

FROM “TRANSFORMATIONAL CORRIDOR” TO PAINTED CYCLE LANES

How Calderdale’s Garden Suburbs lost their way

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In 2019, Calderdale Council promised a “transformational corridor” linking Bradford, Brighouse and Huddersfield – a route of bridges, buses and new homes.

Six years later, the bulldozers haven’t arrived, but what remains of the scheme fits mostly into a pot of road paint.

Calderdale promised transformation - residents will be left with painted tarmac and growing public debt.

The A641 Corridor Improvement Programme was promoted as a region-defining transport project that would cut congestion, support thousands of new homes, and deliver a clean, modern route from Bradford through Brighouse to Huddersfield.

Two new “Garden Suburbs” – Thornhills and Woodhouse – were to be developed alongside the A641 scheme, with a school, community facilities, open spaces, and jobs within easy reach. The Local Plan Inspector accepted the idea on that basis, describing the “A641 Core Plus” scheme as essential to ensuring the new developments were sustainable and deliverable.

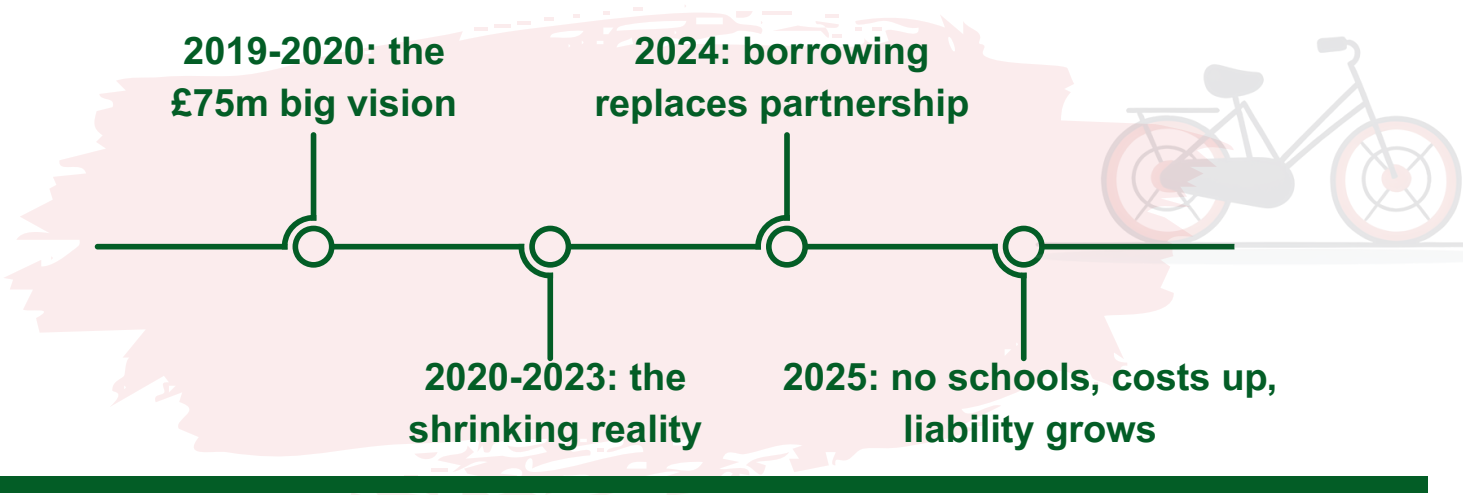
What’s now emerging is a far smaller, slower, and riskier programme.

Are we still getting a transformational corridor, or have we traded greenbelt for painted tarmac and long-term debt?

A timeline of undisclosed change

What’s emerging from Council papers, engineering drawings, and the Autumn 2025 A641 consultation is that the “transformational corridor” promised by Calderdale in the Local Plan examination is now a far smaller, slower, and riskier programme than residents were led to believe.

Here’s how we’ve gone from transformational corridor to painted cycle lanes:



Stage one: the £75m big vision (2019-2020)

A grand vision for South East Calderdale

In 2019, the Infrastructure Delivery Plan identified the A641 as a multi-phase corridor upgrade, estimated to cost tens of millions of pounds.

It featured:

- New link roads around Brighouse and Bailiff Bridge;
- A replacement Huntingdon Road bridge;
- Bus-priority lanes and junction enlargements;
- A continuous, safe cycle route through the town centre;
- Two new on-site primary schools serving Thornhills and Woodhouse.

