

Bampton 20mph opponents say parish council's consultation was 'flawed'

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Opponents of a new 20mph speed limit say it was implemented on the back of a 'flawed' consultation process that the parish council 'didn't have a clue' how to run. The reduced speed limit was brought in in Bampton by Oxfordshire County Council in December 2022 as part of its £8million 20mph programme.

In the county council's formal consultation, the majority of residents objected. Of 68 responses, 35 objected (52 per cent), 27 supported it (40 per cent) and five people had concerns (7 per cent).

However, in its final determination Bill Cotton, Corporate Director Environment and Place, wrote: "The parish council support the proposals as does the local elected county council member. Given this support it is considered that this outweighs the objections given."

Bampton resident Alan Oliver said: "It's not so much that the county council has discounted the consultation, they seem to have done that everywhere. But, basically, if Bampton Parish Council asked for 20mph they would get it."

And he said the views of Bampton Parish Council are not actually those of the residents at all.

A Survey Monkey consultation that the parish council carried out on its Facebook page was 'flawed', he said.

Mr Oliver said: "On March 25, 2022 Bampton Parish Council, via their Facebook page, advised Bampton residents that the decision had been made. The following uproar in Bampton forced them to clarify the results."

It then came to light that the parish council had discounted 155 objections on the basis they came from the same IP address, suspecting it was an abuse of the survey.

But Mr Oliver believes an equally likely explanation is Carrier-Grade NAT (CGNAT) - which is used by internet service providers to allow multiple customers to share a single, public IP address.

An FOI Mr Oliver submitted to the parish council shows its IT committee decided "arbitrarily" that they would count only two responses from each address, but not three.

One email reads: "I'm all for keeping things simple and being consistent. Allowing 2 responses per IP address seems reasonable in light of the fact that we cannot determine whether these are the same or different people. I'm inclined not to overanalyse this as it is not an official vote."

The reply reads: "OK, thanks, so we are agreed we will keep the first two responses chronologically from any IP address associated with two or more responses."

Mr Oliver spoke to a friend, a leading data protection specialist, who consults with major companies and governments.

He told him: "They clearly don't understand how IP addressing works. They only needed to look at the help provided on the Survey Monkey website. It states that IP addresses can be an individual user, a home or can be connections points to entire separated networks.

"To me it shows a total lack of understanding."

Mr Oliver said: "This is their IT committee and they clearly didn't have a clue.

"The cost to Bampton residents both directly and indirectly of introducing 20mph is substantial but this appears to have been ignored by the council."

He said "there will be difficult questions asked" at Bampton's annual parish meeting which takes place tonight (26/4).

Oxfordshire County Council said "it will only approve 20mph schemes in areas where they are supported by the town or parish council and the ward county councillor – as was the case in Bampton.

"Consultations make up part of the decision-making process, but are not a referendum.

"The Cabinet Member for Highway Management reads all submissions and treats them on their merit before making a decision."

Bampton Parish Council was unavailable for comment at the time of going to Press.