

Response by the Cambridge Green Party to the GCP Cambridge Eastern Access Consultation

December 2021

In many cases there was insufficient information in the consultation materials to choose between the options proposed; in some cases additional information was provided at the consultation meetings or was obtained through email questions, but this will not have been available to all those who wish to respond. There is also a need for visualisations, in 3D images, to give a real understanding of each option. For all four locations for which improvements are planned, consideration must also be given to potential places for EV charging points, cycle parking (if necessary), provision of green space and vegetation, and other infrastructure essential for a good and sustainable active transport system.

1. Newmarket Road alterations – Options N1 - N3:

We favour the options that provide the greatest increase in bus lanes, with the following caveats:

- There must be no felling or loss of mature trees, an action that would be directly contrary to the City Council Tree Canopy Project. In Cherry Hinton, at the Robin Hood Roundabout, land was purchased from the Robin Hood pub to facilitate the new road layout. We advocate this approach for the bottle neck locations on Newmarket Road to create space for active transport arrangements around the trees along the road.
- The current lay-outs suggest that there could be significant potential bottlenecks where bus lanes start and stop, which would not be acceptable. We would like to see more details of these and an assessment of their impacts.

We strongly support the proposal for the parallel cycle path, currently noticeably lacking along Newmarket Road. The bicycle lane must be properly segregated from the road to make it a safe option for all levels of cyclist ability. Many people report finding cycling along Newmarket Road one of the most dangerous cycling experiences they have in Cambridge, and alternative routes (e.g. along Ditton meadows and Stourbridge Common) involve a major detour.

For whichever Option is selected, we recommend that bus stops should be covered and have seating. They should be outside key locations for bus users, such as schools, care homes and childcare facilities. Other important locations on or adjacent to Newmarket Road requiring well designed bus stops as close as possible to them are: Abbey Stadium, the Beehive Centre, Newmarket Road Tesco, the East Barnwell Community Centre, Marshall's Airport and McDonald's Drive Thru (noting particularly that for this location, good public and active transport connections could help to reduce vehicle use of the drive through component of the establishment). We would particularly like to see how the proposals for the upgrade of Newmarket Road relate to those in the Making Connections consultation and the proposed new bus routes.

We recommend that the floating design of bus stop is used, with the firm proviso that a good model for this is used, as some have proved less successful. Floating bus stops can be challenging for those with mobility problems as the cycle lane has to be crossed; they need

to have a long dropped curb to facilitate pram, wheelchair and mobility scooter access, and must be sufficiently wide to accommodate prams, mobility scooters etc while waiting for, and getting on to the bus. A good example is Hills Road Blinco Grove Bus Stop ID: CMBDAGDW (Location using Google Plus Code: 54PQ+86 Cambridge), which has a lengthy stop with plentiful space for socially distanced waiting. A bad example is Queen Edith's Way, Stop ID: CMBDAPJA (Location using Google Plus Code: 55MF+F3 Cambridge), which is very small, has no seating, no covered area, and is very short - no more than 2-3 people can wait on it socially distanced. Such details are essential for people choosing to use active transport.

Our other major concern is that the consultation material does not explain that the highway verges, which in many places have trees, will need to be concreted over. The designs indicate that it is almost certain that trees on at least one side of the road will have to be removed, particularly in the case of Options N2 and N3 which provide for an inbound bus lane. If this is the case, we strongly oppose these two options on the basis that trees will have to be removed.

We think it is important that all those who will be impacted by these proposals should be informed as to exactly which trees are threatened; supportive responses should not be understood as support for loss of mature trees unless this is explicitly stated. People must understand that they may need to choose between a bus lane and trees; the results of this survey will be presented to the road planners and it is essential that they receive views on this, which is not possible with wording of the consultation brochure. This issue has already risen with the Histon and Milton Road schemes and we are shocked to see that it is happening again.

The wide variety of trees along Newmarket Road, including some large mature specimens, is vital to this entrance to the City which is a focus for development. This is particularly the case at the western end, where more new green space is urgently needed to provide partial compensation to residents for the dense urban development and near-continuous construction work. Although a number of the trees are small varieties or recently planted, they provide a degree of vital shading, urban cooling and help to mitigate air pollution. In further consideration of these options, a high priority will be to look for opportunities for planting additional trees and vegetation, increasing biodiversity value and generally enhancing the visual appeal of the area. In the case of the section between Airport Way roundabout and the Park & Ride, we understand that the verges are home to a significant colony of Bee Orchids and other botanical interest. Particularly careful attention must be paid avoiding damage to these locations. Development of more extensive compensatory habitats might be possible if suitable biodiversity experts are consulted and agree that such large off-setting habitats would be an improvement to wildlife and biodiversity.

2. Elizabeth Way Roundabout – Options E1 and E2.

We would support a proposal for this roundabout that will reduce vehicle use, improve safety for cyclists and pedestrians, and increase green space.