Calderdale Infrastructure Delivery Plan: 2019

TABLE APP.2.1: Summary of Planned Transport Interventions in SE Calderdale

Scheme	Cost	Notes	Completion date
A641 Programme – Improved Connectivity A644 to A641	£14.5m	Demand for movement between the A644 and A641 at Brighouse is known to be high and contributes to congestion. The Brighouse Local Plan Area is also critical to the housing allocations of the draft local plan. Part of WY+TF Programmes. Programme costs and timeframes may be subject to change.	2025 Completion
A641 Programme – Improved Connectivity A641 to A643	£13m	Demand for movement between the A641 and A643 at Brighouse is known to be high and contributes to congestion. The Brighouse Local Plan Area is also critical to the housing allocations of the draft local plan.	2025 Completion
A641 Prc – Improv connecti A6025 to A641 Prc – Bradfo Highway	£4.5m	As in the National Productivity Investment Fund bid for the Clifton Business Park Transport Network. Programme costs and timeframes may be subject to change.	2025 Completion
A641 Prc – Brighouse Bridge Replacement (WY+TF)	£4.2m	Programme costs and timeframes may be subject to change.	2025 Completion
A641 Prc – Bailiff Improve	£4m	Package to deliver local cycle access improvements both in on highway and greenway contexts. Inclusive of parts of a potential Cooper Bridge cycle scheme on the Calder and Hebble navigation. Programme costs and timeframes may be subject to change.	2025 Completion
A641 Prc – Kirklee Highway	£2.5m	Package to deliver improved bus priorities/facilities. Programme costs and timeframes may be subject to change.	2025 Completion
A641 Prc – Brighouse Centre Improve	£2.5m	Package to deliver improved bus priorities/facilities. Programme costs and timeframes may be subject to change.	2025 Completion

COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

A5.3.1 The Garden Suburbs and other developments in SE Calderdale are likely to generate a requirement for one secondary and two primary schools, and also a GP surgery.

A5.3.2 As noted elsewhere in this IDP, the evolving masterplanning of the two Garden Suburbs sites is making provision for health care facilities and primary school places. Secondary school provision is likely to be provided off-site (see Appendix 5).

Funding was to come primarily from the West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) through the £75.5 million West Yorkshire Plus Transport Fund, with roughly £24 million of developer contributions to follow.

Stage three: borrowing replaces partnership (2024)

Council to underwrite costs, taxpayers on the hook for borrowing

The Council’s February 2024 Cabinet report marked a turning point.

It revealed that delivery of the Garden Communities and the A641 now depended on a £52.4 million capital programme funded primarily through Council borrowing (£34.96 m), to be repaid over 18 years by a “roof-tax” on every new home built.

Key facts from that report:

- Roof tax income forecast: £17.46 m over 18 years.
- Early-year cash-flow gap: £4.84 m (2025-29).
- Repayment “cannot be forecast with certainty,”: success is tied to housing sales.
- Council, not developers, now bears the risk of borrowing.

This change turned a regionally funded infrastructure plan into a Council-financed, market-dependent venture.

At the same time, the report quietly re-categorised the two Garden Suburb primary schools as Council-delivered works rather than developer-built assets.

Stage four: no schools, costs up, liability grows (2025)

Schools removed from the scheme, but other developers to be charged

The 2025 Cabinet papers confirmed that neither Garden Suburb will host an on-site primary school. Instead, existing Brighouse and Rastrick schools will be increased. This represents the final break from the original ‘Garden Suburb’ promise of walkable, self-contained communities with their own schools and facilities.

In a further twist, developers of the two Garden Suburb sites will not fund new education places. Instead, other Brighouse developments will contribute to off-site school expansions — meaning that residents elsewhere in the town will effectively subsidise the suburbs’ impact.

This change improves viability for housebuilders in the short term. But it undermines the original “walkable community” idea and shifts the cost to existing residents.

Broken promises

2019-20 promise

Two on-site schools

Corridor-wide bus lanes

WYCA + developer funding

New link roads

“Transformational corridor”

2025 reality

None; expansion elsewhere

Local crossings only

Council borrowing + “roof tax”

Existing roads and new markings

Incremental safety scheme

Were residents misled?

The sense of frustration in South-East Calderdale is not just about smaller roundabouts or the loss of a bus lane.

It’s about the gap between the promises made to secure the Local Plan Inspector’s approval and the emerging scheme.

A “transformational corridor” in name only

The term “transformational” was repeated throughout Council briefings, consultation materials, and Local Plan evidence. Residents were shown diagrams of a regionally funded road and public-transport overhaul linking three towns.

What is being built in 2025 is a collection of isolated, small-scale interventions—crossings, short sections of cycleway, new kerbs, and public-realm surfacing. These are welcome, but they are incremental rather than transformational.

Promises used to justify building on greenbelt land

The Inspector’s acceptance of Thornhills and Woodhouse relied on the A641 delivering credible transport mitigation. The Council’s own words—“ensuring the A641 improvements are delivered alongside the housing”—were key to releasing valuable farmland.

