

Green Wrythe Lane, Carshalton | Proposed improvements for pedestrians and cyclists | Shared use footway cycleway

A response from Get Sutton Cycling to the Sutton Council consultation | August 2014

Get Sutton Cycling, representing the London Cycling Campaign in Sutton, welcomes the opportunity to comment on proposals to make improvements for pedestrians and cyclists in Green Wrythe Lane, Carshalton.

1. An overview of the proposal

We understand that the proposal is to widen the footway on part of the west side of Green Wrythe Lane, between Muschamp Road and Assembly Walk by Middleton Circle, to allow shared use of this widened path by pedestrians and cyclists. In doing so, this will provide a continuation of the existing shared-use footway, between St Andrews Road and Muschamp Road, that was facilitated in early 2013.

The objective of the facility is to encourage more people to cycle, especially new or young cyclists, although there is the expectation that faster commuter cyclists will continue to cycle on the carriageway of Green Wrythe Lane. In the process of widening the footway, some grass verges will be reduced in width, a bus shelter will be relocated, and parking bays that are currently on the footway will be moved so that they will protrude partly onto the carriageway.

Funding for the work is available from Transport for London over two years. Subject to the consultation, five sections of footway between Muschamp Road and Welbeck Road (approximately 550 metres in length) would be widened this year (April 2014 - March 2015), with the final two sections between Welbeck Road and Assembly Walk (approximately 450 metres) widened next year (April 2015 - March 2016). The indicative funding required for 2015/2016 is £100,000 (as detailed in Appendix A of the Local Implementation Plan Funding 2015/2016 Transport Funding Bid report, Programme 2 Corridors, Neighbourhoods and Supporting Measures). It is presumed that a similar figure is required for 2014/2015, but a reference to this could not be found. Included in the report is the Statement of Need: "to create a longer section of route as part of a strategic borough wide network".

Plans for the proposal were on display at the St Helier, The Wrythe and Wandle Valley Local Committee meeting held on 3 July 2014. At the meeting, councillors agreed to proceed with a bid for the funding to progress with the scheme, subject to views and comments received.

2. Our views on the proposal

Get Sutton Cycling does not believe that the proposal to widen the footway on the west side of Green Wrythe Lane, and formally allow people on bicycles to share the path with people on foot, will result in any measurable increase in the number of people cycling. We are of the view that the proposal lacks aspiration, and that more radical ideas, such as those outlined in our Space for Cycling proposals for [The Wrythe](#) and [St Helier](#) wards, would not only begin to make cycling an everyday transport option for many more people, but would also be more aligned to the ideas set out in the Mayor's Vision for Cycling in London (March 2013) and with the updated London Cycling Design Standards (June 2014) currently in draft form.

There is concern that if Sutton Council continues to produce ideas that appear to ignore the publication of these documents, the borough will never receive any substantial level of funding for cycling. Having said that, however, this is good in some ways, because the last thing that we wish to see is Sutton to be provided with vast quantities of cash for cycling schemes only to spend all of it on simply converting every pavement in the borough to shared use for walking and cycling. It is very likely that the mayor's cycling ambassador, Andrew Gilligan, shares that view too.

Several London Cycling Campaign supporters in Sutton have provided input to this consultation:

- One questioned whether Transport for London funds are supposed to be used to provide for two categories of cyclists. i.e. for the "new or young" on the proposed awkward new path, and for the "commuter" who will be expected to continue to use the main road. They went on to say: "The impression I have is that TfL money is supposed to be to promote cycling as a means of transport. Therefore this is not a proper use of their funds as it is only for new or young cyclists".

- Two people expressed the opinion that this proposal is “tokenism of the worst kind”.
- One commentator suggested that “a cycle lane that is full of breaks, leads nowhere, misses out key sections of the route, and is shared with pedestrians, helps neither group and is an utter waste of time and money”. He went on to say that “such routes inevitably become unused, and subsequently poorly maintained” and noted that “a consequence of this is that when cyclists choose not to use this ill-conceived infrastructure they are then berated by uninformed motorists to use the ‘cycle’ lane”.
- Another contributor expressed the concern that “putting novice cyclists in conflict with pedestrians and people walking their dogs was not the answer”.

Other comments received included:

- “They [London Borough of Sutton] should not be allowed to do another inadequate scheme which they will then be able to publicise proudly as another pro-cycling scheme”.
- “If LB Sutton want to install cycling, do something of consequence. How about, connecting all the sites where there is a library to each other, with segregated cycle infrastructure? That way most areas of the borough will become accessible by cycle. When they’ve done that they can fill in the missing gaps, and look at dedicated cycling routes to schools and transport hubs.”
- “Clearly the best solution is a complete street redesign, so we should hold to our principles and not support the proposals”.

Taking all of this into account, we conclude that it would be preferable for this proposal not to be progressed.