However, we consider neither of these Options to be satisfactory and would urge the GCP to review them and bring in more experienced and imaginative designers. As with the Newmarket Road proposals mentioned above, much more thought should be given to ensuring that this junction is of high quality urban and architectural design, given the importance of it as a key entrance point to the City. Neither option presents what we consider should be an appropriate design and we think that further work should be undertaken to introduce new imaginative concepts, and to provide visualizations. For active travel users, waiting on a traffic island in 4 lanes of traffic is never a positive experience and ideally they should be able to cross a junction in one go. Neither Option allows for this. E2, the cyclops junction is potentially safer for cyclists/pedestrians, and would provide more space but lacks visual appeal, creating a large area of tarmac as the centrepiece.

Both Options involve the loss of the underpass and this should be reconsidered. Many local people do not wish to see it removed, as it is recognised as a unique local characteristic, typical of urban design of its time, and with high quality (if damaged) murals and some vegetation. Some users report feeling unsafe in the underpass, and there are valid concerns about it as a potential location for crime; these issues would need to be addressed, and relevant data collected on incidences and concerns. It should be possible to include the subways in the design for those who wish to use them, along with improved safety, signage and attractiveness, and more vegetation.

In developing the final choice of option, the urgent need for off-road cycle paths along Elizabeth Way should be addressed. There are no cycle paths on the east side of Elizabeth Way Bridge, and the cycle lane on the west side is shared with a bus lane and is not segregated.

3. Barnwell Road Roundabout – Options B1 and B2

We consider that both options would improve safety, with proper pedestrian crossings on all four arms instead of just two - something that residents have been requesting for a long time, given that this junction is on two major school routes. However, neither option will reduce congestion /air pollution /engine idling. B1 may be better for buses but B2 looks safer for pedestrians and mobility scooters; B2, a cyclops junction, converts the roundabout to a traffic-light junction, ending the current situation where traffic queues round the roundabout, blocking the road junctions, and creates some green space.

Given the significant location of this junction on a key entrance road to the City, and the centre of Barnwell community, any Option being considered needs to have high quality urban design, an imaginative approach to improving the public realm used by residents in one of the more deprived areas of the City where a lot of residents are reliant on public transport, and attention to improving green space and presence of vegetation. Neither of the Options appears to be of the high quality needed.

Greater emphasis and urgency needs to go to resolving the problems caused by the MacDonald's Drive Thru, which causes a large part of the congestion, engine idling, air pollution etc.

For cyclists, the design should consider the potential for additional cycle routes on residential roads that are quieter and more attractive (CPPF have identified some options in their consultation response), as even with a re-designed junction many do not use Newmarket Road.

4. Newmarket Road Park and Ride – Options P1, P2 and P3:

The Green Party opposes the relocation of the Park and Ride (P&R) to the sites proposed, as this would have a direct impact on a Site of Special Scientific Interest, Wilbraham Fen, which is legally protected for its biodiversity value, and also because it would lead to loss of green belt. Under national planning policy a green belt location could only be justified if there was no alternative. As there is already a P&R site, there is clearly an alternative. We therefore object to all the Options and in particular P3.

The proposed new locations are further away from Cambridge and therefore less attractive than the current P&R site, particularly for cyclists. P&Rs encourage car journeys and compete with public transport (thereby reducing patronage, which in turn reduces service frequency, which in turn reduces patronage). A new large P&R will result in an increase in carbon emissions, as has been recognised in the planning application for the Hauxton/M11 P&R. This approach is not compatible with zero carbon planning.

The precise locations of the options are not possible to identify from the maps provided, but if a P&R is found to be essential an additional option should be developed which uses only the triangular field, in order to minimise harm to nationally significant ecology and the green belt. Alternatively a P&R could be considered as part of the Airport development; this would technically be a brownfield site, and the roundabout could be relocated within the development. If the P&R is retained it is essential that it does not provide easy access to the nature reserve as this would create increased recreational disturbance to wildlife (and this would be a planning consideration). We also suggest that an additional traffic filter lane be routed along the A1303 so that vehicles do not have to queue.

However, there is an URGENT need to rethink completely the P&R model, as with future climate change we cannot promote dependence on individual car use. Along with general ideas shared in the Making Connections Consultation, we need proposals for a high quality public transport system, of which the most urgent component (and most effectively and rapidly implemented) is the new bus network. If this is sufficiently reliable and connects all major settlements with short hopper on-demand services that connect local transport hubs, there is no need at all for new large P&Rs. Buses from more distant locations could meet and transit passengers at the existing P&R, or at new location on Cambridge Airport land, and connect with frequent services to other destinations. We are aware this is beyond the context of this consultation but the short-sighted nature of this current consultation, based on a personal car-ownership future, has no place in the current climate crisis and will not contribute to preventing catastrophic global heating.