

Reading Borough Council

Submission Local Plan March 2018

Policy TR4 and Proposals Plan

1 Introduction

- 1.1 My name is Henry Colin Hatcher. I retired in 2005 as a Chartered Surveyor with 48 years' experience in the Public and Private sectors. I am Footpath Officer for the Pang Valley Group of the Ramblers' Association.
- 1.2 I submitted an objection to Policy TR4 and Proposals Plan in the Pre-submission Draft. I had previously made representations to the May 2017 Reading Borough Council Consultation on the proposal to convert half the width of Public Footpaths covering the length of the Thames Path from the Roebuck Hotel through to Kennet Mouth.
- 1.3 At the Pre-Submission stage of the emerging Reading Borough Local Plan I submitted an objection to which I attached as Appendix 1 a copy of my representation on the May 2017 Consultation exercise.

2 Basis of objection

- 2.1 I fully set out my objections in my comments of 23rd January 2017 on the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan and attached as Appendix 1 a copy of my submission at the May Consultation into the proposal to alter the status of the Thames Path to become a shared public footpath/cycleway. That document was supported by annotated photographs.
- 2.2 On 9th March 2018 the Department of Transport published a consultation "Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy: call for evidence" (<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/cycling-and-walking-investment-strategy-cwis-safety-review>). Paragraphs 7 and 8 read;
 - 7 Cyclists are one of the most vulnerable road user groups and in the majority of collisions are likely to come off worse. But on the rare occasions that cyclists cause harm to others through their own actions it is right that appropriate penalties are in place.
 - 8 There are longstanding concerns that cycling law does not adequately address some situations where death or serious injury occurs. These were highlighted by the tragic incident in February 2016 which resulted in cyclist Charlie Alliston being found guilty of causing bodily harm by wanton or furious driving following the death of Kim Briggs. The Government commissioned an independent legal expert to consider and report on the case for a new offence equivalent to causing death or serious injury when cycling.. The Government is considering that report and will respond separately in due course.
- 2.3 Paragraph 2.2 of the document establishes a Hierarchy of road users as set out below:

The hierarchy of road users is also important when considering safety. This is a well-established concept in transport planning which places the most vulnerable road users at the top: pedestrians, and in particular people with disabilities, followed by cyclists, then public transport and finally other motorised transport. The reason for this is to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable are fully and actively considered in the development of transport schemes.

2.4 In Paragraph 2.9 Key Themes are stated:

In line with the safe system approach, and following initial discussions with a range of stakeholders, we have identified the following themes to support cycling and walking as safe and reliable ways to travel for short journeys:

- Infrastructure and traffic signs
- The law and rules of the road
- Training
- Educating road users
- Vehicles and equipment
- Attitudes and public perceptions

2.5 Each of the above elements is considered separately in the document and I do not intend to reproduce each one here.

2.6 Reference is made however to Department of Transport “Local Transport Note 1/12 Shared Use for Pedestrians and Cyclists that is a study of “how pedestrians and cyclists interact on unsegregated and segregated shared use facilities”. Two factors emerged from this document: speed of cyclists and width of paths. The study looked at 6 cities. Cycling speeds varied but the highest maximum speed recorded was over 17 mph in Newcastle on a segregated track of Footway 1.9 metres and cycle track of 2.35 metres whilst in York the maximum speed recorded was 10.5 mph on a segregated track with a footway of 2 metres and a cycle track of 1.9 metres. As can be seen from the above two examples, the width of both the cycle ways and footpaths varied and this applies to the other 4 cities examined.

2.7 The 1999 requirement that bells be fitted to bicycles at the point of sale was reversed in 2011. The study “Local Transport Note 1/12 Shared use for Pedestrians and Cyclists” made no mention of the proportion of cyclists that have bells fitted but from personal experience it is low.

2.8 The path generally does not meet the minimum requirements of Reading Borough Council’s own guidelines for a minimum width of 2 metres. Within Paragraph 4.6 of Item 19 of the Reading Borough Council Traffic Management Sub-Committee of 15 June 2016, it is stated that “National guidance recommends that unsegregated shared-use facilities should ideally be 3 metres wide as reflected in our Cycling Strategy that also states that shared use facilities will

be a minimum of 2 metres wide". The aspiration of the Council should not proceed until the deficient areas are addressed to meet National Guidelines.

- 2.9 Because there were objections to Reading Borough's Consultation in April 2017 to alter the status of the Thames Path, the legal status of the Path cannot be altered until the proposal has been submitted to the Secretary of State for Transport who might order a public inquiry. It is also necessary for all the landowners over whose land the Path runs have given their consent to the change. Neither of these criteria has been.

3 Conclusion

- 3.1 The Charlie Alliston case has highlighted the potential conflict between cyclists and pedestrians. That unfortunate incident occurred on the highway and not a shared cyclist and pedestrian track. Nevertheless it exposed weaknesses in the law that the Government will hopefully address. In particular the Department of Transport Consultation document commented on the lack of requirement for the maintenance of bicycles.
- 3.2 The proposal by the Council to alter the status of the Thames Path cannot proceed until all the statutory requirements have been fulfilled. This has not occurred and it cannot be taken for granted that permission will be granted. It should be noted that even in the most open areas, the Thames Path running through Reading does not meet the minimum requirements set out in the National Guidelines.
- 3.3 Accordingly I submit that any reference to the Thames Path as a cycleway and certainly the designation of the Thames Path on the proposals map as a cycle track should be removed.

H C Hatcher
Footpath Officer
Pang Valley Group of the Ramblers' Association