

Colchester Civic Society response to LCWIP consultation – John Salmon April 2021

General Comments

In broad terms Colchester Civic Society strongly supports the view that both footways and cycle lanes should be well lit and maintained to the highest possible standards. Potholes can damage tyres and wheels on motor vehicles but are potentially lethal for cyclists; so too are overhanging bushes and trees. These hazards are also dangerous to walkers, especially disabled walkers and chair users.

We also support the view that pedestrians and cyclists should be segregated and where this is not possible priority should be given to pedestrians. Mixed-use paths are stressful for both cyclists and pedestrians and unsafe for pedestrians, especially those who are hard of hearing and/or have limited vision, or are walking with a child or dog. For these reasons we believe every effort should be made to keep footways, where they are not mixed use, clear of cycles and electric scooters. Of particular concern are areas such as East Hill and Hythe Hill, where it has been reported to us that high-speed cycling on footways has resulted in some near misses. We feel that this is the consequence of previous attempts to encourage cycling without making the necessary investments in planning and infrastructure. It is only in recent years that cycling on footways has become an acceptable practice.

While we are keen to see cycling and walking separated as far as possible, we are also keen to see the development of an extensive network of dedicated cycle paths, where cyclists are able to ride freely at reasonable speed; and provision is made for the safe negotiation of road junctions, especially roundabouts.

For many years cyclists have been obliged to make use of unsatisfactory cycle paths such as the Rawstorn Road to Head Street route which runs the wrong way in a one-way street, dives through a narrow subway, where cycling is banned, and resumes along a strip of cycle path where pedestrians stray on to the cycle-path from one side and car doors open on to cyclists from the other.

This experience, however, pales into insignificance compared with what follows for those cyclists brave enough to negotiate the buses and traffic in Head Street. We will be interested to see proposals for how the cycle route will work here and in the High Street. Will this be a two-way system?

Without taking any particular position on whether or not motor vehicles should be discouraged in central Colchester in favour of public transport and cycling, we are concerned that the implementation of such a strategy is designed to ensure that it does not speed up the decline of the town centre economy and encourage shoppers to gravitate toward the growing retail centre at Stanway, which is designed around car use.

Pedestrian Routes

We cannot comment on the proposed pedestrian routes for Colchester because we do not understand what “proposed walking routes” means. Is this an exercise in signposting or does it go further than this?

Cycling routes

With regard to the proposed major cycling routes we note that the shared-use path from East Bridge to Middle Mill is not included. This is part of the Wivenhoe Trail, which is a well-established east-to-west cycle route and as such will continue to be used whether or not it is designated as a cycle route, as it connects to the northern cycle routes to Ipswich Road and the northern approaches. The problem with this route in its current form is that, like the rest of the Wivenhoe Trail, it is a shared-use path and will need to be upgraded to allow for increased cycle traffic and maintain it as a safe route for pedestrians and chair users.

At present this route is also problematic in that it includes the Lower Castle Park riverside path and is responsible for the increase in the numbers of cyclists entering the park and using it as a route into the town centre. Given that the designated cycle route is now through Maidenburgh Street, Kings Meadow and Pavilion View, the use of the lower Castle Park riverside path for a cycle route should, in our view, be stopped.

In addition the path on the north bank between Meander Mews and Rouse Way should be opened up to provide a more direct cycle link between the Eastern and Northern Routes.

The problem at present is that the path is incomplete and there is a 100m section near Rouse Way that was not put in place because land ownership was not established at the time of building.

Detective work by a member of the Civic Society makes it likely that this problem can be overcome. We are in the process of employing a solicitor to examine the deeds presented by the previous owner of the Bypass Nurseries site and the land on which Meander Mews is built. It is anticipated that this will establish ownership and allow for permission for this path to be completed. This could perhaps then become part of the major cycling route, provided the funding can be found.

Given that the town is continuing to expand on both eastern and western fringes we would like to see consideration given to completing an east – west route that does not run through the town centre. The westward section could make use of the path on the north side of Colne Bank Avenue and Cymbeline Way, connecting this to the Northern Approaches and Ipswich Road cycle routes and the Wivenhoe Trail. At present the missing link in this route is a crossing at the Spring Lane roundabout.

This could be an important link in providing an east-west cycle route, largely independent of the existing roads, at least up to London Road, Lexden. We hope some way will be found to establish a safe and workable cycleway through this heavily congested area and also extend into the developing suburbs and retail parks of Stanway and Copford.

We note that most major routes radiating out from the town centre include a cycle route. Could these not be expanded to provide connections between these radial routes? For instance to connect the Ipswich Road route to Harwich Road and on to the Greenstead estate?

Also there is a large area of the southeast side of town that is not included in this network – around the areas of New Town and Old Heath, Monkwick and Berechurch. If people are to begin cycling to work in the future, then we need to provide a broad network of cycle routes that connect all areas of town and ensure that major employment areas, such as Whitehall Road, are included in the network.