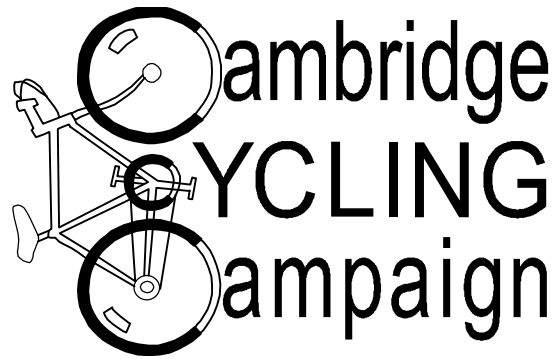


January 11, 2004

Our ref: M04001  
Your ref:

Matthew Lugg  
Asst. Director of Environment & Transport  
Cambridgeshire County Council  
Castle Court, Shire Hall  
Castle Hill  
Cambridge CB3 0AP



**Cambridge Cycling Campaign**

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Dear Mr Lugg,

### **Safety Audits**

Recent discussions about Corn Exchange Street have drawn our attention – not for the first time – to the general issue of Safety Audits.

We are puzzled and disappointed that the County Council is so secretive about Safety Audits. We do not understand why these are considered as confidential documents. This has the effect of making us suspicious about a process that we should be supporting. Safety Audits are also regularly referred to in agenda papers and minutes of council committees, and it is our understanding that under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Acts the information should be made public.

We are also concerned about the process. We are often told that something “would not pass a Safety Audit”; indeed reports to committee often use this phrase. There is concern that this is increasingly used as a tactic to avoid having to discuss a matter further: a Safety Audit can be an absolute stop on doing something, so the threat of it is used as a blocking technique.

Yet the Safety Audit is a perverse process (what we can see of it through the veil of secrecy). It appears to be a matter of informed opinion rather than drawing on past experience. For example, we cannot believe that rising bollards would pass a Safety Audit given the fairly numerous incidents where vehicles have hit them at speed.

On the other hand, we were told that various suggestions related to Corn Exchange Street (we use this simply as an example of principle rather than wishing to discuss the particular issue in this context) would not pass a Safety Audit even though similar arrangements elsewhere have been installed in the past and operated without significant problems. In some cases schemes are promoted which common sense would say are “unsafe” because their obvious difficulties are thought to make people behave more cautiously and therefore, on balance, more safely.

In other cases, despite evidence from existing (though illegal) use – for example in Trinity Street – the threat of failing a Safety Audit is raised. We are told that the Downing Street

contraflow lane would now fail a Safety Audit yet it has operated for years with a reasonable safety record.

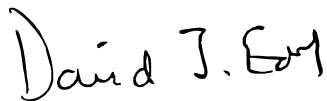
So sometimes something which council processes deem unsafe is still recommended; and in others it is used as a blocking measure without supporting evidence, rather than as a second, more independent, look at a design to reduce possible risks. In any case, nothing is ever absolutely safe: how do you evaluate degrees of risk for a scheme which hasn't been implemented, and who then says whether the risk is worth the benefit? That is at least our impression of this non-transparent process.

Please could you tell us

- how a Safety Audit is carried out and whether it has changed recently;
- why the Safety Audit process is considered confidential and on what basis you can sustain this; does the Freedom of Information (Local Government) Act not require Audits to be public in principle?
- why a failed Safety Audit is enough to prevent a scheme being taken further in some cases and not in others;
- why real experience appears to count for so little in the Safety Audit process;
- why Safety Audits, or the threat of them, are now being used to block proposals rather than improve designs, which was their original intention.

Thank you

Yours sincerely,  
on behalf of Cambridge Cycling Campaign,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David J. Earl". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D'.

David Earl