

Pedestrian Heart - Darlington Cycling Campaign Submission

Since our previous submission to the local authority regarding cycling in the Pedestrian Heart (14th December 2007- Appendix 1), we have seen no reason to change our view that cycling should now be made a permanent feature of the town centre.

The trial period has continued throughout 2008, and no serious accident between a cyclist and a pedestrian has occurred in that time. Meanwhile, on the Borough's roads, we have had one cyclist death and one serious injury due to a motor vehicle collision. The serious safety arguments, more than ever, point to the need to protect cyclists from busy main roads like the inner ring road.

In our 2007 submission, we detailed the results of our study of pedestrian/cyclist behaviour, and found no evidence of "dangerous" incidents between cyclists and pedestrians. Transport commentators have since hailed this study as being of national importance. The CTC kindly trawled their records for any comparable work, and discovered just one piece of research, carried out in 2001/2002 by consultants WS Atkins on behalf of the Royal Parks Agency in London (Appendix 2). This studied the effect of introducing shared use to two main paths, Broad Walk and Palace Walk, in Kensington Gardens. Crucially, it included the use of video evidence, employing a methodology of categorisation of interactions not unlike our own. Videoring took place both before and after cycling was officially allowed.

The consultants analysed six hours of footage (around 30% of the Darlington sample), or some 4500 user movements on the paths. They found no collisions, 6 "near misses" and 1 "display of aggression". The number of "evasive movements" fell from 18 before cycling was permitted, to an average of 6 after cycling was permitted, despite a large increase in cycling (from 2% to 8% of users on Broad Walk, 2% to 29% on Palace Walk).

The consultants also carried out opinion surveys of pedestrians throughout the trial. Pedestrians' negative perceptions of cyclists were significantly lower after cycling was permitted, even though the number of cyclists had increased. 26% of people thought that collisions with cyclists were a problem before the implementation of the cycling scheme, which fell to only 2% a year after. People also thought that the proportion of cyclists that behaved well rose from 40% beforehand to 80% a year afterwards.

The Darlington and Kensington Gardens studies both indicate the same conclusion. Actual recorded evidence of behaviour shows the mixing of cyclists and pedestrians to be a safe proposition.

Darlington Cycling Campaign still feels there is plenty of work to be done in making the Pedestrian Heart a pleasant place for all users. The Cyclist Code of Conduct is an important part of that work. But now the people of the town need to be clear that cycling has become a permanent part of their culture.

Pedestrian perceptions of danger, as we stated in our 2007 submission, will become more in line with reality as cycling culture becomes part of everyday life. Cycling Campaign members regularly report to us the reactions of pedestrians to cyclists in the Pedestrian Heart. After 18 months of "trials", the most common description is still "unanticipated". The continuing temporary status of cycling in the town centre is now actively inhibiting this important process of change. We therefore strongly urge the council to make cyclist access through the town centre permanent.

Darlington Cycling Campaign
24 December 2008