

Anti-bypass group attacked over 'anonymous' leaflet

19/5

A CAMPAIGN group has been formed to fight plans for a road taking traffic away from Watlington town centre.

A leaflet was distributed to homes in the town last week warning of the consequences if a proposed "edge street", or bypass, is built.

The leaflet did not state who produced it but the town's neighbourhood plan team discovered it was created and sent by planning consultants Terence O'Rourke, acting on behalf of Residents Against Watlington Ring Road.

The company has also been preparing the Pyrton neighbourhood plan, which, like Watlington's plan, is currently out to consultation. The leaflet claims that a bypass would:

- Generate more traffic and air pollution.
 - Destroy the green buffer between Pyrton and Watlington.
 - Impact on listed buildings, conservation areas and the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
 - Increase the risk of flooding if it went through areas of high risk.
 - Put a strain on medical services.
 - Result in "potentially dangerous" intersections with the B4009 and traffic choke points through nearby Shirburn.
- Watlington's neighbourhood plan

By DAVID WHITE

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earmarks three sites for up to 260 homes to the north and west of the town.

In return, developers would be expected to contribute towards the cost of a bypass from the B4009 Pyrton crossroads in the north to Britwell Road in the south.

The road would run through a site to the north of Watlington, off Pyrton Lane, in Pyrton parish, where Providence Lane has submitted plans for 100 homes but is not in the plan.

Land for a by-pass has also been "safeguarded" in South Oxfordshire District Council's new emerging Local Plan for up to 2033.

Pyrton's plan, meanwhile, allocates three sites for 18 homes and has not included the site off Pyrton Lane, saying that residents are "deeply concerned" about the potential merging of the two settlements.

Gill Bindoff, facilitator of the Watlington neighbourhood plan forum co-ordination group, said it was unacceptable for a leaflet to be distributed without making it clear who was responsible for it.

She added: "Some of it is a bit inaccurate and some of it doesn't have any factual foundation. I think they are

saying the majority of people in Watlington would oppose the idea of a re-routed B4009. That isn't the message we have got from all the drop-in sessions we have been holding.

"It's one thing to promote your own view, which is fine, but to make claims which do not have any foundation in fact is not acceptable."

Mrs Bindoff contacted John Curtis, chairman of Pyrton Parish Council, to see if he knew anything about the leaflet as it was sent to her with a postmark from Bournemouth, where Terence O'Rourke is based.

"I absolutely did not contact Pyrton because I thought there was any possibility that the leaflet could have originated from there," she said.

Clr Curtis told her he and his council had no knowledge of the leaflet.

However, an hour later, Mrs Bindoff received an email from Luke Vallins, a senior planner at the company. This said the leaflets had been prepared on behalf of the Residents Against Watlington Ring Road in objection to and to raise awareness of the proposals for the bypass.

Mr Vallins added: "Any bypass would have an irreversible adverse impact on the built and natural environment and we hope that you will join in resisting the proposals."

Mrs Bindoff said: "We have a name of a group we have never heard of and

because we have tried really hard to contact local groups to talk about the neighbourhood plan we would be very happy to talk to this group so they can understand the proposals we have put forward.

"I replied, saying if their company was going to do a second circular to the people on the Watlington mailing list to apologise for sending an anonymous leaflet and to give the information he sent in the email."

Clr Curtis told the *Henley Standard* that he had no knowledge of the leaflet until informed by Mrs Bindoff and had had no contact with RAWRR or any discussions with Mr Vallins or Terence O'Rourke about it.

However, he added that the arguments against the bypass were based on published data.

Clr Curtis said: "It's being promoted without alternatives being investigated, without a full understanding of how it will be paid for and the number of houses that would need to be built in Watlington parish to pay for it."

He said that Oxfordshire County Council and the Homes and Communities Agency, a government body that wants to build 3,500 homes on Chalgrove Airfield, didn't have the money to fund it.

Mr Vallins confirmed his company was working for the new pressure group but declined to comment further.

Anti-bypass campaign leaflet 'inaccurate and one-sided'

26/5

A CAMPAIGN group which criticised plans for a bypass around Watlington has been accused of misleading residents.

A leaflet produced on behalf of Residents Against Watlington Ring Road was distributed to homes in the town two weeks ago.

It claimed that the proposed "edge street", or bypass, running from the B4009 Pyrton crossroads in the north to Britwell Road in the south would generate more traffic and air pollution and destroy the green buffer between the town and Pyrton.

But at Watlington's annual parish meeting last week, the claims were labelled "one-sided, unbalanced and, in places, inaccurate" in a statement by the parish council.

It said: "We know that there are two sides to the picture — a re-routed B4009 will have both benefits and disadvantages."

"We ask that you think carefully before you decide which to support and that you tell us your views in your response to the Watlington neighbourhood development plan consultation.

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The leaflet presents a very one-sided view — we ask that you take a much more rounded view of the issue.

"An alternative route around Watlington will reduce the curse of congestion in the centre of the town, making it a far more pleasant environment for residents and shoppers.

"Against this you have to balance the loss of valuable green space between Pyrton and Watlington and harm to the views of the area from Watlington Hill."

The council said traffic would increase on the B4009 and B480 irrespective of the new route due to development. The Watlington neighbourhood plan earmarks three sites for up to 260 homes to the north and west of the town.

In return, developers would be expected to contribute towards the cost of the bypass. The council said: "The parish council takes the view

that we should do what we can to protect the town and our neighbours from this increased traffic."

The leaflet also claimed that 400 new homes would be needed in order to help fund the bypass.

But the council said it was "simplistic" to think that the number of houses to be built would directly relate to the cost of the road.

It said there was no requirement in South Oxfordshire District Council's draft Local Plan for infrastructure such as the road to be funded entirely by levies on developers.

The leaflet was created and sent on behalf of the campaign group by Bournemouth-based planning consultants Terence O'Rourke, who are also helping prepare the Pyrton neighbourhood plan, which allocates three sites for 18 new homes.

It also claimed the road would:

- Impact on listed buildings, conservation areas and the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- Increase the risk of flooding if it went through areas of high risk.

- Put a strain on medical services.
- Result in "potentially dangerous" intersections with the B4009 and traffic choke points through nearby Shirburn.

Last week, Gill Bindoff, facilitator of the Watlington neighbourhood plan forum co-ordination group, criticised the leaflet for not making it clear who was responsible for it.

She said: "Some of it is a bit inaccurate and some of it doesn't have any factual foundation."

"I think they are saying the majority of people in Watlington would oppose the idea of a re-routed B4009. That isn't the message we have got from all the drop-in sessions we have been holding. It's one thing to promote your own view, which is fine, but to make claims which do not have any foundation in fact is not acceptable."

John Curtis, chairman of Pyrton Parish Council, said that neither he nor his council had any knowledge of the leaflet.

Both Watlington and Pyrton's neighbourhood plans are currently out to consultation.