

Abbey Green Party Ward Office
603 Newmarket Road
Cambridge
CB5 8PA
20th March 2023

Dear Greater Cambridgeshire Partnership (Eastern Access Project team),

Eastern Access Consultation 2023

1 Introduction

I am writing in capacity as ward councillor for Abbey ward. I have read the consultation response filed by my colleague Cllr Hannah Copley with which I broadly agree. I do not intend to duplicate the comments made by Cllr Copley but wanted to make you aware of some concerns and suggestions raised by other Abbey residents who might not feel confident in making their own consultation responses.

2 About me

My personal experiences shape my view of this project. I am a long term Abbey resident who lives on Newmarket Road. I am an occasional bus and taxi user but my main method of transport is my mobility scooter. I am a 60 year old disabled woman who works from a home office but travels throughout the city.

3 About Abbey Ward

Abbey's demographics are quite different from those of the city as a whole. Typically, Abbey residents are much more likely to be older, have 3 or more indices of deprivation and be long term Cambridge residents than is the case for the city as a whole. In one respect, Abbey is similar to the city as a whole with 34% of households not having a car. Usually, low car ownership is associated with lower levels of income. However, income level is not the only predictor as these figures show.

Although Newmarket Road is described as Eastern Access, it's not just an urban approach road but a densely populated residential road with shopping and leisure facilities. On any day, there will be commuters passing through but there will also be shoppers, delivery vehicles, trades vehicles and residents. Commuters may just want to drive through. Others need to be able to stop and park.

A key question for me and for residents is whether the right balance has been struck between protecting local amenities for those of us who live, work and visit here and those who just want to travel through.

Although some residents argue that no change is needed, I think that the accident statistics for Elizabeth Way and Barnwell Road roundabouts and Newmarket Road itself are a strong argument for change. But is this the best plan or are further changes to the plan still needed?

My colleague, Cllr Copley has chosen to analyse the plans by area. I have chosen to focus on different user groups.

4 Emergency services -resident questions

On any day you will see heavy emergency service traffic along Newmarket Road and Barnwell Road. The current road layout is often congested and far from ideal. However, because much of Newmarket Road is dualled or has broad pavements, it's often possible for private cars to pull out of the way and let ambulances go through. Will this still be possible under the new layout? Or will drivers be inhibited from pulling over because of cycle lane kerbs or bus lane cameras?

If ambulances need to pick up sick or infirm residents, will they still have good access to parking spots by residents' homes and able to pick up or set down safely out of traffic?

5 Taxis

If the GCP plans to introduce a congestion charge succeed, then the role of taxi and private hire vehicles will become even more important. Taxis are incredibly important for residents who have a disability or are just a bit older. I have already had concerns expressed by taxi trade associations and individual taxi drivers about abuse from cyclists and safety issues when trying to pick up elderly or infirm residents after GCP changes to other local roads. How will the new layout work for taxis and their customers? Will taxis still be able to offer a full door to door service to residents who need this?

6 Buses and bus stops

Residents are distressed by the number of bus stops that have been moved or lost under the current plans. A very high proportion of bus users are elderly or infirm. If you take away their bus stop or move it, you aren't just adding a few minutes to their journey time. You might make it impossible for them to travel by bus at all. This could force elderly residents to keep elderly high emission cars on the road that they can't really afford or limit them to a weekly taxi trip.

We ask you to think again and at the very least maintain the number of bus stops and keep them as evenly spaced as possible. Disability friendly seats at the bus stop would also be welcome. Some of us can't stand for more than a short period even with mobility aids and can't balance on perch bars.

Finally, residents would welcome a clear explanation of the proposed new floating bus stops and how the design will ensure that slow and infirm pedestrians can safely cross fast moving cyclists and put large prams and wheelchairs onto the buses.

7 School and nursery journeys

I consider that the new cyclops crossing that will replace the current Barnwell Roundabout will make the Seesaw nursery and Galfrid school run safer and easier. Some residents have pointed out that there are already crossings if people are prepared to walk further down each arm of the roundabout. However, I sat with a GCP officer at the roundabout for half an hour and we were the only people who took that detour. So we consider that these improvements are both desirable and necessary. I also welcome the new intelligent crossing signals which register if a bike or pedestrian (or mobility scooter) hasn't made it across yet. This is a real win for elderly residents or parents taking small kids across the road.

8 Historic fears and cycling

The Elizabeth Way roundabout has been nicknamed the “Wall of Death” by cyclists .Otherwise confident cyclists refuse to use it. This is why the underpass was built in the first place. The underpass is like concrete marmite. Many residents want to keep it, while others refuse to use it.

I can see that the new design would be a considerable improvement on traversing the current roundabout without using the underpass. But I am not convinced that residents are going to be prepared to cycle through it, no matter what improvements are made.

One suggestion made was that cyclists should be given a short priority filter at the new traffic lights to allow them to cross the cyclops junction ahead of cars. This seems like a cost effective proposal that would improve cycling confidence.

Will it be enough to get residents cycling along Newmarket Road or over the Elizabeth Way cyclops junction? I would like to be proved wrong but residents have little reason to take this route with so many good options and when the road has such a dreadful reputation.

I think that many residents will continue to detour via the Chisholm Trail to Mill Road or via New Street down to the Grafton Centre or take the scenic route along NC51, Riverside and Midsummer Common on to King Street into the historic centre, cycling on Newmarket Road only for short unavoidable stretches.

If GCP really wants to improve cycling in Abbey, they could do so far more cheaply by improving signage and putting in bat friendly solar studs on the footpath.

A few chicanes to allow mobility scooters and cargo bikes through but slow down motorbikes on NC51 would also be welcome.

I remain doubtful that Newmarket Road cycle numbers will ever justify what GCP is spending on the project. Maybe a few out of towners will miss the turns for NC51 and Chisholm Trail?

9 Pedestrian crossings and islands

Residents are pleased to see the new pedestrian crossings but are not happy that other islands (e.g by Jack Warren Green) are disappearing. A JWG parent off to visit the food hub or take the kids to the popular CTR youth group now has a really long detour. Your highways engineers have suggested that 400m is the maximum best practice difference between crossing points and that more frequent road crossings improve safety. May we ask you to confirm all the intervals between crossing points under the new plan?

10 Cars and street parking

I have already shared the feedback from several residents living in 15 houses on Newmarket Road North, just east of Garlic Row. Residents have been permitted dropped curbs and on road parking. One couple has lived in the area for over 30 years. He is a builder who uses his car for heavy tools, so going car free is not an option. No alternative parking provision is available.

The impact of your changes could force them to move from their home of 36 years. We hope that you will be able to resurvey this small area and consider whether a solution can be found.

Finally, we thank you for your patience in explaining the plans to us and for the amount of work that has gone into the proposals. We hope that you find our comments and those of our residents helpful and informative.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Naomi Bennett,

Abbey Ward City Councillor,

Green Party