

Living Streets Northampton

Submission to the Abington Active Travel Scheme Consultation

Background

In 2020, a successful Tranche 2 bid was submitted for the “Billing Road Corridor Scheme”, for which the council received £1.3m. The Billing Road scheme was included in the LCWIP, which stated that the priority in Northampton is to create active travel routes to the town centre.

However, with no consultation, the Billing Rd scheme has been replaced with the “Abington Area Active Travel Scheme”, which does not go to the town centre. The Abington Scheme is really only a cycle path around the edge of a park, plus a short cycle lane that takes space away from a pavement. The only very limited positives are two crossing improvements.

The introduction to the Abington Scheme incorrectly states:

“West Northamptonshire Council began to develop several potential schemes to encourage walking and cycling, and initial ideas have already been presented to the public, including a proposed one-way system for cars on Billing Road. Feedback from residents was that safety for cyclists and pedestrians remained a concern, and there was opposition to the proposed one-way system. West Northamptonshire Council has considered all the feedback received...”

In fact, the consultation on the one-way proposal was abandoned in 2020 after a petition from some local residents, so no one else got a say.

Throughout the period 2020 to early 2023, there was no consultation with the public or stakeholders. During this period, the council stated on its website - and told the DfT - that it was looking at alternative ways of encouraging cycling along Billing Road. But in fact, planners have been working on the Abington scheme since mid-2021.

The council has told the DfT and others that the reason for abandoning the Billing Road scheme was concerns about emergency services access to the general hospital. However, we know from FOI requests that the only correspondence with emergency services was a reply to a preliminary letter from the council about the scheme. The reply from the ambulance service stated *“Copied in my colleagues as this is more their area of the business. Hope it goes well.”*

The General Hospital raised no concerns either. Only St Andrews private hospital (which does not have an emergency department) mentioned it in an email from their estates manager, but their main concern was people taking a shortcut through their grounds.

Does the Abington scheme encourage walking and cycling?

The purpose of Active Travel Schemes is to encourage more people to walk or cycle instead of driving. We don't believe that this scheme will achieve this.

While there are some much-needed crossing improvements for walking in the scheme, it actually removes pavement space along Park Avenue. And we feel the scheme does nothing to encourage cycling. We give our reasons below.

1. Cycle path along Abington Park Crescent and Bridgewater Drive

1.1. This path may be beneficial for some pupils attending Bridgewater Primary School.

However, it will really only work for children living nearby (who probably already walk to school), as in the north the scheme does not link to anything, and in the south it only links

to the planned short cycle lane along Park Avenue South (which is problematic – see below).

- 1.2. We note that no space is being reallocated from the road – only from the pavement and the park.
- 1.3. Currently there are wooden bollards along the edge of the park to prevent vehicles from entering the park. These would need to be moved to the edge of the pavement next to the road, in order to prevent cars from parking on the pavement.
- 1.4. Currently, cycling is not allowed in Abington Park, there are no cycle parking facilities there, and there are not safe cycle routes to it. So it's hard to see how this path would encourage people to cycle to the park, which apparently is one of the aims of the scheme.
- 1.5. In summary, this section of cycle path may be useful to families living in Park Ave Crescent to get to Bridgewater School. Other than that, because the path doesn't go anywhere, we don't see it getting much use.

2. Crossing at the top of Abington Park Crescent (opposite King Edward Rd)

- 2.1. This is good. It makes the road narrower and enables people walking, wheeling or cycling to cross the road without changing levels – particularly beneficial for people using wheelchairs and buggies, and for bikes carrying children. Most people when they are driving behave well towards people walking and cycling if the road design encourages it.
- 2.2. In summary, we see this as a very positive feature that needs to be replicated at junctions all over the town.

3. Cycle lane along Park Avenue South

- 3.1. This is a very wide road, so we are confused as to why it's proposed to take space away from the pavement instead of using space from the road. We see this as giving the wrong message, as it will leave a pavement only 2m wide.
- 3.2. The cycle lane going south stops in front of the junction, just when it's most needed. This is not LTN1/20 compliant.
- 3.3. There appears to be no space between the cycle lane and the parking spaces. LTN1/20 states that there should be a gap of at least 0.5m, to avoid car-dooring incidents, and, importantly, to remove the fear of car-dooring, which is a disincentive to cycling.
- 3.4. With no cycling provision at the Billing Rd junction, and only highly unsafe provision along Billing Road, it's hard to see who will use this lane, apart from the people who live next to it and want to get to the park, although really that's within walking distance anyway.
- 3.5. In summary, this seems a half-hearted attempt at a cycle lane which is not compliant with new standards and does not go anywhere. It's hard to see how this will encourage cycling.

4. The Park Avenue South-Billing Rd junction

- 4.1. This design adds good provision for pedestrians, including the diagonal crossings, which we see as very positive - we'd like to see a commitment that these will remain as a permanent feature (we foresee a risk that the signal programming and road markings could be changed after the scheme has gained approval).
- 4.2. There is no provision for cycles in the new design, making it non-compliant with LTN1/20. Most collisions occur at junctions and they can be very stressful to experience on a bike. People will not change from driving to cycling if they have to negotiate junctions with no cycling provision.
- 4.3. The proposal gives cars the ability to turn in any direction, and takes very little road space away from the current design. Going south, the right turn lane needs to be removed in order to create space for a cycle lane.

- 4.4. It will be very difficult for people cycling to reach the advance stop lines, as there is no cycle lane going to them. This will not encourage people to cycle.
- 4.5. Advance stop lines should also have traffic signals for cycles, to enable them to set off before motor vehicles.
- 4.6. In summary, the junction improvements will encourage walking, but the junction will continue to strongly discourage cycling – parents will not allow their children to cycle to school through this junction, and adults will not change from driving to cycling if they have to negotiate junctions like this.

5. The Abington Scheme and Northampton LCWIP

- 5.1. The scheme documentation states:

“This scheme has been developed to support the proposed Billing Road corridor scheme, and is included in the draft Northampton Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP).”

- 5.2. The Northampton LCWIP is very strongly focussed on routes to the town centre. This route does not go to the town centre, and there are no plans for any provision along Billing Road. The current cycle lanes along Billing Rd feel extremely dangerous and discourage cycling – they are only 0.5m-1m wide, very close to parked cars, and poorly maintained.
- 5.3. It should be noted that the Northampton LCWIP was started 5 years ago, yet is still not published – it surfaced briefly in 2020 to support the Tranche 2 bid, and then immediately disappeared once the funding was allocated – the council stated this was to update it to LTN1/20. But there is still no plan, and no consultation.