

HIGHFIELD ROAD – PROPOSED JUNCTION IMPROVEMENTS – HRA RESPONSE

The City Council's agent, Balfour Beatty, has informed the Association and local residents of plans to make improvements to Highfield Road. [Details of what is proposed are on the Association's website]. The work is scheduled to take place in the late autumn. This paper sets out HRA's response. The key points are:

1. HRA supports the objective of improving sustainable travel facilities for all road users.
2. However any works should only be done as part of a comprehensive scheme for Lovers Walk that takes account of the needs of all users.
3. What is proposed here is anyway deeply flawed, both for what it includes and for what it excludes.
4. The top priority should be the rebuilding and widening of the footpath opposite nos 1-5 Highfield Road, being the only stretch at present that is in need of urgent repairs and which is actually dangerous for cyclists and pedestrians alike.

HRA therefore calls upon the Council to rethink what is proposed and enter into a proper consultation about what is needed to improve access to all road users in this part of the City.

The fundamental objective

HRA supports the basic objective of improving accessibility for all road users whilst noting that the majority are pedestrians.

A comprehensive scheme

The proposals for Highfield Road should not be determined, let alone enacted, until an overall scheme has been agreed for Lovers Walk. This needs to be done through proper processes, involving full consultation with local residents as well as users' representatives, as well as the possibility of a public inquiry (given the requirement for Ministerial approval of hard works on a common).

Content of the current proposals

There are two main problems with the current plans.

First, the management of the Common is committed to restoring centuries-old pedestrian entrance to Common. Yet the removal of the pavement on the west side of the junction of Highfield Road and Highfield Avenue (to allow more space for cyclists to merge with traffic on Highfield Road) is just at that point. The cyclist merging space would be better accommodated by moving the northernmost limit of on-street parking on Highfield Road

slightly southwards and aligning the cycle movements north of that to align with an alteration to the Furzedown Road/Highfield Lane junction proposed at Diagram A.

Furthermore, nothing is proposed to prevent the highly dangerous, and quite frequent, movements of northbound vehicles in Highfield Road from attempting a short cut by turning right into Highfield Lane just as the pedestrian crossing light is green. At the same time, nothing is proposed to prevent the frequent use of the footpath from Nos. 32 Highfield Road northward by cyclists, which is dangerous both to pedestrians and the cyclists themselves from vehicles entering and leaving adjacent properties. These are significant omissions.

Second, the proposed build-out for those waiting at the bus stop opposite Omdurman Road would actually make it more dangerous for cyclists as the stationary buses would be further into the road near the junction. It also appears that it would involve some loss of on-street parking used by those from other parts of Highfield and the City visiting the Common.

However the proposals do not contain a number of important traffic management measures that would improve the safety of both pedestrians crossing to the Common and cyclists:

1. Effective speed restraint to 20 mph. Although the current traffic loadings on Highfield Road are low, there are not infrequent speeds of 50 mph+ from cars trying to 'rat run' past a queue on the Avenue, which are extremely dangerous for southbound cyclists in the middle of the road passing parked cars. There should be pedestrian tables installed at the Omdurman and Khartoum junctions to slow traffic and give pedestrian priority to those crossing to the Common, and midway between Omdurman Road and Highfield Avenue (similar to the speed limiting tables in University Road north of the Sports Hall).
2. There is no effective physical deterrent to traffic passing southbound through the 'no entry' throttle opposite the end of Khartoum Road. There should be a sharp kerb southbound installed and a bollard in the pavement of the Khartoum Road corner (to prevent 4x4s travelling south mounting the pavement and southbound cycle route).
3. There is no effective deterrent to northbound vehicles making right turn moves into Omdurman Road. These are both frequent and regular and put unsuspecting crossing pedestrians and cyclists at risk.
4. There is no improvement of the cycle route on to the Common opposite Khartoum Road, which has an awkward sharp bend to negotiate, and where the surface is compromised by a sawn-off metal post that creates a serious hazard for cycle wheels, especially in wet conditions.
5. Nothing is proposed to prevent the very common (and unlawful) cyclist movements on to the Common opposite Omdurman Road, where the chicane

railings are ineffectively installed. There is often conflict with pedestrians waiting for the bus and with other users of the central grassed area of the Little Common for games, through which the 'no cycling' path passes.

Use of scarce resources

At a time of extreme resource constraint, HRA is not persuaded that this is the best use of the Council's funds for improving the road infrastructure. If however it is felt imperative to start to improve Lover's Walk then the top priority is to repair the walkway outside Nos. 1-5 of Highfield Road, which is a current danger to cyclists and pedestrians alike.