

Cycling Strategy 2014–2026 Consultation – Response by the Lower Sunbury Residents’ Association (LOSRA)

Introduction

The Forward to the Consultation document recognises that ‘the cycling issues in rural Surrey are not the same as at the urban fringe’ and this response addresses an initiative which traces its origins back to 2001.

The Thames Overways Project, whilst enjoying widespread support and endorsement by Sustrans, finally fell off the political agenda in 2007. In this connection, it is interesting to note the very encouraging email from Helyn Clack, coincidentally the co-sponsor of this consultation, when she was member for Transport at Surrey County Council in 2007 (Copy attached).

LOSRA’s response addresses the following elements of the consultation document:

- Strategy Summary (Pages 4-5) and in particular items 1, 2 & 6
- Objectives 01, 02, 03, 04, 07, 08, 010, 011, (Pages 8-9 & 18-24)
- Para. 6.2 Priority Routes, in particular bullet point No.7 (crossings over major roads, rail and waterways), (Page 18)

Question put to Local Committee

The following question was put by Mr John Hirsh on behalf of LOSRA at the Spelthorne Local Committee on Monday 30th September:

The Resurrection of Proposed Cycle/Pedestrian Bridge to Access Thames Path.

Traffic congestion, pollution and danger are major current concerns in this part of car-dominated Surrey. Finding alternatives to car use - a policy embraced by central government - will play a key part in improving what has become a degraded local environment.

A foot/cycle bridge was first proposed by the Thames Overways Projects (TOPS) in 2001 but since then the Lower Sunbury population has increased very considerably. The combined population increase of Sunbury East and Halliford & Sunbury West wards is 10.1% (2011 census) but with no commensurate improvement in local infrastructure amenity. Further, an aggregated total from 271 units of 811 additional bedrooms have been approved in recent planning applications which implies an even greater population increase before the next census is due in 2021.

The River Thames is one of the greatest assets but is also a barrier between places where people live, work and play. LOSRA believes that a car-free bridge would be of enormous benefit to a wide area both north and south of the River. It would mean safer and shorter non-

polluting journeys to work, schools and recreation. It would also provide an alternative to traffic-jammed Thames Bridges and the choked main roads leading to those bridges; and facilitate extended access to the Thames Path National Trail (On 17th September the Thames Path made the second spot in the Lonely Planet's top ten 'city hikes', behind Tijuca forest in Rio de Janeiro) to communities north of the river, giving impetus to sustainable local tourism. In short the river is a beautiful linear park but it also prevents easy sharing of the excellent amenities that exist on either side of the waterway.

I am aware that public opinion was very much in favour of the earlier TOPS proposals but in order to test public opinion today I have conducted a random survey (summarised below) of 100 residents from the TW16 and KT12 postal areas (north and south of the River). I have also sought the preliminary views of ward councillors representing Sunbury East and Halliford & Sunbury West, the SCC Cabinet member for Transport, the SBC Cabinet member for Economic Development and fixed assets; and the Chairman of the Local Area Committee (Spelthorne). All but two have given their qualified support. (The two remaining respondents have reserved their positions until the outcome of proceedings at this Committee) Kwasi Kwateng, the MP for Spelthorne, has also given his enthusiastic endorsement.

Survey of Local Residents

A questionnaire survey was conducted over a number of weeks with 100 local residents being approached at a number of locations on both sides of the river. A spreadsheet is available which details the responses and it will show that every respondent, perhaps unsurprisingly, was supportive of the proposal to construct a foot/cycle bridge provided it was positioned at the best possible site. If one were to be constructed, 97 respondents stated that they or their family members would use it, with those resiling giving old age or infirmity as their reasons.

The reduction in car journeys would be considerable with 16 respondents stating that they would always use the foot/cycle bridge in preference to driving over the road bridges; 54 would often choose to do so; 26 sometimes; and a mere 2, for reasons mentioned above, would never choose this option.

In addition to the questions each respondent was given the opportunity to comment and these have been recorded. It was significant that many residents always thought the bridge was to have been built many years ago and couldn't understand why it hadn't. The level of enthusiasm for the proposal was very evident throughout the survey with many respondents quoting their personal frustrations at having no option but to drive to destinations on the south bank.

