

Design Guide for the Greater Cambridge City Deal

Federation of Cambridge Residents' Association (FeCRA) comments on proposals and process.

Cambridge is a world-famous city, internationally recognized as worthy of World Heritage status <http://bit.ly/2IEmkPT>, yet the first version of the Design Guide for the Greater Cambridge City Deal Major Transport Infrastructure projects made no reference at all to heritage, conservation or the historic environment. This is a serious omission in a document intended to provide guidance on incorporating public realm and green landscaping with transport schemes for this historic city. Addressing this should be the priority in the revised version.

The Council's own Transport Strategy Policy states:

'In terms of built and natural Heritage, the City of Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire are both regarded as distinct and desirable locations that are required to be preserved and protected to keep the quality of life high...It is therefore vital that the impact on the built and natural environment from transport is kept to a minimum, with measures looking to improve on the current situation wherever possible'. *Appendix G streetscape and environment*

Many residents across the city, however, have been dismayed by County Council road and cycle schemes with a 'one size fits all' approach, measuring out bus, car and cycle lanes according to rigid standards with what too often seems to have been little regard for the impact on the streetscape and environment. With many more schemes already agreed, or in the pipeline, we welcome the recognition that good design is crucial, and needs to be at the heart of all these projects rather than tagged on as 'mitigation' at the end of the process.

The design and implementation of road and cycle schemes has been foremost among the issues of concern to many residents over the past year, and there has been a remarkable degree of unanimity in the principles and priorities expressed. Several of these are well expressed in the letter recently submitted by Camcycle, especially their concerns about the 'disturbing' and dangerous examples given in the first draft of the Design Guide.

Safety is the key priority for most residents – summed up by one person who wrote to us:

'The cycle path should be so safe a 9 year old child can use it without any fear that should they veer off the straight and narrow a vehicle can hit them'.

- For most people this means a physical barrier between the cycle lane and other traffic. The 'Cambridge kerb' with a slope to allow other vehicles onto the cycle lane does not feel safe to many people – especially for children. Unless parents are convinced their child is safe they will not allow them to cycle and the 'school run' will continue to be by car, adding to congestion. Perhaps more importantly, children will not grow up with cycling part of their everyday life and changing the attitudes and behavior of future generations is necessary to achieve the modal shift we need to see.
- Creating a barrier between the road and cycle lane also allows space to design in features which are important in residential areas such as loading bays – otherwise delivery vehicles will park in the cycle lanes and it will not be possible to prevent this.
- Grass verges are not just a more attractive physical barrier between cycleways/footpaths and other traffic – they also provide 'handlebar space' for overtaking, and a soft landing for wobbly novice cyclists. In a city that has a serious problem with surface water and ageing

sewers verges also act as valuable soakaways. Incorporating trees and other attractive greenery as SUDS “rain gardens” is a proven method of managing flooding. <http://bit.ly/1drKCRT>

- It is also proven to counter air pollution. <http://bit.ly/2kjxnAK>

Context and character

No projects in Cambridge can consider **only** cycling improvements or traffic flow and the first draft of the Urban Design Guide rightly recognized that a key objective should be to achieve an appropriate blend of the needs for movement along major routes and the desire to make them attractive places to live, work and pass through. Much greater emphasis, however, needs to be given to good placemaking, and to how it will be achieved in practice.

This is also part of the Camcycle submission, which sets out widths for footpaths and cycle ways in new developments while pointing out that these must be applied in a flexible manner depending on context. This is the approach taken in countries such as the Netherlands, where the CROW standards are important for **new developments** and for roads between towns and villages where wide lanes are needed for speed and overtaking. They do not apply however within the **existing residential areas** of cities such as Amsterdam, where the usual cycle lane widths are 1.2m - 1.8m. The priority here is infrastructure for cyclists and pedestrians which is safe for all users and also well integrated in its context to enhance the streetscape.

This is achieved through a multi-disciplinary approach **from the start**, with a team which consists of traffic engineers, urban and landscape designers and often, depending on the location architects or experts in other areas such as heritage or conservation as well. The Cambridge Association of Architects wrote to the City Deal Board on 1st September 2016 asking that this should be the model followed for new transport infrastructure projects in the Greater Cambridge area

‘It is essential for the city that infrastructure design is considered in a broad multi-disciplinary team at the earliest possible opportunity, not just by road engineers’

We support the points they make and also the 6 measures they call upon the City Deal Board to implement as a matter of urgency. <http://bit.ly/2c3eYCR>

Signs/street furniture

- Department of Transport advice clearly states that this should be minimal, especially in residential and Conservation Areas:

‘Signs should only be provided where a clear need has been identified, and should be minimal and sympathetic to their environment. ... For new schemes the aim should be to design clutter out from the start. *Traffic Advisory Leaflet 01/13*

The Design Guide needs more detail and better examples of these principles to ensure clear guidance on how this advice on signage should be followed.

