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Dear Transport Delivery,

Cherry Hinton High Street improvements

Cambridge Cycling Campaign objects to the proposals for Cherry Hinton High Street as presented. The current proposals would amount to a massive waste of public money, and simply do not address the cause of the problems in the area.

The Campaign has long called for improvements to the High Street. It is a narrow highway, busy with motor traffic. The traffic is a mix of local and through, with many drivers (including HGVs) using the High Street as a way to access the Beehive and Newmarket Road retail areas from the south east of Cambridge. The current streetscape features some of the worst cycle infrastructure in Cambridge, with narrow lanes, pinch points and “bypasses” that are narrow and frequently strewn with debris and litter. What lanes there are end where they’re most needed or end into bus stops and parking spaces. We would welcome the removal of these lanes, bypasses and pinch points, but do not welcome what is proposed to replace them.

Cycle Lanes

The cycle lanes proposed for Phase 1 are dangerously narrow. The consultation material makes claims about “1.5m wide cycle lanes”. But even 1.5m is hardly ever achieved- for much of the length the lane is only 1.0m wide. Worse, the remaining carriageway is generally less than 5.5m wide- at this width two HGVs or buses cannot pass without invading the cycle lanes. Where painted cycle lanes exist, drivers expect cyclists to use them. Painting too-narrow lanes on a carriageway that is too-narrow will lead to both thoughtless close passing and downright aggression, endangering people on bikes.

The cycle lanes in Phase 1 that run outside of car parking are another source of danger. These are some of the 1.0m sections- narrowed to this because the issue of “dooring” has been recognised by the council and partly dealt with by removing 0.5m of lane width – though many car doors are much longer than this. However, this parking will generally be short-term, used by people using the shops and other businesses, and so will have a high turnover. This means frequent movements across the narrow cycle lane.

Shared Surface

In Phase 2 the council proposes to create a “Shared Surface” for the central section of the High Street. We completely oppose this concept here or any similar locations.

The “shared space” concept is suitable for locations with little traffic, preferably dead ends. It is entirely unsuited to locations with heavy through traffic as in these situations it is generally seen that the drivers of motor vehicles assert dominance over other modes of transport.

“Shared space” is terrible for pedestrians, particularly those with vision problems. With no clear physical demarcation there is nothing to protect the visually impaired from entering the space used by vehicles, putting them in danger. With no formal crossing points, and no priority for pedestrians, it is dangerous for children, and also adults with learning difficulties, who can have difficulty judging when it is safe to cross. This reduces their independence.

The “shared surface” proposed is bad for cyclists. Along the rest of the scheme it is proposed to remove the centre line, which we welcome having been trialled on Mill Road (a similar environment). Yet through the “Shared surface” area the plans and concept images show a de-facto centre line!

The “shared surface” is bad for cost and maintenance. The block paving is much more expensive than standard surfacing and much less durable. Similar paving in the city centre is often loose due to the damage caused by delivery vehicles. With much heavier traffic these problems would crop up much more often.

Traffic Volume

The Campaign feels that the primary problem in Cherry Hinton High Street is through traffic. Cherry Hinton has a bypass, yet this is massively underused.

We would like to see the bulk of the traffic redirected around the bypass. There are several ways this could be achieved. One way would be the creation of a rising bollard “bus gate” as used in the city centre. This would allow the bus route to keep operating. This may have some effect on motor vehicle journeys by locals, and the effects of displaced traffic must be taken in to account. However, the extra car distance, combined with a quieter safer High Street, may prompt locals into making short journeys by means other than their cars such as by bicycle or on foot.

Another suggestion by some members would be to have a closure “except for access”. This could if required be enforced by police or by cameras. At the very least, a restriction on HGVs “except for access” would continue to allow deliveries to local businesses.

The parade of shops has a car park to the rear. Is parking at the front of the shops really that important? There is extensive evidence that small businesses overestimate the importance of parking to their business¹ and removal of most of the parking, for cycle lanes or larger pedestrian areas, would make the street environment more pleasant and safer for pedestrians and people on bicycles.

Conclusion

Cambridge Cycling Campaign objects to the proposals for the following reasons. The lanes proposed for Phase 1 are too narrow and cannot be made wide enough. The shared surface proposed for Phase 2 will be bad for people on bicycles, bad for pedestrians and even bad for people in motor vehicles. The problems on Cherry Hinton High Street are caused by high levels of through traffic and extensive on-street parking, and none of the proposals deal with this

Yours sincerely,
on behalf of Cambridge Cycling Campaign,

Alistair Storer
Campaigner

References:

1 <http://www.citylab.com/cityfixer/2015/03/the-complete-business-case-for-converting-street-parking-into-bike-lanes/387595/>