

21st June 2011

City and County
Councillor Members of
the West/Central Area
Committee and of the AJC



Cambridge Cycling Campaign

P.O. Box 204, Cambridge CB4 3FN
01223 690718 (phone & fax)
contact@camcycle.org.uk
www.camcycle.org.uk

Dear Councillor,

20mph Speed Limits in Cambridge

(To be considered at the West/Central Area Committee on 21st June and at the AJC on 18th July 2011)

Cambridge Cycling Campaign strongly supports 20mph speed limits in the city centre and in the residential streets of Cambridge. We are writing to ask for your support for these 20mph limits. The exceptional number of people who walk and cycle in Cambridge as compared with most of the rest of the UK is a powerful argument for making a 20mph limit the norm and reserving the 30mph limit for a small number of through roads.

Some city streets have for many years had 20mph limits. Recently the County Council, stimulated by successful 20mph schemes in Portsmouth and some other towns and by changes in government regulations, have added new experimental 20mph limits in the city centre and a few other streets. But the rest of Cambridge still has a general 30mph limit and there are even a few city streets where the limit is 40mph.

We now have the first results of the new experimental 20mph areas.

<http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/democracy/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=4944>

The results are disappointing: the figures suggest that so far no significant reductions in speed have been achieved in these areas. This may seem surprising as there are very strong indications of the popularity of 20mph limits. For example a poll in the Cambridge News in April 2009 showed that around 95% of over 3,000 people who responded favoured a 20mph limit in all residential streets. The 2010 British Social Attitudes survey indicated that nationally 72% of adults support 20mph limits.

<http://www.natcen.ac.uk/study/>

But in fact the disappointing results so far are not so surprising. There were flaws in the implementation of the schemes which we believe could be and should be remedied to make long-term reduction in average speeds much more probable. These flaws were insufficient publicity to increase levels of public awareness, inadequate signage for the new areas with 20mph limits and insufficient police support and willingness to enforce the 20mph limits.

Procedures in the well-known and successful Portsmouth scheme - where 94% of road length in the city now has 20mph limits - were very different from our Cambridge experimental limits:

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/roadsafety/speedmanagement/20mphPortsmouth/pdf/20mphzoneresearch.pdf>

In Portsmouth great efforts were put into publicity and public consultation and into securing cross-party support and the backing of the police. Signage was made prominent. They put red roundel road markings on the carriageway alongside the post-mounted signs at each 20mph entry point and also at some additional places where visibility was limited. This contrasts with the unobtrusive and easily missed new 20mph signs at, for example, our entry points on Tennis Court Road and on Maids Causeway. Portsmouth has achieved only modest results in speed reduction but even these modest results appear to be linked to substantial reductions in recorded road casualties (a 22% reduction so far). The numerical results in both Portsmouth and Cambridge are currently only indicative but they do suggest that more measures are now needed in Cambridge for successful speed and casualty reduction.

Costly traffic calming used to be considered essential for successful 20mph schemes. But Portsmouth has shown that much can be achieved without any traffic calming (though it is recognized in Portsmouth that traffic calming may be needed in a few streets where average speeds remain too high). Financial constraints are in any case likely to limit the use of traffic calming for the foreseeable future and our focus should be on a range of low-cost measures to ensure greater compliance with our 20mph schemes. It is encouraging that the local police now seem willing to enforce the new regulations. Moreover the Department for Transport has very recently (9th June) altered its rules specifically to make it easier for local authorities to set up 20mph schemes:

<http://nds.coi.gov.uk/clientmicrosite/default.aspx?clientID=202>

A well-designed 20mph scheme should do more than reduce average speeds and the number and severity of road casualties. It should make our streets pleasanter and less intimidating places where children are able to walk and cycle more confidently, where noise is less obtrusive and where people feel more comfortable. In the Netherlands residential areas (and many non-residential urban areas) typically have a 30kph (18.5mph) limit. We should follow their example by actively encouraging and promoting effective 20mph schemes which will make Cambridge a better place for everyone who lives here.

We urge you not to be put off by the disappointing results so far of the experimental 20mph schemes in the city centre and elsewhere in Cambridge and to back new measures to make them more effective.

Yours sincerely,

on behalf of Cambridge Cycling Campaign,

James Woodburn

