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Name

Sam Peters

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Party

Green Party

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Ward / Parish or PCC Candidate Position

Shere division (SCC) and Send ward (GBC)

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Email address (will not be shared)

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Do you regularly walk or cycle to get to work, the shops, your doctors etc?  
If not, what is stopping you from doing so?

I haven't owned a car for about 5-6 years now, and cycle or walk everywhere. In fact, over the course of leafleting and door-knocking, I have covered almost 500 miles walking and cycling!

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What do you think about the current walking and cycling infrastructure provision in your local area and how can it be improved for all (including those who hard of hearing, partially sighted or using wheelchairs, prams, cargo bikes, tricycles and handbikes etc)?

Cycling has certainly been neglected across Shere division – both within towns and villages and in terms of the connections between them. There are very few cycle lanes, even just paint on a road, and the state of the surfaces themselves make cycling on them too dangerous for many residents who would otherwise see cycling as an option within their area. From Send to Chilworth, potholes and obstructions mean that those who do cycle are constantly having to swerve to avoid punctures or being thrown from their bike entirely, putting them at risk of the traffic – which is also often travelling too fast for these residential areas. While there is a good network of public footpaths linking many villages in Shere division – although currently suffering from a build-up of litter and increasing fly-tipping – the pavements themselves within villages are also suffering from years of neglect and substandard repairs. In some areas, pavements are so bad that local people have told me they have to cross the road to make sure they don't trip on the way to the shops, or now prefer to get deliveries. The idea that our streets are so bad that they prevent people leaving the house is shameful. Rather than outsourcing and sub-contracting, with shoddy repairs that often don't even last a year, I would work towards making SCC take proper control over road and pavement maintenance, ensuring repairs are fit for purpose and proactively tackling problems before they become serious, rather than kicking the budget can down the road. Not only would this make our roads safer for pedestrians, cyclists and indeed motorists, but it would also save money in

the long run over constantly implementing quick-fixes that don't last or leaving problems until they become unmanageable.

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How do you see walking and cycling provision contributing to the decongestion and de-pollution strategy for Guildford?

The impact of proper investment in walking and cycling in and between our villages would be enormous. Many villages are built around one key road – for example, Send, Chilworth or Albury – and these roads are hotspots for traffic and air pollution. Outside peak times, many become problem areas for speeding, particularly those which act as shortcuts – Potters Lane in Send is a key example of this, with cars from the A3 using the narrow road as a racetrack to cut a fraction off their journey times. As I experienced personally when door-knocking here, and also heard from almost every resident I talked to, cars will regularly hit 60mph down this residential road, and the feeling is that until there's a serious incident, nothing will be done about it. This traffic not only makes cycling and walking unsafe, but also contributes to tearing up the roads more quickly – creating a vicious cycle that pushes people further still from active transport. Investments in safe walking and cycling, along with reliable and affordable public transport, could take a significant proportion of cars off the roads. Not only would this be a good thing in and of itself, but the knock-on effects would have many more benefits. Reduced traffic would mean less air pollution, carbon emissions, noise and stress for drivers, pedestrians, cyclists and those who live nearby; the road surface would last longer, saving us money and avoiding road closures; health would be improved and the impact of respiratory issues would be minimised; opportunities would open up for local people to be able to reach new destinations, or just to save time and money on getting to the shops. Then we come to the possibility for a proper network of cycleways between villages. I heard from a resident in Chilworth that they commute to Cranleigh by bike whenever possible, but that this is becoming ever more difficult due to the deterioration of the roads and cycle paths and they now often have to drive instead. This situation is mirrored across Shere division. Connecting our villages with safe, accessible cycle routes – like we are doing from Guildford to Godalming – would open up opportunities for work, leisure, exercise, education and more for all local people, tackling all the issues listed above. Independent village shops, which are facing increasing hardships following the pandemic and as big companies muscle in, would benefit enormously from this. Better connectivity between villages is a cornerstone of not just tackling the impacts of the pandemic on local businesses, but could contribute to the kind of thriving, buzzing communities that the Surrey Hills are famed for.

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What have you done personally to improve cycling and pedestrian mobility in your area? If you are standing for re-election outline improvements you have put forward or voted for previously.

As coordinator for the Federation of Surrey Green Parties, I have supported the work done by our existing county, borough and town councillors on sustainable transport.

