

Statement to the Board: The BCP Wessex Fields proposals

Friends of Riverside and partners are strongly opposed to the inclusion of BCP Council's Wessex Fields proposal in your Strategic Transport Plan (2020-2025). This proposal – actually Phase 2 of the former Bournemouth Borough Council's so-called 'A338-Wessex Fields Link' - is for an environmentally and culturally damaging roads flyover which has attracted widespread public opposition. It threatens the town's Green Belt, increased air pollution, wildlife habitats and the Conservation Area of Holdenhurst Village, a Domesday Book settlement known as the 'mother of Bournemouth'. It also runs entirely counter to the vision and objectives you have set out for the WGSTB.

You claim that your vision is to 'enable clean growth and increased use of sustainable transport'. Your first objective is 'to support the development of low-carbon transport solutions'.

It is extremely worrying therefore, that you appear to be unaware or unconcerned that this scheme will actually increase carbon emissions and do nothing meaningful to promote sustainable transport, but will rather discourage cycling and walking.

Following on from stakeholder consultation in the summer, your September 2020 Engagement Report states that "90% of the comments received focussed on three themes", the first of which is 'transport decarbonisation'. You go on to say that the following stakeholder feedback headlines "stand out":

"The plan does not reflect the Governments' decarbonising priorities or the impacts of CV19 –it still reflects a "predict and provide" approach to managing travel demand

There remains too much focus on highway investment (this was the most popular comment received)"

The release of the Strategic Transport Plan was delayed from September to December 2020, supposedly to reflect these concerns, *but this delay actually resulted in the inclusion of a further damaging road intervention in the form of the Wessex Fields scheme*. The Council administration at the time of the stakeholder consultation was the Unity Alliance which had given a public commitment not to seek funding for a roads flyover. They were replaced by the current Conservative administration at the beginning of October 2020, and the fact that this resulted in a complete policy volte face is highly disturbing. It calls your commitment to your vision and objectives into serious question.

2000 people signed a petition and over 300 members of the public and organisations wrote letters of objection to the A338-Wessex Fields Link proposals which were passed in January 2018 (in contrast, only 36 letters of support were received by the time the Case Officer released his recommendations report). The Council's own Tree, Urban Design (including cycling and walking provision) and Heritage Officers objected.

In recent weeks, both the United Nations and HM Treasury have published major reports – ‘Making Peace with Nature’ and Dasgupta’s ‘The Economics of Biodiversity’, respectively - calling for immediate and far-reaching change in the way we interact with the world around us. In particular, they decry the reliance on archaic Benefit Cost Ratios (BCR) such as the one hailed by Wessex Fields scheme promoters and which fail to give value to nature (in fact, for a scheme promoted on solely ‘economic’ grounds, even its supporters admit it will only have minor employment benefit).

This is a destructive scheme from an earlier age on which time now calls account: it takes no account of BCP’s Climate Change Emergency Action Plan nor of the consequences of the pandemic (for example as regards the need for large-scale office space). You have a responsibility towards future generations and it is no longer acceptable to support such environmentally and culturally damaging car-focused developments as the Wessex Fields proposal.

We will also send our objections to the Department of Transport, asking them not to fund any bid from yourselves for this backward-looking and destructive scheme.

In the words of Albert Einstein:

“Look deep into nature and you will understand everything better”.

Yours

Conor Niall O’Luby, Coordinator Friends of Riverside

This statement is supported in its entirety by:

Holdenhurst Village Parish Meeting – electors’ representation

East Dorset Friends of the Earth

Dorset CPRE (The Countryside Charity)

Christchurch Bicycle Club – major local cycling organisation, representing over 165 cyclists

BH Active Travel Forum – major local active travel organisation

Bournemouth Civic Society – celebrating and conserving heritage

BCP Cllr Mark Howell

BCP Cllr LJ Evans

BCP Cllr Lisa Lewis

BCP Cllr Kieron Wilson

BCP Cllr Lisa Northover

BCP Cllr Mike Brooke

BCP Cllr Felicity Rice

BCP Cllr George Farquhar

BCP Cllr Chris Rigby

BCP Cllr Simon Bull

BCP Cllr Sandra Moore