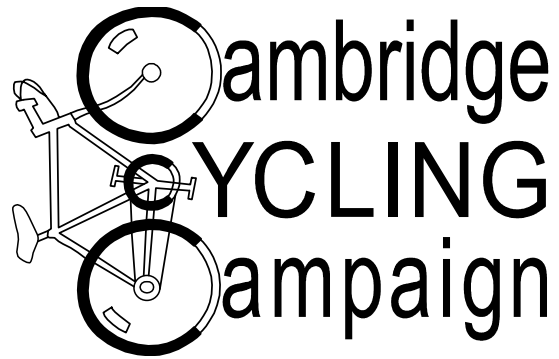


October 11, 2005

Our ref: PO5008

Cabinet Members
Cambridgeshire County Council
Castle Court, Shire Hall
Castle Hill
Cambridge CB3 0AP

Mark Kemp, Councillor Sian Reid (Vice-Chair, AJC), Councillor Gaynor Griffiths, County Councillor (Market Ward)



Cambridge Cycling Campaign

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Dear Councillor,

The Need for a Cycle Contraflow Lane in Corn Exchange Street

I am writing to you in your capacity as a member of Cabinet on behalf of Cambridge Cycling Campaign to ask you to support the approval of the provision of a cycle contraflow lane in Corn Exchange Street. In a postscript to this letter I give some information about our organisation and our strong advocacy of legal and responsible cycling.

While recognising that there are safety concerns, our organisation believes that the provision of this contraflow lane is not just desirable but is essential. We are pleased that Cambridge City Council (Environment Scrutiny Committee, 5.7.05) and the Cambridge Traffic Management Area Joint Committee (17.1.05) have both expressed their approval for the proposal.

The Issue

From the earliest stages – many years ago – of the development of the plans for the Grand Arcade, the designs have incorporated a large (500 space) ground-floor cycle park opening directly onto Corn Exchange Street and linked with the provision of a cycle contraflow lane which would permit two-way cycling along the street. The stated intention has always been to provide high-quality, readily-accessible, secure cycle parking not just for shoppers using the Grand Arcade and for those employed there, but more generally for people coming into the city centre by bicycle for employment, shopping and recreation. The cycle park would help to relieve the clutter of casually parked bicycles in the city centre caused by insufficient cycle parking provision due to the great difficulty of finding suitable locations. The costs of the cycle park, of the installation of the contraflow and the remodelling of both Corn Exchange Street and Wheeler Street would be borne by the developers. In meeting after meeting, public consultation after public consultation, the benefits of the combined cycle park and contraflow have, rightly in our view, been paraded by the developers and others.

The cycle contraflow lane is an integral component of the scheme. Without it, getting into and out of the cycle park would, we believe, be so tiresome that the park would be likely to become a white elephant, under-used by cyclists and wasting valuable resources. An alternative site would be needed which would be almost impossible to find in the city centre and, if found, would be likely to be extraordinarily costly.

Without the contraflow the only possible access to the cycle park would be from Fisher Place, a pedestrianised precinct providing a major pedestrian route into and out of both the Lion Yard and the Grand Arcade which, when the Grand Arcade is operational, will be crowded with pedestrians for much of the day. Cyclists would have to wheel their bicycles through these pedestrians to gain access to the cycle park which would inevitably cause pedestrian-cyclist conflicts at peak times.

An even worse difficulty arises from the fact that, without the contraflow, cyclists would be faced with unacceptably long diversions. For example, a cyclist coming out of the cycle park and wishing to go south along Regent Street towards the station would, if prohibited from cycling south along Corn Exchange Street, have to cycle along Wheeler Street, Bene't Street, Trumpington Street, Pembroke Street and Downing Street, a diversion so long that few would do it. We believe that instead most responsible cyclists would wheel their bicycles south along Corn Exchange Street against the traffic either on the road or the pavement up to the point just before the car park exits where the street becomes two-way and then cycle across the exits up to Downing Street. Because Corn Exchange Street is only to have one rather narrow ground-level footway (1.2 metres wide alongside the Corn Exchange building) cyclists wheeling their cycles would seriously obstruct pedestrians or on-coming vehicles if no demarcated space has been allocated to them along the street. In general terms a cyclist wheeling a bicycle takes up twice as much space for twice as long as a mounted cyclist.

