

Statement and questions for Cllr John Thomson Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Highways and Streetscene and Broadband, Cabinet Meeting April 22nd 2014.

Bradford on Avon, Historic Core Zone Proposals.

I was elected as Councillor to Bradford on Avon Town Council at the by-election held on March 6th 2014, although I speak as an individual, not on behalf of the Town Council. During the election campaign I was struck by the marked lack of support for the Historic Core Zone project, with people being both critical of aspects of its detail and also more broadly sceptical of the scheme in its entirety. The latter driven often by concerns about the adverse effect that the proposals will have on the already bad congestion and poor air quality which residents endure. I undertook to strive to get these concerns heard and this I have been endeavouring to do. I have to say that many questions remain unanswered and other councillor voices are also raising concerns.

I also want to make you aware of what appears to be serious shortcomings in the process. Who really owns this project? The Bradford on Avon Town Council has been intimately involved in the detail of the scheme, yet has been only too ready to say it's a Wiltshire Council scheme when the going gets tough. Wiltshire Council will no doubt say that it is only doing what the Bradford on Avon Town Council wishes (and by implication what the residents want, which is open to challenge). Wiltshire Council officials either quote from the Buchanan report as justification for their actions or, as I have witnessed at Working Group Meetings, remain silent or most recently seek to rubbish a well supported residents' petition on the Zebra crossings. The consultants now working on the project have said in terms that they are only implementing a plan that has been agreed by others, even if they don't personally agree with it. The Buchanan Report seems to have been placed on a pedestal and to be beyond challenge, even when it is clearly suspect in areas such as its favourable comparison with an HCZ scheme in Shrewsbury. Yet Shrewsbury is totally different with its alternative fast routes for through traffic and its inner ring road and in one report I have seen has a slightly increased accident rate post implementation. I could go on.

Turning to the HCZ scheme itself the declared objectives are, I suggest, what the American's would call "motherhood and apple pie". What's not to like about it? The problems arise when the assumptions are challenged, namely will it deliver what is promised by its supporters and will there be unacceptable unintended consequences and indeed is it what the majority of residents want. Will it really be a safer place to cross the road, particularly for the young, the elderly and the disabled? Published research suggests that it may well be less safe. Will the traffic congestion be made even worse and will this lead, as it is reasonable to expect, to a worsening of air quality? If this happens will the hoped for new shoppers actually be put off from coming, and is the HCZ solution actually dealing with the reason why they are not coming at the moment anyway? Are the additional journey times, already forecast in the Buchanan report, acceptable to the residents and what is the economic cost of these delays?

I believe that Bradford on Avon residents definitely want something done to improve the well known traffic problems in our town but many I have spoken to remain unconvinced

that the HCZ scheme will deliver this. I can imagine them being very disappointed, if the scheme goes ahead and after major disruption and the expenditure of large sums of their money, that they see no improvement and quite possibly deterioration.

I appreciate that thinking again or turning back may be unpalatable to some, but I urge that residents' legitimate concerns be taken account of, and that alternatives or adjustments are actively and properly considered, modelled and perhaps even tested.

Martin Newman
Thursday, 17 April 2014