

Staffordshire County Council
Staffordshire Place 1
Stafford
ST16 2DH

12.03.2021

Dear Sirs

I am replying on behalf of Hednesford Town Council on behalf of all Councillors and residents of our community with specific reference to the proposed Cannock scheme to be funded by the Active Travel Fund

We feel that the proposed scheme is not an appropriate use of this investment fund and an alternative scheme should be developed as we set out below. As a Town Council and a Community we are keen to support Active Travel as part of our regeneration activities and demonstrated not just in the policies and priorities we have developed but also working with the developers of new estates in the town to ensure we have connected walking and cycling routes as part of the developments in design, encouraged wider infrastructure investment from developers connecting cycling to our railway station with plans for secure cycle storage for commuters and followed these up if there have been delays in fulfilling these commitments.

Situated as the Gateway to the Chase as the closest train and bus route for people wanting to access the Chase and the visitors that this attracts, we believe that a key aspect that will contribute to the balance of public access and much needed conservation measures is to encourage Active Travel for both leisure and commuting. Indeed, we know that the Chase will have a global focus next year when the Commonwealth Games arrives in our community increasing the profile of cycling on the Chase and other leisure users accessing this important area. Investing in the access to the Chase to encourage active travel and leaving cars at home is an important strategy for the Special Area of Conservation and the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty of which Staffordshire County Council is an important landowner and stakeholder.

We also believe that beyond the leisure visitors connecting the three towns of our community with Active Travel is critical for the health and wellbeing of the community as well as its prosperity in to the future. The established Cannock Chase Heritage Trail was established a good number of years ago with this principle in mind but with the District Council as the lead Authority and the District, County, Highways and Forestry Commission as landowners where the trail proceeds maintenance and development of this arterial route has not occurred. This has not been promoted as a key cycle route and was designed to connect key visitor assets without a plan ongoing development, maintenance and promotion. Further whilst the route travels from Cannock Leisure Centre through to Rugeley Trent Valley railway station and takes in many steps along the way including access to the Retail Outlet Village through Mill Green Nature Reserve there are gaps in using this as a direct route across the Chase when travelling from Hednesford to Rugeley. The route currently directs people travellers on a circuitous route taking in the two visitor centres at Marquis Drive and Birches Valley but as a commuting route a direct route to join/improve existing paths from RAF Hednesford to Slitting Mill would make this route an asset to active travel. There

are other areas on the route which need wayfarer signage and maintenance and a holistic plan to develop this scheme would benefit the whole community of Cannock Chase and visitors alike.

As three post-industrial market towns our vibrant prosperity is a challenge, as it is for all town centres, but these are brought in to sharp relief when an out of town shopping centre is developed which will further draw investment out of our town centres. We strongly feel that the investment and developer contributions from section 106 commitments around the Retail Outlet Village have identified and supported this development and where these new funds have been made available by the government that these should be directed to supporting the existing economy, wider prosperity and the health and wellbeing of the community at large. The proposed investment of a scheme from the fire station to the Retail Outlet Village is not a priority, is not supported by the community of Hednesford, Cannock Chase or Staffordshire and should not move forward as a scheme for our community. Whilst having no direct evidence our knowledge of the area, and some of us being cyclists, this would not be used by cyclists visiting the Retail Outlet Village to do their shopping. The proposed scheme is also not connected to other routes and using the section of the heritage trail from Mill Green Nature Reserve to Cannock Town, properly promoted, signed and maintained will deliver the desired outcome of connectivity.

Finally, the proposed scheme is not in the listed 22 priority areas included in the recently published Staffordshire County Council Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan 2020-2030, but then again neither is the heritage trail or other known routes in this flawed document which is subject to separate representations.

Please consider changing the direction of this investment fund from a limited scheme that will only benefit a few people visiting the already heavily invested Retail Outlet Village towards the scheme suggested that will benefit the health and wellbeing of the whole community, encourage active travel connected to the bus and train routes in the District, promote the opportunity for town centre regeneration and prosperity, accommodate both leisure and commuter cycling, help showcase the area when the eyes of the world are on our area for the Commonwealth Games and helps us as a connected community.

We are happy to contribute to the development ideas for this scheme should this be an appropriate way forward.

Yours faithfully

For and on behalf of Hednesford Town Council



Cllr Paul Woodhead FCIWM, CEnv, MSc