

Address to Full Council on 14th December 2022 - by Charles Ainger

My name is Charles Ainger. I am here to talk to you about the South Lancaster Growth Catalyst.

As well as being a concerned local constituent and council tax payer, I have been an infrastructure engineer since 1972, and a Fellow of the Institution of Civil Engineers. I am also co-author of a just-updated book published by the ICE on how to plan and provide 'Sustainable Infrastructure'. This really brings home the new challenges of providing infrastructure, including housing and transport, in a properly sustainable way. I look at the South Lancaster scheme in the light of this experience.

In 2016, the South Lancaster road scheme may have looked like a sensible outline plan. But since then *everything has changed*, as we confront three emergencies: of *climate*, and staying within carbon budgets, of *biodiversity*, as you are discussing today; and now of *finance*, given councils' huge pressure on funding, and the 20-25% increase in construction costs. So we cannot continue to plan and provide infrastructure in the old 'predict and provide' way. We must change how we do it.

The South Lancs road and housing scheme has now become an example of exactly how not to do it; it is simply unfit for the 21st century. Everything about it is now wrong:

- the number of homes is wrong. Even your Local Plan's 3500 target is no longer likely to be needed. The UK Govt has just said that the high housing growth targets that they imposed are no longer mandatory. Let alone the 'out of thin air' 9185 homes needed to pay for the J33 scheme - which developers will never build. A classic example of 'cart before horse';
- the homes' location, west of the West Coast Main Line is wrong. Its requirement for an underpass under the railway makes it the most expensive location to serve with infrastructure of any area in the Local Plan, and most subject to delays – so it should be absolutely the last location to actually develop;
- the traffic predictions are wrong: they are 6 years out of date; and ignore the accepted need for a 'modal shift' in transport policy. We can no longer build communities dependent on the private car, as this one will be;
- the scheme's high carbon emissions are wrong: it is unacceptable to declare a climate emergency and then spend a quarter of your carbon budget for this century on one, wrong, scheme;
- the scheme's biodiversity, ecology and rivers impact is wrong: you are debating the biodiversity emergency today;

and:

- the cost estimates and funding are wrong: with construction costs up 25%, and a 'magical money tree' assumption that developers will build 9185 houses each providing a £10,000 roof tax; there will inevitably be a large funding gap.

If you go ahead without major re-planning, this scheme will be a road to nowhere, and a financial and reputation disaster. It will serve homes that will never be built, for traffic that will not happen, and require paying for with money that you won't actually have. Only the damage it does will be real: to our climate, our biodiversity and rivers, to the councils' finances and reputation, and to local voters' pockets: and worse, it will leave no funds to build the other infrastructure that we really do need.

I recognise that you are trying to provide the best you can for our community. It is not too late to re-think and re-plan the scheme; and it is no disgrace, or failure, to change it, in the light of the totally changed circumstances since it was first conceived. The solution to this needs to be a careful, adaptive collaboration between city and county councils, with community consultation and buy-in, to serve the real 21st century infrastructure needs of South Lancaster.

Other sensible councils are changing their out of date, unaffordable road plans; and you can do the same. Please do it.