3. Why the proposal is unlikely to encourage more people to cycle

It is evident, from observation, that some people already cycle on the footway along Green Wrythe Lane (although in relatively low numbers). These are most likely to be children accompanied by adults who walk, or people who would rather not cycle on the carriageway (and, therefore, probably do not cycle very far or very often). Widening the pavement a little, and formalising the arrangement, will not change this. It would be nice to think that new cyclists would use the facility as somewhere to build their confidence, prior to launching themselves onto the carriageway (which, of course, they would have to do sooner or later to actually get anywhere). But, in reality, this presumption is thought to be highly unlikely. We would, however, welcome any plans the council have to test the hypothesis.

The total length of shared use footway that will be available along the west side of Green Wrythe Lane, from St Andrews Road to Assembly Walk, if the scheme is completed, equates to a distance of about 1.2km. Over this distance, cyclists will be required to give-way at nine intersections along the route. Furthermore, anyone wishing to use the facility when travelling southbound would be required to cross Green Wrythe Lane twice, once to join the shared use path and then a second time to rejoin the carriageway. To have to give way on average every 120 metres, only then to have to switch back to the carriageway further on, will be enough to deter anyone who wants to regularly cycle here for most trip purposes. The first three guiding principles detailed in the new London Cycling Design Standards are: (1) Cycling is now mass transport, and must be treated as such; (2) Facilities must be designed for larger numbers of users; (3) Bicycles must be treated as vehicles, not pedestrians. We would suggest that the Green Wrythe Lane proposal fails on all three of these principles.

The council’s own Project Mandate Summary for the “Green Wrythe Lane Off Road Cycleway (final phase)” (provided in Appendix C of the Local Implementation Plan Funding 2015/2016 Transport Funding Bid report) makes interesting reading. Firstly, it states that the proposal is “to implement a widened footway...to provide an off road facility the whole length of the road”. This is false, because the final phase excludes any mention of a facility along Green Wrythe Lane south of St Andrews Road. Secondly, it proclaims that the project is expected to deliver an increase in cycling numbers of 1%. Not quite sure how that figure was derived, but does it matter? 1% of almost nothing, is almost nothing. We rest our case.

4. Better ideas to be explored that would provide dedicated Space for Cycling

Earlier this year we set out our Space for Cycling ideas across all eighteen wards in the borough. For The Wrythe, this included a request to explore the possibility of providing protected space for cycling on Green Wrythe Lane, between Middleton Road and North Street, and also on Middleton Road between St Helier Avenue and London Road. These routes were chosen for two reasons. Firstly, they had been highlighted by cyclists as areas for improvement and, secondly, the provision of dedicated space for cycling here would help create a cycling culture across the ward and deliver fully inclusive cycle links with the nearby St Helier Hospital and with the David Wear Leisure Centre and Arena. Additionally, these ideas resonate with the techniques outlined in the new London Cycling Design Standards in terms of developing a coherent cycle network.

There is no denying that, with a carriageway width of just 7m, Green Wrythe Lane is a challenge. According to Manual for Streets 2 (paras 8.6.1 to 8.6.8) the recommended minimum lane width for vehicles to overtake cyclists in comfort is 3.8m at 20mph and 4.3m at 30mph. If these standards are adhered to, it would follow that 20mph really needs to be the current maximum speed limit on Green Wrythe Lane as things stand. It's true that, in terms of the available carriageway width alone, the provision of two dedicated cycle tracks on Green Wrythe Lane would be a complete non-starter. However, if the complete width of the public area between opposite property boundaries, which provides up to 20m of space, is considered (see attached Google Maps satellite image) things start to look very different. Working within the 20m space between property boundaries, there would be ample room for a 2m wide footway, plus a 2m wide cycle path on both sides of a 7m wide carriageway and still leave 5m to spare. Clearly, as some of this public space is currently used for the parking of private vehicles, it would be necessary not only to undertake a general reappraisal of how the overall use of space could be managed, but there would also a requirement to manage alternative scenarios for parking. In addition, there would be implications on drainage, and existing street lighting columns would probably need to be replaced. Although expensive, this could also be an opportunity to provide an improvement to the street in terms of place and function. Despite all of the difficulties, the fact remains that, technically, there would appear to be sufficient space for fully segregated cycle tracks on Green Wrythe Lane. These could be delivered adjacent to the carriageway, but at a separate level, to give priority at intersections with minor side roads.

Providing protected space for cycling on Green Wrythe Lane is an ambitious idea, and would be a major departure from anything that has been delivered locally before. But it is not the technical issues that make finding space for cycling difficult here, but rather the political and social issues around making the case for it. For these reasons, it is of great importance that the council is quite transparent and unambiguous with its objectives for the delivery of cycle-friendly schemes that will make a difference. Furthermore, it is essential that these objectives, which will relate to transport, but are linked to mobility, sustainability, health and the public realm, are clearly stated. Without this commitment at the outset, progress with any worthwhile proposals is going to be severely restricted. Meanwhile, traffic engineers need to forget the London Cycle Network Design Manual (1998), and start reading the London Cycling Design Standards (2014). London is moving on, cycling is on the increase, and we don't want Sutton to get left behind.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this proposal. We hope that our comments are of interest, and look forward to ongoing discussions.

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Get Sutton Cycling representing the London Cycling Campaign in Sutton



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