Having helped to overturn the previous Conservative control over Waverley Borough Council, Green Party councillors and others are now pushing ahead with the Guildford-Godalming greenway, which will make cycling between the towns far more accessible for all local people, not just those willing to share the road with cars and other vehicles. The council now has a Sustainable Transport Officer and bike racks are popping up in car parks and key hotspots around the local area. If elected, I would be building on the success of these policies across Shere division, aiming to connect the villages to enable safe, accessible bike travel between them. The existing means of reporting potholes, obstructions and other issues don't currently seem to make much difference, unfortunately. While I still do report these problem areas, and do believe that having this data from residents is of course a good thing, if this is not followed up with action then there is no real point having the data in the first place! I've also noticed that the increasing amount of litter is also having an adverse impact on active transport, with some residents I've spoken to on doorsteps choosing other areas to walk or enjoy the countryside, or even staying at home. I have always carried a bag with me on walks to pick up litter I find, but having seen the huge increase this year, I began running dedicated litter-picking events to clean up our streets and natural spaces. Most recently, we collected nine full bin bags of litter at Newlands Corner, including some pieces that were older than I am! It is important to remember that the accessibility of cycling and walking is not the only aspect we need to focus on – if people are put off from these activities for other reasons, no amount of investment will reach its full potential.

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Given the push towards active travel, what could you do to promote more considerate behaviour towards people using bicycles and those walking.

The vast majority of pedestrians, cyclists and motorists are already kind and considerate – but it is easy to see that the stress of sitting in traffic, breathing in polluted air, can often raise tensions between motorists and cyclists. Narrow or poorly-signposted cycle lanes can also lead to animosity between cyclists and pedestrians, particularly along towpaths or on other shared routes. The first thing to note is that by improving walking and cycling infrastructure, separating bikes and cars wherever possible, we reduce traffic and the other negative issues that cause these stresses, encouraging a more collaborative view of our roads and paths. For cyclists and motorists in particular, avoiding poorly-planned afterthoughts such as dumping a cycle lane into the middle of traffic at a busy junction is vital on improving safety and minimising the mindset of competing for space on our roads. The same is true for cyclists and pedestrians where paths are shared, particularly where there isn't the space for this or signage is lacking to make sure everyone is aware of the layout of paths. The more people see that increasing levels of walking and cycling actually reduces traffic jams and saves us all time (and money), the more considerate and collaborative I believe we will be. As we've seen in other cities across the UK, Europe and worldwide, this kind of mindset can be developed very quickly when people have the opportunity to travel in the way that best suits them.

What is preventing Guildford becoming a cycling city with mini-holland type infrastructure, where the majority of people doing short journeys choose to walk or cycle?

Living on a hill, I would say that some journeys are considerably more physically taxing on foot or by bike than most in the Netherlands! However, the fact remains that most journeys taken in a car are very short, and would take only minutes walking or cycling. When traffic is at its worst, I have cycled distances of over 5 miles more quickly than those stuck in traffic jams, so for short journeys into town or village centres, or between villages, there is nothing stopping the investment in walking and cycling infrastructure having big impacts on the number of people choosing to leave the car at home. For some people, transporting the weekly shop home is the key reason why a car is currently a necessity here. Schemes like cargo bike shares, being considered in Waverley and also for Guildford's Climate Emergency Centre, could overcome this issue for many people. However, even just ensuring that cycle lanes are the necessary width and segregating from cars as much as possible could persuade many people to take a leisurely cycle to the shops with panniers or a bag, as we see in the Netherlands. The issue would then become ensuring that we have sufficient bike racks – Guildford's racks are often completely full, and many villages lack any safe places to put bikes. Other policies like encouraging businesses to provide shower and changing facilities would also enable more people to commute by bike regardless of distance. Ultimately, aside from the issues presented by our geography, there is nothing stopping Guildford and the surrounding villages from hugely increasing the levels of walking and cycling, especially for short journeys. If elected, I look forward to joining our existing councillors in pushing for investment in sensible active travel and public transport, and investigating whether a portion of the funds saved on road maintenance and other costs could be reinvested into further advancing safe, accessible walking and cycling across the county. The appetite for this is already there among local residents I've spoken to – we just need the political will, the joined-up thinking, and the necessary investment to catch up.