

Friends of Woodhouse Moor – Amended Deputation Speech 22.3.2023

My Lord Mayor, council members. I'm Bill McKinnon, chair of Friends of Woodhouse Moor. I'm here with Claire Randall and Sue Thomas - concerned local residents.

Connecting Leeds want cycle lanes and infrastructure changes along the A660. "Commonplace," the company providing their platform, has won awards for their high response rate here. They attribute this to repeatedly consulting the same people. As well as being questionable under data protection laws, this is "selection bias." As is Connecting Leeds having eight meetings with cyclists before the 2018 A660 cycle lane consultation.

You can complete this consultation without answering open questions. But such consultations are considered untrustworthy. Commonplace state consultations should have open and closed questions. This matters especially if participants receive incentives. People might be responding to the remuneration, not because they care about the issues. This consultation received over 420 responses in the first 24 hours, an unusually high number.

The consultation is long and cognitively demanding. It contains lots of information, not always presented clearly. Section 1, grid A, lists 15 bullet points. Before you can answer the questions, you must read the bullet points carefully and then match them with the plans. For the multiple choice questions, you must choose all that apply from 21 options. You have to do this 12 times! This requires a lot of time and sustained mental effort to do properly. It should take at least 25 minutes to complete the consultation. We should be told how long each respondent took as Connecting Leeds will know.

Commonplace state consultations should avoid biased language. But this Connecting Leeds consultation is full of it.

They claim they want to make "better use" of space in front of the Arndale Centre. Who would object to something being made better use of?

When someone drives down a side road, it's "rat running." But when they direct drivers down side roads, it's "re-routing."

They claim their changes would reduce accidents. But they don't tell us their cause or alcohol's contribution. A council web page which no longer exists stated that the majority involved alcohol.

By stating the changes would reduce accidents, they get around the obstacle of conservation area status, which makes changes difficult to achieve.

They want cycle lanes behind bus stops, but don't mention the dangers, or that Leeds is committed to the Hierarchy of Road Users, with pedestrians at the top.

They want to turn a pavement across the Moor into a shared cycle lane but don't mention they're dangerous.

They want to encroach on the Moor, but not on narrower roads at either end of the park. We're not told that this would enable traffic stacking across the Moor, allowing it to flow freely on the narrower roads. Because of slow or static traffic, resultant air pollution and lost green space, the park would become a less attractive destination for locals and students. A park should be a destination, not a transport hub. Locals who don't own green space would be especially affected.

Respondents are asked plainly how they feel about a "narrower carriageway," but obliquely how they feel about "re-landscaped public space," "overgrown shrubs to be removed" and "11 trees removed and replaced." Who could possibly object to "re-landscaping?" Why is it necessary to state that shrubs are "overgrown?" Instead, people should be asked how they feel about "green space being take away" or "paved green space" or "removing trees." Presumably people aren't asked because Connecting Leeds know that nobody likes green space being taken away or ruined.

"Improved landscaping" comes at the expense of almost a metre of grass verge at the Moor's edge. And roadway would replace green space at Hyde Park Corner. But we're not informed about either proposal. The consultation should ask people "how do you feel" about trade-offs directly and unambiguously.

This use of biased language and the selective presentation of facts is called "response bias."

Cycle lanes are socially desirable. But so is preserving green space. Is this why they don't mention wanting to remove grass verge, thus endangering adjacent trees, or that there's already little green space in Hyde Park and Woodhouse compared to Weetwood and West Park, where most cyclists originate?

Connecting Leeds knows whether respondents are local or cycle through the area. So there should be four sets of responses - locals who cycle, those who don't, non-locals who cycle, and those who don't. These groups may have sharply differing opinions. We should know how each answered the questions.

Labour's committed to narrowing the gap. But these proposals would widen it. The council would be sacrificing a known, existing benefit for local people, for an as yet unquantified benefit for outsiders.

Local people rejected an almost identical scheme in 2018. Are we to be consulted ad infinitum until we give the desired response?