- Recent research on the environmental damage caused by microplastics shows that 50% of this is from road markings, so on-road signs should also be kept to a minimum.
- Bus stops also need to be in keeping with the neighbourhood, and large advertising signs are not appropriate in most of the city’s residential areas.

Materials

- The red material currently used for used for cycleway surfacing in Cambridge is not easily available and is expensive. This means that when it is necessary to patch up small areas this is often done in black, which is unsightly and can also lead to confusion. With a large expansion

planned in the number of cycle routes in the city now would be a good time to review this and consider a switch to something cheaper and more attractive. Green is used in Edinburgh and would perhaps be a good choice for the new greenways, linking Cambridge with the villages.

- Differentiation between the footpath/cycleway/highway can also be achieved by using paving and/or height levels and choices here should be based on design, quality and whole life cost.

Consultation

Residents are key stakeholders in the schemes in their areas, and are also the people best placed to input detailed local knowledge on what the problems are, as well as how they may best be addressed, yet the existing process has left them feeling marginalized and that their concerns are ignored. The current ‘top down’ model for consultation with poor communication, engineering drawings incomprehensible to the lay person and pre-determined outcomes is deeply flawed.

Residents should be involved from the start in identifying the demands, challenges and opportunities when any new scheme is proposed, along with others such as environmental, heritage and disability groups as well as cycling or business interests. This is the usual practice in the Netherlands and many other countries.

Review

An impartial review of the key elements with input from all stakeholders is an essential and integral part of any good design process, and we ask for this to be incorporated as a requirement in the revised Design Guide, as it is in other countries with high standards for transport infrastructure.

Despite repeated requests there has been no review, for example, of phase 1 of Hills Road, other than a very simplistic Sustrans survey showing an increase in the number of cyclists. Since the work was carried out in the first place because the numbers of people using this road was rising rapidly this is hardly significant – what we need to know is how successful the scheme is according to a much wider range of criteria, which would include the views of residents and impact on the streetscape and environment.

That the design for phase 1 of Hills Road was highly experimental is acknowledged in the Report to the Cambridgeshire Environment and Scrutiny Committee 13/10/16 Appendix 1.2

‘Segregated cycleways had not previously been delivered in Cambridgeshire (and indeed in few places in UK at that time) and other features such as the Cambridge kerb, sedum and floating bus stops had never been used in schemes.

Apart from serious financial overspends and major disruption to residents and businesses for almost 2 years, these innovations have led to many other problems including:

- Fears about safety due to the lack of physical separation of cycle lanes from traffic, leading to increased numbers of people cycling on the footpaths especially with children.
- Traffic hold-ups caused by the floating bus stops, which have now led to cancellation of the popular Citi 8 bus service.
- Flooding – no consideration of the impact of changes such as removal of verges on SUDS (sustainable urban drainage system)

Without robust review how can there be proper scrutiny of these schemes, or any lessons learnt?

Some of the points raised here on public realm and streetscape are already included in section 4 of the first draft, but they have not yet been put into effect on any County infrastructure schemes in Cambridge, which all fall very far short of this ideal.

It is essential that the City Deal considers not just the Design Guide itself but also how it will ensure that the teams responsible for implementing City Deal schemes have the professional expertise needed

to put it into effect, including urban and landscape design. We have been repeatedly assured that this is in place, yet Hills Road phase 2 which is a City Deal funded scheme, was ‘designed’ by traffic engineers and cycling officers, with no consideration at all of streetscape or environmental impact.

FeCRA, the Federation of Cambridge Residents’ Associations, is the principal grassroots civic voice in Cambridge and our membership includes over 90 community associations and neighbourhood groups. The design of new transport infrastructure has become a key concern of our members, many of whom have already asked questions about these issues at both the City Deal Board and Assembly.

We had asked to be involved in revising the Design Guide, and are disappointed that this has not happened. We request that the updated version is consulted on fully and that the views expressed in this letter are taken into account.

All roads in the city are far more than ‘transport corridors’, and FeCRA would like to work with the City Deal and council officers to help ensure that future infrastructure schemes are designed to the highest international standards and will not only improve traffic flow but also enhance the streetscape and public realm of our residential areas.

Wendy Blythe FeCRA Chair

Jean Glasberg FeCRA Cycling officer