

Thursday 10th September 2020

Request for review of Slough Borough Council's abuse of its grant from the Green Transport Fund

Dear Rt Hon. Grant Shapps MP,

We would firstly like to thank you for your efforts in supporting local councils do the right thing by providing them with funding opportunities to improve local roads and transport. The Green Transport Fund is yet another example of our Conservative government investing in local communities to improve local environments.

However, we are also pleased to hear that you are open to intervening to “scrap the worst examples where local authorities have ruined High Streets and residential roads”, as quoted in the Daily Telegraph recently. Here in Slough, the local authority we believe have done just that with their rushed, botched implementation of a bus lane on the A4 through the centre of the Borough¹.

We believe the local authority has implemented this scheme without considering the impact on residents, the town in general or the environment, and against the spirit of the intention for the funds to support social distancing measures. A petition against the scheme reached over 5500 signatories who support this perspective.

We believe the implementation of this scheme fails in several regards:

- **Increased Congestion** - Has increased the amount of congestion throughout the town, not just on the parts of the A4 that this was implemented, but also in adjacent residential roads. Given Slough already suffers from one of the worst journey times in England as Department of Transport data shows², this scheme makes things worse for residents whose journey times throughout the day have dramatically increased.
- **Making Air Quality Worse** – The increase in congestion has clearly the potential to reduce air quality in the town, and given the town has some of the highest instances of childhood asthma³ and the worst air pollution in the South East of England⁴, both as highlighted by recent analysis by the British Heart Foundation, this scheme is clearly counter-intuitive to what it should be achieving by making the likelihood of worsening those statistics greater.
- **Worsening Public Safety** – The conversion of part of the bus lane into a voluntary cycle lane taking up half of the inside traffic lane is considered by local cyclists and motorists to be dangerous, making cycling less safe for residents.
- **Not Improving Social Distancing** – on all the stretch of the A4 the bus and cycle lane has been implemented, it has not improved public ability to social distance, because all of the route already had more than adequate public walkways to allow this.
- **Misaligned Local Public Transport Strategy** – With an average of only two buses per hour in each direction based on current service levels, it is clear that this scheme is ‘ahead of its time’ and lacks coherence with a joined up local public transport strategy that covers all aspects of encouraging greater use of public transport.

SLOUGH CONSERVATIVES

Chair: Lee Pettman

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- **Lack of Consultation with Residents** – Whilst this scheme was allowed to be implemented without prior consultation under the emergency powers allowed under the coronavirus response, the local authority have failed to bring residents on the journey, and we also believe that given this scheme does not actually improve ability to social distancing, we believe it is an abuse of the emergency powers by them.
- **Misuse of Public Funds** - Out of a total of over £200,000 provided to Slough through the fund by your department, the A4 bus lane scheme cost an initial £60,000 to lay down (and before permission was granted by Highways), with an additional £15,000 spent on converting some sections to the cycle lane instead within weeks of the initial bus lane being implemented. For the local authority to spend such vast sums of money on schemes that are an abuse of their intended use, as well as for all the reasons already outlined, and particularly at this time, is we believe an abuse of public funds.

We strongly urge you to intervene and review this scheme urgently – we believe you will agree that not only is this scheme not in the interests of local residents in general, but is also contrary to the spirit of the intention for the funds in the first place to support social distancing.

We as a local party are not against the implementation of bus lanes and cycle lanes, when they are well thought out, do have a positive environmental impact and are in the interests of the public at large; however, it is clear to us that this scheme meets none of those criteria.

Our local activists and councillor group have consistently stood against the local authority on anti-resident schemes like this over recent years, and we hope we can rely on your support to turn this into Conservative Government action for the people of Slough.

Many Thanks,



Lee Pettman

Chair, Slough Conservative Association

On behalf of all members, local candidates and councillors of Slough Conservative Association

References:

¹ – Slough Borough Council Website, 7th September 2020, <http://www.slough.gov.uk/parking-travel-and-roads/a4-bath-road-bus-and-cycle-lanes-trial.aspx>

² – Department of Transport Gov.uk Website, Journey Time Statistics Data Tables, 19th December 2019, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/journey-time-statistics-data-tables-jts>

³ – Daily Mail Online, 5th December 2019, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-7755847/Breathing-London-air-like-smoking-160-cigarettes-year.html>

⁴ – Slough Express Website, 6th December 2019, <https://www.sloughexpress.co.uk/gallery/slough/153546/figures-reveal-air-pollution-in-slough-is-the-highest-in-the-south-east.html#:~:text=Analysis%20of%20data%20by%20the,smoking%20145%20cigarettes%20a%20year.>