

18th December 2005

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



Cambridge Cycling Campaign

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Dear Cabinet Member,

Gilbert Road Accident Reduction Scheme

I am writing to you on behalf of Cambridge Cycling Campaign about an issue that is on the agenda for the **Cabinet meeting on 20th December**. The Officer's report for **Agenda Item 7 "Accident Remedies and Traffic Management Programme - Medium-Sized Safety Schemes"** states in paragraph 2.5 : "Due to budget pressures, development work on the Gilbert Road scheme has been deferred until 2006/07 and will have first call on that year's budget." We greatly welcome this recommendation.

However there is a problem. Since the original scheme was drawn up much has happened. Councillor Leeke, the main advocate of the original scheme, has ceased to be a Councillor. Our Campaign which from the very start always opposed the original scheme is now, we see, not alone. Gilbert Road residents have recently held meetings at which they have expressed strong opposition to the original scheme. But the need for an effective accident reduction scheme has actually increased for a number of reasons of which the most important is, we believe, the construction of new buildings due to open in September 2006 for Milton Road Primary School (in Ascham Road) and Castle School (in Metcalfe Road). We believe that these developments are likely to increase the number of young people cycling and walking along and crossing Gilbert Road. The number of young people attending the whole range of schools in the immediate vicinity of Gilbert Road will, from next September, be about 2,720, an extraordinarily high figure for an area this size (County Council data). Probably well under half of this number will be regularly walking or cycling along Gilbert Road but the actual figure will still be very high indeed in comparison with other Cambridge localities.

An additional factor which increases the need for urgent remedial action is the high accident rate, particularly for cyclists. There is much concern about the recent death of a cyclist in a collision with a motor vehicle on Gilbert Road.

We believe that we share with residents the desire to have a scheme which enhances the residential character of the area and makes it less of a racetrack for vehicles passing through. We believe that we share a desire for better street-lighting which was part of the original scheme and which should help to reduce the accidents which happen after dark. We believe that we share a desire for some form of speed-reducing traffic calming. Beyond this the situation is at present unclear. We would welcome involvement in discussion and cooperation with residents, with schools and with the local authorities to find ways to resolve the problems of this road.

Let us now set out our views about what we believe should and should not be done. We oppose and have always opposed former Councillor Leeke's scheme for a cycleway partly on the verge and partly on the road on the southern side of Gilbert Road because it is damaging to Gilbert Road and doesn't make sense in cycling terms. There are four reasons:

1. The verges are an amenity which should not be reduced unnecessarily.
2. The proposed cycleway is only on one side of the road and would mean that cyclists, including child cyclists, cycling towards Milton Road would have to cross and re-cross Gilbert Road if they wish to use it. This could easily increase rather than reduce accidents.
3. The proposed cycleway is only in the half of Gilbert Road which lies within the West Chesterton Ward. Nothing is provided for the rest of Gilbert Road where conditions are very similar.
4. A simpler system would, we believe, work better especially for young people who are the main focus for our concern.

Almost every house along Gilbert Road now has off-street car parking and in the great majority of instances there is provision for more than one car. The present on-road cycle lanes along the road are ineffective because car parking is still permitted within them. Increasingly, especially at the Milton Road end, the car parking is being used by commuters because it is now some of the nearest free parking to the city centre. Cyclists overtaking parked vehicles are put at risk because of the narrowness of the carriageway. We believe that the time has come to convert these cycle lanes running along the whole length of both sides of Gilbert Road into red mandatory cycle lanes in which parking is prohibited. We believe that they should be 1.6m wide, fractionally wider than existing lanes. Government guidelines specify 1.5m as the recommended minimum width for such lanes. We have measured the width of the road in a number of separate locations to establish that there is sufficient space for such lanes along the entire length of the road. The visual effect of such coloured lanes actually has a significant traffic-calming effect because it makes the road appear narrower but we would strongly support additional cycle-friendly traffic-calming measures to further reduce the traffic speed.

If possible we would like the traffic speed of most traffic to be reduced by traffic calming to below 20mph because current County Council policy will only permit the introduction of a 20mph speed limit in areas in which the speed of most vehicles is already below 20mph. A 20mph limit would greatly enhance the amenity value of Gilbert Road as a residential area and as a safe zone for pedestrians and cyclists. Dramatic reductions in road casualties are achievable through 20mph limits and government guidance now favours their use. We have a number of other suggestions including advanced stop lines at the junctions with Milton Road and Histon Road and tighter radii at road junctions to slow down the speed at which vehicles turn left on a green light.

We ask Cabinet members to support the allocation of the funds already set aside for accident reduction in Gilbert Road but to permit them to be spent on an improved accident-reduction/traffic-calming scheme. We have outlined our suggestions. No doubt there will be others. The funds should not be rigidly tied to the original scheme which is no longer appropriate in the changed circumstances of 2006-2007 and which we believe now has little, if any, support.

Yours sincerely

on behalf of Cambridge Cycling Campaign

James Woodburn