of its annual review as I believe it is a level of mismanagement that would require 'heads to roll' if it were to occur in the private sector.



Bus Lanes

Central government finance has been made available to improve bus transport across the country. As the Secretary of State made clear, ‘The [Government’s] Strategy... explains how we expect to see plans for bus lanes on any roads where there is a frequent bus service, congestion, and physical space to install one in Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIPs).’

In North Somerset, we do not have a frequent bus service, are not subjected to the level of congestion that occurs in many of our cities, and given the nature of our transport infrastructure, there is seldom physical space to install bus lanes without substantial disruption to other road users.

It is difficult to see, therefore, how some of the changes which have been forced upon many parts of North Somerset can be justified outside, perhaps, Weston-super-Mare.

Long Ashton Bus Lane

There was considerable controversy ahead of the local elections about the installation of a bus lane on the Long Ashton bypass and, in particular, the fact that it was designated as a 24-hour facility.

As you will remember, I was particularly annoyed by claims from both North Somerset officials and councillors that the 24-hour role was a condition imposed by the government before funding would be made available. This was to deflect local anger before the elections and was, as I pointed out, **completely untrue**. We are yet to receive an apology for this.

As the Secretary of State pointed out in his letter to me on 6th June 2023, ‘It is nevertheless for the Local Transport Authority to set hours of operation for bus lanes, taking into account bus timetables and levels of traffic and I can confirm that it is not a condition of BSIP funding received from the Government that the proposed bus lane on the A370 Long Ashton bypass must be in operation 24/7.’

Brockley

In October 2022, Brockley Parish Council took part in a Zoom call with North Somerset Council (NSC) during which changes to the A370 were outlined by NSC.

The plan for the Brockley crossroads showed the bus lanes in the middle of the road, and the Parish Council raised the subject of the right turn into Brockley Lane as it was not clear how vehicles would cross the bus lane safely.

Officials from North Somerset Council said they would take the issue away and come back to the Parish Council with details of how this problem might be overcome. It was expected that work would begin in the Spring of 2023.

On 29th August 2023, the Chairman of the Parish Council received an email from NSC to ‘Put something in the diary to talk about some up and coming changes planned in Brockley Combe.’ This communication referenced a hyperlink to further information and plans of the



intended work. The Chairman of the Parish Council pointed out that the problem of traffic turning right into Brockley Lane had not been addressed despite assurances from NSC that this would be done.

On September 6th, NSC responded that this had been addressed by introducing a ban on turning right. This was not apparent on the plans shown.

Also on September 6th, Brockley Parish Council was sent Notices of Intent (NOIs) indicating the ban on the right turn along with Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) for the works to begin on October 2nd. These were also posted on the traffic lights at Brockley crossroads together with copies of the original maps. A consultation period was also advertised as ending on Friday 29th September, two non-working days before work was due to start.

Local residents and the Parish Council were assured that personnel would be on duty over the weekend to review all comments submitted. Temporary traffic lights were, however, installed on 29th September in preparation for works beginning on Monday 2nd October, meaning they were installed before the 'consultation' was even finished.

I would be very grateful for an explanation about this particular issue as local residents have asked me to refer this to the local government ombudsman on the grounds of breach of process.

Backwell

This is another example of where there has been insufficient consultation with local residents and an overconcentration on the provision of bus lanes without due regard to the impact on local road users who include the elderly, the disabled, and those who need to travel to provide important medical and social care. The idea that motorists using our roads represent some sort of luxury journeys which are to be discouraged simply does not understand the reality of the community in which we live.

There is particular anger about proposals for Backwell crossroads and Dark Lane. The current proposal will make Dark Lane one-way only coming up from the crossroads. This will not only prevent access from Dark Lane to the A370 but will produce long detours along Church Lane with potentially dangerous exits onto the A370 from two uncontrolled points.

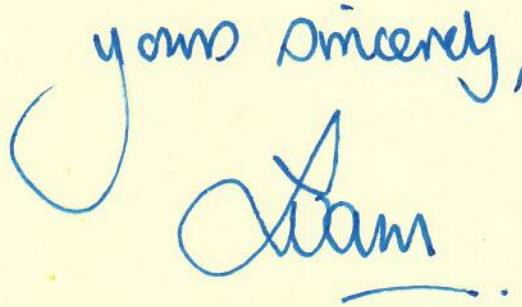
As with the disastrous Clevedon seafront proposals, I believe that this will create a safety issue where none exists today. In addition, this will produce large volumes of traffic which will pass by the junior school where there are no safe pavements along the route and where vehicle access is restricted to single lane traffic at points.

This set of proposals is still out for consultation, and I hope that NSC will take the opportunity to avoid the calamitous mistakes being made here which have been the hallmark of recent decisions.



Overall, I believe that the decision-making process has been flawed, has resulted in huge bills to local council taxpayers, and has resulted in both inconvenience and increased risk to North Somerset residents.

I look forward to your response on behalf of the council.

Yours sincerely,
A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Liam', with a horizontal line underneath.

The Rt Hon Dr Liam Fox MP
Member of Parliament for North Somerset