That farmland may now be built over, yet the enabling infrastructure has been scaled back or delayed, and the school provision that made the new communities “sustainable” has completely vanished. Residents feel that the original bargain has been broken.

Repetition of outdated talking points

Even as the 2025 plans show a reduced scheme, official communications still describe it as “a transformational corridor supporting new homes and sustainable travel.”

This disconnect—using the same slogan for a smaller project—has created mistrust and the perception that residents are being managed rather than informed.

How the risks shifted

Financial risk transferred to taxpayers

The 2024 and 2025 Cabinet reports reveal that **the Council now carries the borrowing risk** for private-sector developments. The “roof-tax” income is forecast but not guaranteed, with an 18-year recovery period.

This long tail of debt, alongside reduced developer obligations and a fixed tax rate in an era of unpredictable inflation, leaves Council finances exposed to market conditions.

Residents are right to ask: **why was a developer-led infrastructure plan turned into a public debt burden without explicit consent or transparency?**

Loss of local fairness and environmental integrity

The removal of the two on-site primary schools breaks the foundation of the Garden Suburb idea.

Without schools within walking distance, parents will have to drive, undermining both the “walkable neighbourhood” concept and Calderdale’s net-zero targets.

The Council’s own equality and diversity statements cite “reducing inequality” as a key goal, yet moving key services away from new affordable housing areas makes access harder for lower-income families.

One-sided consultation: we’re on transmit, but the council isn’t on receive

Consultation has primarily focused on fine-tuning road layouts rather than re-examining whether the overall development mix remains sensible given the reduced infrastructure.

Residents are told about “green corridors” and “community hubs,” but seldom asked if the project still reflects the community’s priorities now that its scale and purpose have changed.

In short, people feel misled because the scheme that justified the loss of Calderdale’s greenbelt is no longer the scheme being delivered—and because official messaging still pretends otherwise.

The question now is whether the Council will level with residents, or continue to spin a shrunken scheme as if nothing has changed

What is the cost of this compromise?

Loss of farmland and countryside

Several hundred homes may eventually be built on what was once a productive agricultural greenbelt.

Erosion of the Garden Community principles

Without local schools, new estates become more car-dependent.

Public exposure to financial risk

Council borrowing is tied to private housing sales.

Net-zero setback

More car trips undermine Calderdale’s climate targets

Decline in trust

Residents were sold a vision — giving up greenbelt for housing, new schools, and better infrastructure. The watered-down reality has eroded public confidence in Calderdale’s planning process and left many wondering whether promises made in public still count for anything.

What residents can do

[Participate in the WYCA/Calderdale A641 consultation.](#)

Here are five practical things to think about in your response to WYCA:

Transparency: a plain-language annual monitoring report tracking delivery

- 1 Demand that the Council publish, in plain language, the amount borrowed, the roof-tax receipts, and which A641 works have actually been delivered.

Re-evaluation of the school strategy

- 2 With on-site schools cancelled, the Council must disclose where additional classrooms will be created and how pupils will travel to them safely.

A realistic A641 delivery plan

- 3 The term “transformational corridor” should be retired; the current scheme should be described honestly as an “active-travel and safety programme”.

Push for honesty and quality in the A641 design

- 4 Press for clarity on what’s changed since 2021 and insist that the corridor is built before any major housing phases on the Thornhills site are developed.

Active travel safety standards

- 5 Challenge how the proposals meet the borough’s net-zero, reducing inequality and active travel safety standards — something the 2025 revisions fail to show.

Conclusion

The A641 and the Garden Suburbs were introduced to residents and the Planning Inspector as a bold partnership: modern infrastructure, self-sufficient neighbourhoods, and new opportunities for Calderdale.

By 2025, we can now expect a reduced, debt-financed scheme that falls well short of that promise.

Large areas of farmland are being lost, the transport works have shrunk to minor improvements, and the schools that were meant to anchor these new communities have disappeared from the masterplans.

Residents were sold a vision: give up greenbelt for housing, schools and better infrastructure. The diluted reality has eroded confidence in Calderdale’s planning process, leaving many to wonder if promises made in public still hold meaning.

Calderdale residents deserve honesty about what is being built, how it will be paid for, and whether the 2019 bargain still holds.

Because right now, the borough appears to have traded its green belt for painted tarmac - and borrowed money to do it.

Borrowing to fund South East Calderdale infrastructure

Read our 2024 analysis on Calderdale Council’s proposals to borrow money to fund developments in South East Calderdale.

Find out more at thornhells.org.uk



ABOUT THORNHELLS

Published by thornhells.org.uk | **October 2025.**

We’re a community group shining a light on the unnecessary destruction of South East Calderdale’s greenbelt.

Our independent civic commentary is drawn from publicly available Calderdale Council and West Yorkshire Combined Authority documentation.

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