

THE CLEVEDON SEAFRONT SCHEME IS A DISASTER

The “improvements” forced onto Clevedon are a complete calamity and national laughingstock. This is in no small part because the scheme is so bonkers that it would even be out of place as a spoof proposal featuring in “Yes Minister” or “The Thick of It”. The scheme is completed by the fact that it breaches the Council’s own policies, bears unrecognised road markings and, is a net detriment to the safety and character of the area. This policy failure has been filled with a litany of errors highlighted by Audit West and is symptomatic of a disconnect between the council and public.

The only sensible way forward is the complete reversal of the Seafront Scheme.

Should the Seafront Scheme have been subject to North Somerset Council’s own policies it would almost certainly have been rejected.

1. High Quality Design, DM32 (Sites and Policies Plan, part one) & DP1 (Local Plan preferred options 2038). Ensures that all proposals are designed in accordance with the intended area, character, and policies.
2. Economic Development, Town Centres and Hill Rd, DM47, DM60, DM61 (Sites and Policies Plan, part one) & SP5 Towns (Local Plan) There should not be an adverse impact on the character, highways network or a reduction in safety. Moreover, the business should thrive.
3. Placemaking, SP4 (Local Plan 2038). Proposals should reflect/enhance character, be high quality and use land effectively in terms of layout with the aim to producing social and economic sustainability.
4. The area of the scheme is inside of Clevedon Conservation Area which aims to protect the character and heritage of Clevedon.

High Quality design policy DM32 simply states that “Proposals which cause unacceptable harm to the character or appearance of the area will not be permitted”. The building materials are inappropriate because they do not enhance or protect the character of the area. The yellow surface is an eyesore and may not be salt water resistant. The realignment of the car parking into a permanent traffic jam is not accessible or safe because of exiting the vehicle into a cycle lane or a road especially for children, prams, elderly or less mobile. It is ironic when the minutes of the council meeting when the Active Travel Strategy was adopted, where the seafront is a “showcase scheme”, states that “reference was also made to the importance of ensuring the needs of the elderly population and those with mobility issues”. Additionally, many accessible vehicles have the entry/exit point at the rear, which the road layout does not consider. A common comment is that the resident/family can no longer drive to the seafront and have a car-picnic watching the sea. Being able to drive is a must due to mobility issues or age, additionally plenty of visitors partake in this custom. Others have said it was a fantastic mental wellbeing asset supporting them with anxiety/depression.

The One-way system is frequently ignored, and the cycle lane is two-way, running counter to the traffic posing a significant risk. The road markings are not recognised by the Highway Code and were

described as “bizarre” by the RAC. A prominent feature is a crop-circle, turned roundabout turned, yellow box, a marking which is redundant due to the one-way system and never had sufficient clearance for cars. The three crossings are not considered safe because they are unrecognised and the 20mph limit is unenforceable. The wiggly lines are for comedic effect at best. The road markings cannot be said to even be in keeping with the character or appearance of a road. The reduction in parking also, adds unnecessary pressure to parking and congestion with residents having to do laps of the town to park in town, at home or to pick up a takeaway. Resident’s living within the Conservation Area must follow strict guidance from Historic England on maintaining their properties from windows and paint to the structure itself, yet North Somerset has complete disregard for their efforts by vandalising the whole area and diminishing the character. DP1 of the local plan is consistent with DM32 and seeks to prevent the above affects, going further by stating that effective and early engagement and consultation is necessary.

Placemaking is a significant consideration in the Local Plan 2038, Preferred Options and applies to all developments to ensure the character is enhanced or protected so that all proposals are high quality, safe, attractive, and desirable buildings/spaces which respond to their local context. This clearly has not happened as buff yellow surfaces which have no particular meaning, does not enhance the mid-nineteenth century architecture from the promenade, sea wall or residences. The safety concerns are egregious and far worse than the original layout which allegedly needed “improvement”.

The wide array of economic policies stress that developments should not have an adverse impact on the highways network, local businesses, living conditions of residents, heritage, or car parking availability. The loss of parking at the Seafront is by a magnitude of 50% the additional car parking promised has failed to deliver and is a pipedream. DM61 relating to Hill Road states that “Opportunities to increase public car parking and improvements to the public realm should be taken where possible.” Moving on to say that the specialised, small-scale businesses will be supported. Many residents cannot access the area due to parking, mobility, or safety issues with visitors unable to park anywhere. A good number of residents have boycotted the area due to the hassle and risks involved. Most businesses in the affected area are against the scheme and have already suffered a - 80% footfall due to the national lockdowns. The 2021 Census states that 85% of households in North Somerset own at least one vehicle, this does not appear to be factored into any planning because North Somerset want to “reduce the dominance of the car” in the stated aims of the scheme. As a result, plenty of residential roads are now congested due to dislodged residents, business parking or visitors. Clevedon is lacking a rail link due to public transport to Yatton being severely limited, meaning the most practical way to get in and out of Clevedon is by car. This causes congestion and reduces the attractiveness of the town as a key component of the Visitor Economy, worth nearly £374m across the district, causing both businesses and residents to suffer and miss any opportunities arising.

Audit West performed a review of the scheme to ascertain which lessons the Council could learn. The budget was poorly managed with the scheme sitting at £1.3m overbudget due to poorly estimated costs and mission creep. The timings were unrealistic and there was no sensitivity to upholding the Victorian character. The consultation was found to be lacking due to the short period, during a lockdown, featuring a final design suggesting that residents did not have a meaningful say. Additionally, the ONS stated in 2018 that 10% of the adult population in the South West and across the UK is digitally excluded/non-user confirming that the online-only consultation missed a large portion of residents. Of the 954 consulted, only 66% lived within a mile of the scheme (Clevedon),

with a total of 50% support for the scheme with 42% against. This also, suggests that the data analysis was lacking as a detailed breakdown is unavailable. The adoption of the Active Travel Strategy, states in the minutes that “members recognised the importance of effective consultation and engagement” in this case it was proven to be ineffective by the audit and there was seemingly no attempt at a postal consultation. Clevedon’s Conservative councillors raised this point in a question regarding the AECOM review to ensure that another dismal consultation was avoided and that a mixed method one was both advised and realised.

During the Local Election 2023 The Conservative team had well over a thousand conversations on the doorstep finding near universal condemnation of the scheme and that it was the pressing issue which people were voting on. We won three out of five seats as the only party against the scheme, a fourth seat was won by an Independent against the scheme. It was our team which secured the debate making a partial reversal of the seafront the first thing the new council discussed. As a result of that, we secured a guarantee on the public record, that the review would happen and that no options were off the table.

The only supporters other than the (last) administration at North Somerset were Clevedon BID, despite most businesses being against the scheme. The BID has been forcibly renewed by North Somerset Council which has a dominating vote, if uncast the BID renewal would have failed. Moreover, The BID is subject to a review of process to ensure the renewal is even valid with many questioning its legitimacy with the council involved. The only other supporter of the scheme, despite opposition was the Town Council which belatedly withdrew its support.

The only sensible outcome for this review is the complete reversal of this poorly planned, executed and consulted upon scheme with any future development the prerogative of a future council.

Councillor Luke Smith (Clevedon West)

Councillor Michael Pryke (Clevedon Walton)

Councillor Chris Blades (Clevedon Yeo)