Appendix B of the draft Community Infrastructure Levy charging Document details infrastructure projects to be funded by CIL and it will be seen that 'open space and leisure facilities' are included. Since the original Sunnyside Bridge scheme, connecting Hampton to East Molesey was first conceived, the Principal Transport Planner for the Transport and Highways Directorate at Richmond Borough Council has advised me that the plan was dropped in favour of a bid to Transport for London (TfL) for a bridge at Twickenham. It seems then, that the alternative Sunnyside Bridge site located within Richmond Borough is now firmly off the agenda.

Even if we were to put aside the very obvious benefits to leisure amenity, any infrastructure improvement which succeeds in reducing the number of car journeys, especially in a Borough

which is an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA), really has to merit the support of this Committee.

Question:

Whilst aware of the current consultation on the Surrey Cycling Strategy to which this Association will be submitting its response; and putting to one side considerations of costs or precise location options, would the Committee approve the principle of erecting a foot/cycle bridge to the benefit of Spelthorne residents' amenity; and formally recommend this initiative to the SCC Cabinet member for Transport, Highways & Environment; and the Cabinet Member for Communities?

The Answer from Nick Healey, Area Highways Manager (NE), is as follows:

“Strictly speaking Surrey County Council’s Local Committee for Spelthorne is unable to approve the construction of a new bridge formally. The formal ‘approval’ of a new bridge would be subject to inter alia planning approval, land acquisition and funding.

Notwithstanding the formalities, in principle Surrey County Council would welcome new transport infrastructure that was beneficial in meeting our transport objectives. Encouraging cycling and walking as alternative modes of transport to the private car is recognised as key to cutting congestion, improving accessibility, improving air quality, and improving individual health. Experience suggests that wholesale take up of walking and cycling is critically dependent on the provision of high quality infrastructure, that is seen to be safe and advantageous when compared to the alternative car journey.

Therefore in principle a new cycle/pedestrian bridge over the Thames is an interesting suggestion. Before Surrey County Council could lend its support to such a suggestion, we would need to be satisfied that the anticipated benefit would justify the likely cost, would outweigh any negative impact, and that the priority of such a suggestion would compare favourably to other schemes elsewhere in Surrey. It would take a reasonable amount of effort in the context of a feasibility study to assess these.

The Local Committee is invited to indicate its support (or not) for the suggested new bridge. If considered a priority the Local Committee could commission an initial feasibility study to begin to examine the business case for a new structure, possible locations, technical considerations and likely costs.

It is the intention that in the future a local cycling action plan will be developed with the Local Committee to identify new cycling infrastructure that could be implemented should any money become available in the future (for example in case the Cycle Safety Fund from the Department for Transport that was announced last year is repeated in future years). The aim would be to have a number of possible schemes and a priority agreed so that a bid could be prepared and submitted in the future. If the Local Committee is favourable to the suggested cycle/pedestrian bridge over the Thames, this could form part of the local cycling action plan, and could then be considered in the future alongside other schemes in the Borough and across Surrey.”

It is emphasised that the above question was put only to the Spelthorne Local Committee. It is intended to put a similar question to the Elmbridge Committee when it next meets on 18th November 2013, after the closing date of this consultation. That question will highlight the very obvious attractions in Lower Sunbury to Elmbridge residents who may wish to use the bridge. These attractions include the famous Walled Garden and Millennium Embroidery Gallery, Orchard Meadow, the Riverside Arts Centre, Rivermead Island; and the pubs, shops and restaurants in Lower Sunbury and beyond. It would also be useful for longer journeys to major centres of employment at Sunbury Cross, the BP facility in Sunbury and even Heathrow Airport.

Para. 7.2 of the Consultation Document states that 'contributions and the work of volunteers will also be critical to successful implementation of the Strategy'. To this end, and to enable the feasibility study to which Mr Healey refers in his answer, this Association has agreed in principle to make a contribution towards its funding so as to achieve one of the 'green corridors to take cyclists off the road and onto other trails for commuting and leisure purposes' (Page 23, Objective 10). LOSRA would also welcome the opportunity to participate in any study which allows for multi-agency involvement.

Alan Doyle,

Hon Chairman,

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