Would the Cycle Contraflow be Dangerous?

While we recognise that there are dangers for cyclists, we believe that these have been over-stressed by the Council's safety auditors. In our considered opinion the dangers are acceptable and not appreciably greater than those accepted by cyclists on most of the city centre roads.

The factors leading us to this conclusion are:

The Car Park Exits

The safety auditors have focussed on the dangers to contraflow cyclists at the car park exits. But they fail to point out that two-way cycling has always been legal along the section of Corn Exchange Street in which the car park exits are located and, ever since the car park was constructed, hundreds of cyclists have every day cycled across the exits. Until the Lion Yard car park was demolished, a wide footway ran at ground level beneath the car park and many responsible cyclists used to wheel their bicycles along this path and mount them to cycle on across the exits towards Downing Street. However, the County Council's figures for the past ten years show no recorded cycle accidents either at the car exits or anywhere else in Corn Exchange Street.

(Strictly speaking the proposed contraflow will end just before (north of) the car park exits because the street was, and will remain, two-way for all traffic from this point. It is misleading to suggest that a new facility across the car park exits is proposed. What is proposed is a facility in another part of the street that will lead to increased cycle traffic across the exits.)

Moreover the car park exits are, after extensive consultations, to be substantially modified to alert emerging motorists to the presence of cyclists and the design for the cycle contraflow will slow down cyclists and position them so that they are more visible to emerging motorists than they have been in the past.

The Redesign of Corn Exchange Street and Wheeler Street

The new designs for Corn Exchange Street will create an environment which is much more like other city centre streets, with a welcoming atmosphere, oriented to the needs of pedestrians and cyclists and well-suited to the location adjoining the Arts Theatre, the Corn Exchange, the Guildhall, the Tourist Centre, the Lion Yard and the Grand Arcade. In the past this street has been poorly lit and rather a backwater with quite high vehicle speeds, especially at night. The redesigned street is expected to change the ambience from one in which motor vehicles dominate and have priority to one in which vehicles, cycles and pedestrians interact on more equal terms.

Speed Limits

As part of the Core Stage Four proposals, a 20mph zone has been proposed for the city centre. Corn Exchange Street is within this zone. Such a limit will further reduce potential risks to contraflow cyclists in this street.

Comparison with other Cycle Contraflow Arrangements

Many years ago, when the construction of the contraflow in nearby Downing Street and Pembroke Street was proposed, there were serious warnings from the police and others about the potential dangers to cyclists. The County Council bravely decided to implement the scheme and construct the contraflow. We believe that strong approval for this contraflow is now near-universal. By any judgment it has been an outstanding success. We call on Cabinet members to follow this example and to join the City Council in supporting the Corn Exchange Street contraflow. We are confident that in the future it will be seen as equally successful and a testimony to the County Council's support for cycling in Britain's premier cycling city.

Yours sincerely,
on behalf of Cambridge Cycling Campaign,

James Woodburn

Postscript

Cambridge Cycling Campaign is a local organisation, run wholly by volunteers and with more than 700 subscription-paying members, which seeks to work closely and cooperatively with local authorities and a wide range of other bodies to improve cycle facilities and provision for cycling in Cambridge and Cambridgeshire. Our aim is to try to mobilise our combined knowledge and skills to represent the interests and concerns of all who cycle and wish to cycle locally- young and old, committed and uncommitted, confident and less confident. Our intention is that Cambridge's international renown as Britain's premier cycling city in which more than 25% of local people cycle to work and even greater numbers cycle for recreation will be maintained and enhanced.

We are, and always have been, strong advocates of legal, responsible cycling (see <http://www.camcycle.org.uk/campaigning/papers/legality/>)