

Dear Sir,

I wish to respond to Sustrans' prompt reply to our letter of 11th March re. their proposal to create shared-use Greenway between Kinnegar and Donaghadee. I will be referring, in particular, to the section between Holywood and Bangor. The planning application shows that Sustrans are planning a fundamental change in the function of the path along this coast; from a place to visit, play, sometimes walk, into a full-blown Cycleway. In the article they did not address the 2 fundamental issues which we raised.

1 The total unsuitability of creating a cycle path which will also be used by walkers and their families and pets.

2 This stretch of coast is also a playground for many people especially on the beaches at Seapark, Helen's Bay and Crawfordsburn, and their adjoining open spaces. It is impossible to reconcile satisfactorily the 2 functions.

You say that criticism is 'fuelled by a local culture that says it is a path for walkers and no one else'. Well, local people are those with most at stake. i.e. they are the main stakeholders.

You call the proposal an upgrade. that 'will primarily make it more accessible for most users'. It will make it more accessible for cyclists. For the rest, no. I have been visiting that stretch of coast since 1960. The relative roughness and wildness of parts of the path was and is part of the attraction, and, as a youngster, there was the sense of freedom and adventure.

Your proposal will remove most of that variety and create an anodyne strip suitable only for cycling. A pleasant and interesting path will be turned into dull uniformity. As for people with mobility issues who cannot walk far, if this proposal is successful they will be intimidated out of even venturing onto the path at all. People who find parts of the present path difficult to traverse at present will find the route totally impossible, with the constant fear of cyclists approaching silently from behind.

You say that conflict on shared paths occurs everywhere. Precisely! This points to the fundamental flaw in the concept that no amount of wishful thinking will eradicate. Along the North Down coast the potential for conflict will be greatly increased by the fact that many people visit the area to sit, relax and play on the beaches and hinterlands at Seapark, Helen's Bay and Crawfordsburn. To repeat our earlier letter, the reaction of these people to cyclists speeding among them will be a sight to behold.

You mention the Comber Greenway. I know of a number of confrontations along that path. As for the Camino De Santiago where you experienced 'Peace and Love' between cyclists and walkers; well, after all, it is a traditional religious pilgrimage route so you would expect

people to be on their best behaviour. However, a cursory search on the internet reveals that, even there, there have been a significant number of confrontations.

You also refer to the 'economic and social benefits' of Greenways. What will be the 'enormous economic and social benefits' for Bangor, if your proposal is accepted? Bangor Town Centre has been filleted over the past 40 years thanks to grandiose and inappropriate planning decisions. One of the few pleasures left in Bangor is walking or sitting along the coastal path. Now that pleasure is under threat from your proposal.

Sustrans' Mission is to create Cycleways. They have also pioneered the concept of shared paths across the UK, i.e. shared by everyone not travelling in or on motorised vehicles. This concept has received much criticism over the years because it isn't always appropriate. These can work well in urban areas to provide a safe alternative to using a busy road network. They also work in sparsely populated areas like Mayo.

However, the model is not suitable in a popular seaside area like the North Down coast, where it is a recipe for disaster.

The whole concept for Sustrans is to create a suitable pathway along which to make a journey. However, many people visit the North Down coast to sit, relax and let their children play freely without stress or danger in a beautiful environment. Let's keep it that way.

Finally, I am fully aware of the impending climate crisis. However, using that crisis as an excuse to destroy a pleasant, relaxing environment, enjoyed by many over many generations is unforgivable.

Yours etc

Anthony Smyth