

OXFORD CIVIC SOCIETY

Oxfordshire County Council Riverside Routes Scheme

Response to consultation

What is Riverside Routes and what does it aim to achieve?

The 'Riverside route to city centre' scheme aims to improve pedestrian and cycle links between existing residential areas and the city centre and Oxford station. It will connect major city centre sites including Westgate, Oxpens and Osney Mead with some of the city's largest residential areas. Problems that prevent more cycling and walking will be overcome by providing new and improved largely traffic-free connections to and through Oxford city centre.

Comment:

One notable feature about the Riverside routes is that THEY DON'T JOIN UP. This is unfortunately a feature of most cycling routes in Oxford. A critical factor will be a new bridge from Oxpens to Osney Mead's new University development. This is not considered as part of this proposal. An initial look at this bridge shows that it would be high up - which would be fine for pedestrians who could continue into Westgate at 1st floor level over Thames Street. The cost of the "Bridge to Nowhere" in the old Oxpens SPD was much overestimated. However, we have not investigated a cycle route through Oxpens as everything, including the planning permission for Student Castle, seems rather fluid. We believe that there will be a cycle track up the Castle Mill stream (see below)

The improvement of the towpath to make walking and cycling feasible travel options is welcome (though this may compromise purely recreational use). However, the works proposed do nothing to improve connections from the towpath to the station or the city centre, and the route improvements certainly do not provide "*traffic-free connections ... through the city centre*". The effect of encouraging more travel by walking and cycling as a result of the works proposed here are likely to be limited, since the major disincentives are related to on-road connections, rather than this route which is already off-road.

On the subject of "traffic-free connections" for cyclists, we have investigated a route up the Castle Mill Stream to the West of Westgate to join up with the Canal towpath. From Quaking Bridge to Park End Street, the footpath moves down from road level (and probably liable to flood) and there are steps up to Park End Street - but there is plenty of space to put a cycle track at a higher level. A crossing of Park End Street would be needed - either at road level or above (almost where the "experimental" one was for a couple of days while the traffic lights were switched off). Again between Park End Street and Hythe Bridge Street the footpath is at lower level, but there is still plenty of room for a new cycle track though it would need to be at a higher level so that cyclists could cross Hythe Bridge Street at the existing traffic light crossing. From Upper Fisher row going north any "Cyclists Dismount" signs and any bars across it should be removed. There would also be a need to widen and resurface it to join up with the Canal towpath. Incidentally, there is a Rewley Road group development about to happen next to the cycle track over the wobbly bridge, so there could be some developer money sought. (Some years ago some lighting was suggested there). Incidentally, under David Nimmo-Smith they only resurfaced the canal towpath up to Aristotle Lane, but it needs sorting out right up to Wolvercote so that pedestrians and cyclists can both be happy with it. Any improvements for cyclists between Westgate and the canal towpath shouldn't cost much (unless there are bridges over Park End Street and Hythe bridge street) and would be extremely well worth

doing at very little cost. At present the whole area from George Street to the rail station is hazardous for cyclists and offers no proper North-South routes.

How is this project being funded?

The county council has secured £3.3m from central government's Cycle City Ambition Fund, and is contributing £300k towards the scheme through maintenance improvements. Of the £3.6m total, £3.3m is allocated to route infrastructure improvement measures, with £300k allocated to bank maintenance measures on the Thames towpath. Bank improvement works were completed in October 2016.

Comment:

Has any assessment been carried out of alternative opportunities for spending CCA Fund resources? Do the works proposed really constitute the best value for money which can be achieved (i.e. the highest priority) in terms of promoting active travel, compared to other potential improvements? What about developer contributions – e.g. at Oxpens and Rewley Road? The last time any re-surfacing was done between Donnington Bridge and Folly bridge it was done by the Environment Agency while shoring up the river bank. If there is Cycle City Ambition fund money available, then it should certainly be used for cycle tracks and not for other purposes. However the path between Donnington Bridge and Folly Bridge is used by both pedestrians and cyclists for rowing races etc. - so it just needs a decent surface and widening so that everyone can safely use it.

Why are you not proposing segregated cycle lanes?

Whilst the project is funded through the government's cycle city ambition scheme, improvements to the routes are intended to benefit all users. As well as providing a key off-road cycle route into and from the centre of Oxford, the routes also provide important leisure and recreational function. The county council considers that provision of segregated cycle facilities along the route would compromise the desirability of the route for a large proportion of users and could create a potential safety hazard.

Comment:

The proposals are **not** "... providing a key off-road cycle route into and from the centre of Oxford ..."; the route already exists, and it does not go into the centre of the city. There is no explanation of what is meant by "... compromise the desirability of the route by a large proportion of users ...", nor any evidence provided of why this might be true. Likewise, there is no explanation or evidence in support of the assertion that segregation could cause a potential safety hazard; received wisdom would suggest that normally the reverse is true.

Pedestrians and cyclists do not mix well - it is unhappy for both parties, so where it is feasible (and this is not everywhere), then cyclists should have their own paths and in no circumstances should they meet either "Cyclists Dismount" signs (these should read "Cyclists please be considerate to pedestrians") nor hoops or any other sort of barrier. Drop kerbs in certain strategic locations are also essential.

What are the latest proposals for the Oxpens pedestrian and cycle bridge?

The riverside routes scheme includes a pedestrian and cycle bridge over the river Thames at Oxpens. Design proposals for the bridge are being developed and co-ordinated alongside a number of key delivery partners. In particular the bridge proposals need to be coordinated with the emerging development proposals at Osney Mead and Oxpens. Feasibility design work of the bridge element is

being progressed and further details on the bridge proposal will be made available in due course once further feasibility design work has been completed.

Comment:

Early opportunity to provide input to the processes of selection of location and development of design would be not only welcome, but also sensible. A cycle route through Osney Mead to join up with the proposed South Hinksey route would need to be very temporary - pending the redevelopment of the area. It is also suggested that a new road parallel to the Botley Road behind the warehouses might be required (for public transport) - which may alter the plans for the cycle route.

OCS Transport Group
20 August 2017