

Wow – listening to previous speakers is powerful. I am moved by what is here.

I am James Barlow, cyclist, car driver, public transport user, father, and member of the South Oxfordshire community.

I am a District Councillor in the Wallingford Ward in South Oxfordshire – a few miles East of here.

And, I have worked as a consultant and senior corporate leader on environmental strategies and capital investments for 20 years.

I've volunteered to build people-based, soft-infrastructure for resilient communities during this climate and ecological emergency for a similar time.

I speak here in a personal capacity.

There are roughly 160 000 residents in South Oxfordshire today.

There are, hopefully, many more in future generations. The decision this inquiry makes will influence both sets of residents' lives significantly.

I can not stand by and watch this project progress in its current form.

Yes, we in Wallingford, Didcot and Sth Oxon **absolutely** need better transport infrastructure to improve connectivity in our district – for reasons of both economic and community prosperity.

But, we need infrastructure that massively increases active travel.

Not simply a road primarily designed for and privileging privately-owned cars.

History of road building tells us one thing: more roads induce more demand.

The settlements and surrounds affected by the proposed scheme will likely become at least as choked at peak times as they are today 6 months after it is opened.

But I understand the modelling used to justify this scheme in its current form ignores induced demand, and overestimates congestion without the scheme.

OCC's very own Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP) states "We have found that road schemes often generate new demand and quickly reach capacity again. It is therefore not a sustainable long term solution for Oxfordshire's transport network."

Given that, ask ourselves, is £290M on this project a wise and prudent use of the public purse?

It is disingenuous to suggest it will make South Oxfordshire residents' lives easier, since it still omits to incentivise the modal shifts really needed.

For example, for current residents of Wallingford, including me, our travel to Oxford will be adversely affected by this scheme, since it will funnel more traffic on to the A4074 North through Nuneham Courtney. It will make local connectivity worse for those of us coming from Wallingford and Henley north to Oxford – these are 2 of the 4 major South Oxfordshire towns.

And the bus route from Reading will similarly be affected – this is a service the rural communities in South Oxon use. We need to get people onto busses, not drive them off them.

This scheme is not a product of OCC's own 'decide and provide' mode of operating, instead this is out-moded 'predict and provide'. Our jobs as public servants are to surely drive change, not reinforce the damaging status quo.

We need highways infrastructure fit for active and public-transport based travel.

As we'll hear over the coming days, this proposal is badly designed, it also flies contrary to SODC's vital climate and nature recovery corporate plan themes.

Ask ourselves, how does this road support the achievement of a local net zero target, or indeed the UK Government's climate targets?

It will destroy much more of the very nature we need to sustain our communities here, making it even more likely that current and future Wallingford residents will have a lower quality of life than we do today. Not what we in local and national government should enact.

Connectivity is possible with less destruction.

Ask ourselves, how rigorously were more suitable alternatives explored?

Alternatives more in line with OCC, Vale and SODC's own policies?

And, SODC and Wallingford Town Council, along with many other public bodies, have declared climate emergencies. Because we know what is happening and that we need to change our behaviour – and infrastructure is key to that.

In the last 20 years we have recorded 4 of the 6 worst floods in Wallingford since the 19th century.

Neighbours tell me about tulips coming out, in February.

And February so far is 4.9oC warmer than the average of 1961-1990. And some of the days are the highest since records began in 1660.

Ask ourselves, is this scheme making the emergency worse, or mitigating it?

Ask ourselves where is the light-rail infrastructure study?

Or the one for guided buses?

The distances and terrain make these attractive options to link the communities concerned.

Afterall, this is proclaimed as the Science Vale ... but science of which century?

The 20th of the privately-owned internal combustion engine continually worsening the extreme weather events that we in Wallingford and beyond then suffer?

Or the 21st – of active and mass public transport that plays its part in adapting to these weather extremes – the impacts we see this week on our roads?

As someone who travels by bike as often as possible, I can tell you that the reality of cycling or walking alongside the designed noisy, high-speed, smelly transport route – segregated spaces or not - is actually an incentive for me to get in my car for the miles of road planned here.

As I cycled to this inquiry, I had to do so for part of the way on a cycle path next to a similar road. There were many lorries going past – covering me in dust, and making breathing unpleasant.

The scheme proposed seems to be similarly poorly designed when it comes to the realities of being a cyclist.

I see similar schemes such as the A43 road from Brackley to Northampton where there is never a cyclist to be seen.

And, finally, we know from experience that it is likely to go over budget, for a council that is already financially precarious. So how will this impact OCC's ability to deliver other already massively stretched key services such as adult social care and already under pressure children's services for Wallingford's residents? Let alone active transport infrastructure.

This is a £290 M opportunity to make the 21st century, climate change adaptation savvy choice.

As a local district councillor, with 20 years of professional work on climate change I urge you to do so.

For the residents of Wallingford, and the rest of South Oxfordshire, and obviously the rest of the UK and all other countries. Today's and future generations.

This plan needs to be rejected, and one that doesn't mean we are on the end of even more extreme weather designed instead.

The NPPF chapter 6 talks about a strong competitive economy. There is no economy without a healthy environment though.

We have the information. We have the opportunity. Please take it Madam.

Thank you.