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Alison Hall MBE
Dagley Lane Preservation Group

9th August 2021

Dear Alison

Proposed Dagley Lane Development

Thank you for writing to me about this issue which I have recently been made aware of and for giving me the opportunity to give you my thoughts.

The Liberal Democrats will always support any initiative that promotes walking and cycling as a means of travel and which could potentially remove cars from the road. However, the Liberal Democrat philosophy is that local voices must be consulted on such projects as they are the ones who are a) most likely to use them and b) the ones who will have to live with the after effects of such projects.

With regards to Dagley Lane it appears that this lane is already well used by local people and beyond - by walkers, dog walkers, horse riders and occasionally by cyclists. It is a lane that is rural in nature that has not been specifically well maintained in the past so parts of it can become muddy and difficult to navigate through. For that reason it is not used much by cyclists who will instead choose to use the parallel A281 until they can join the tarmac path that runs behind the Shalford village Church (St Mary's) from the Waterworks and through Shalford Park into Guildford.

It therefore makes sense to upgrade Dagley Lane to make it suitable for cyclists who wish to commute to and from Guildford from Shalford and beyond so that cycling to Guildford and back becomes a safer activity, but I am concerned that the current plans appear to be recommending widening the path to 3m involving digging up trees, tarmacking the surface and putting in 5m-high lights which will be in use in the darker months during morning dark hours from 5am and then again in the evening dark hours up to 11pm. In other words the plan seems to be to sell this as an 'environmental' project whilst simultaneously destroying the natural environment and habitat, and increasing light pollution for the residents living in Dagden Lane.

I have spoken to a couple of local residents about this issue. While it appears that the lane does need an upgrade there are other local paths, such as the nearby Downslink, which uses compacted gravel and which is, I understand, used by many local cyclists for travel to work and school. One resident who has lived in the area for twenty years told me that the Downslink path from Shalford A281 to Shamley Green works well for cycling, however another local cyclist is not complimentary about how well Surrey County Council maintains the Downslink. Therefore, we know that compacted gravel is a solution which works for walkers and cyclists without losing the rural nature of a path. Going forward any upgrade to Dagley Lane needs to come with a written commitment from SCC about planned ongoing maintenance. The Downslink has no integrated lighting and I am not aware how this affects cyclists nor their thoughts on this.

One other concern I have is hearing that Surrey County Council have not publicised this potential project very widely amongst local residents, with the local Conservative county councillor posting only one basic 'no-details' announcement a year ago on the Shalford Village Facebook community page, with no follow-up posts about either the planning application, nor about the current 'consultation', despite him having an active presence there. This is not good community politics. The soon-to-finish local consultation is within a very short, sharp window (responses by 15th August) and has only been spread to a handful of local residents rather than to the whole Shalford community, all of whom have an interest in this well-loved path. Community is what our lives are about and deliberately keeping the local resident consultation a limited one suggests to me that Surrey County Council really do not want to hear the voices of local residents. That strongly goes against what the Liberal Democrats and I believe in.

To summarise:

1. I support any initiative that encourages the use of walking and cycling as a mode of travel and gets people out of cars.
2. Such initiatives need to have the widest possible consultation within the local community as they are the people who will have to live with any changes and Surrey County Council needs to work with the community to deliver a project the majority of residents are happy with.
3. Destructive construction work that uproots trees and natural habitats must be avoided unless absolutely essential. Laying electricity cables will be enormously disruptive to local people and damaging to local wildlife.
4. The rural nature of this path should be preserved – my suggestion would be to use compacted gravel similar to the nearby Downslink. Tarmac is not appropriate in this location.
5. Light pollution must also be minimised. Perhaps reflectors could be installed into the edges of a new compacted gravel path to help guide cyclists and walkers carrying torches and lights.

If I can help in any way with your campaign going forward please do get in touch, but thank you for inviting me to give a view on this.

Kind regards,

Zöe Franklin

Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Spokesperson for Guildford & Cranleigh