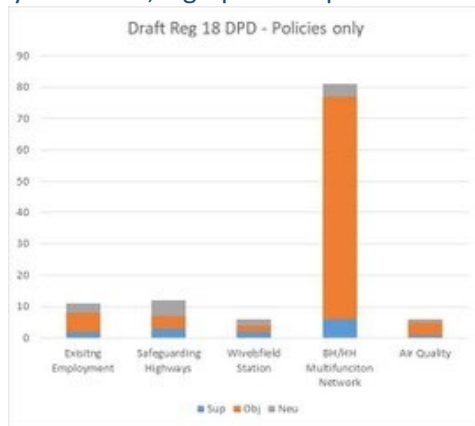




For reference, there are 35 residences plus four countryside businesses in the road; this is not a “NIMBY” response but a widespread issue with a sizeable public bridleway user community.

MSDC cannot say this was a surprise. When the original Reg 18 round of consultation was carried out a year earlier, a graph of responses to non-site policies garnered the result below:



The details of this input have not been made public; however they were verbally dismissed by MSDC council leadership as a misunderstanding (people read what was written and commented on it).

There is support in the CJFounds report for the concept of “a route” – and that is supported on all fronts. The question is, which one, and indeed does *any* route actually make sense.

We have already submitted our documents which demonstrate the eastern route at least does not. MSDC have not commented on this at all, in any form, at any stage.

When finally cornered on the topic at the meeting mentioned below, MSDC had to admit that no route actually made sense. Yet the data that supports that – the latest census – had been available for use for several years.

Given the level of public dissatisfaction with the plans, I filed an FOI request on behalf of the bridleway users and residents. The text of this is included as “FOI request text as submitted”. This resulted in a refusal to provide more than a single one-row cut of an unpublished document and one or two references to meetings, the minutes of which were not provided as requested. None of my substantive questions were answered.

After a year of asking, finally, we were granted an audience with the MSDC leadership team shortly after the FOI response. The agreed notes of that meeting, with various appendices and points referenced by MSDC during the meeting is appended as “Meeting Notes Sorted”. MSDC’s comments do not indicate a council that has done its homework in any meaningful way at all.

As a result of this, I appealed the initial FOI, pointing out that statements made by the FOI team were incompatible with the comments made by the MSDC leadership team, relating essentially to the same period. The response from MSDC was that if anything said at that meeting was referenced, a further FOI would be required.

Accordingly, I field a second FOI request, appended as “Follow up FOI Request for Burgess Hill to Haywards Heath Link”. This resulted in no response at all within the statutory window (MSDC FOI claiming that the FOI had gone into a junk folder and MSDC has no procedure for searching junk folders associated with public email addresses). MSDC’s lawyer then conceded I was correct. When

the response was eventually received, it simply dismissed my request and referenced data already in the public domain (and hence excluded from FOI request in the first place), I appealed.

This is attached as an email item "RE: Freedom of Information Request – MSDC's decision process related to the Burgess Hill to Haywards Heath link". To date, no response has been received to this so far but I should point out MSDC is within their statutory 20 days and have never responded before the last possible moment permitted.

There is a lot to digest here and you may feel that it is of marginal interest. The key points are, however:

- a. MSDC clearly cannot demonstrate good decision-making processes in determining optimal element choices to go into a plan
- b. MSDC did not do even the most cursory of objective evaluation at any stage in this process on this topic – if not on this, what other decisions were taken without any reference to the facts, data and information available?
- c. MSDC are completely opaque in their decision-making and are determined to prevent any external scrutiny, even to provide basic reports and input or minutes of meeting which should, unarguably, be in the public domain
- d. MSDC are very comfortable with being disingenuous, ambiguous and see no reason to provide truthful responses to FOI requests

Having – we feel – demonstrated these points after months of toil on a single element of this plan, it is perhaps relevant for the Inspector to consider the number of FOI requests and challenges by members of the public in other public spaces in this context this Plan has thrown up. To pursue the truth in the face of MSDC's relentless obstruction and contemptuous dismissal of questions – even when supported by unarguable facts – has taken a great deal of time and frustration. For example, still, two years on, we are denied sight of an initial report on route alternatives submitted in November, 2016, as we understand it, on the basis that it is still in draft form. Note that MSDC are happy to use (and publish) draft documents elsewhere when it suits them. This is simply ludicrous.

We feel this speaks to a council whose decision-making quality (based on the outcomes) is questionable and whose obsession with keeping it hidden is very telling.

MSDC only use selected data and information to support decisions already made. Any information that does not support their apparently subjectively decided decisions is suppressed.

I would be happy to speak factually on this topic if there is a slot and you consider it would provide useful insight.

Yours sincerely

Robin Walker