



Formal response and objection to the town centre movement restrictions consolidation order.

13th November 2013

Introduction

This response has been compiled by Tracy Dearing RNIB Regional Campaigns Officer, Yorkshire and Humber. On behalf of the Rotherham Visual Impaired Group (RVIPG) and its blind and partially sighted members. We are pleased to have the opportunity to respond to this proposal.

RVIPG

RVIPG has over twenty members and is run by Rotherham blind and partially sighted people for Rotherham blind and partially sighted people. It provides a wide range of functions and activities, such as:

- Information on local services and activities
- Social activities
- A point of consultation for local authorities and wider professionals
- Campaign support

RNIB

RNIB is the largest sight loss charity in the UK. We are a membership organisation with over 10,000 members who are blind, partially sighted or the friends and family of people with sight loss and more than 80 per cent of our Board of Trustees are blind or partially sighted. We encourage them to be involved in our work and regularly consult with them on government policy and their ideas for change.

As a campaigning organisation of blind and partially sighted people, we fight for the rights of people with sight loss in each of the UK's countries. Our priorities are to:

- Stop people losing their sight unnecessarily
- Support independent living for blind and partially sighted people
- Create a society that is inclusive of blind and partially sighted people's interests and needs.

12 blind and partially sighted people, from the RVIPG, participated in the discussion. They were joined by two representatives from Rotherham Healthwatch.

The discussion centred on the Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council's (RMBC) proposal to:

‘Allow cyclists to cycle within the pedestrianised zone at all times, for them to travel the “wrong way” down some of the quieter one way streets in the town centre and to make some turns that they are currently not allowed to make’

Blind and partially sighted members in principle support RMBC's efforts to reduce traffic and acknowledge the health, economic and environmental benefits that can be gained by encouraging cycling. Having said this, they feel they must **formally object** to the plans to introduce cycling on pedestrian areas.

Main concerns

The group reviewed the limited information available on the proposals; all members raised initial concerns about integrating cyclists and pedestrians together. All members talked about experiences they have had with near misses with cyclists and one member had been hit by a cyclist, which was illegally riding on the pavement. This incident resulted in the person with sight loss having to visit hospital and more significantly, as a consequence, stopped walking that area without someone accompanying them.

One member of the group suggested that RMBC may have research which suggests that few incidents of collision actually occur between cyclists and pedestrians and may use this to justify the proposal. The wider group wondered how many collisions were actually reported.

Members were not aware of any systems that were in place to report collisions or near misses with cyclists.

Members discussed how they find it impossible to anticipate what people are doing when they are walking around the town centre and often collide into prams and mobility scooters. They talked about how difficult it is to anticipate movements of cyclists because they cannot hear them approaching.

Sally said: 'I am only aware that a cyclist is close when I feel them 'whizzing past'.

The group expressed their concern about the restrictions they already experience in the town centre. The following presents a list of barriers the group feel affect their ability to negotiate the built environment in the centre of Rotherham:

- A boards
- Café furniture
- Street furniture like bollards, seats and planters
- Mobility scooters and prams
- Market stalls and fair type rides

The members were very fearful that introducing cyclists into such an already crowded and cluttered environment would be extremely hazardous for blind and partially sighted people and eventually make the town centre a 'no go zone' for people with sight difficulties; limiting their independence and freedom.

Joan said 'Cyclists cannot have our space'

The group discussed at length the idea that legalising cyclists to ride on pedestrian areas will send out the wrong message to cyclists that it is okay to cycle on all pavements across Rotherham. The group feel that this could potentially impact on levels of illegal cycling across the town.

Finally, the group discussed their thoughts about shared space. The group felt that the RMBC, by allowing cyclists onto pedestrianised areas and extending loading hours of vehicles, were trying to introduce shared space as part of the plan without properly consulting on it.

The members of the RVIP hold strong feelings about shared space initiatives. An RNIB briefing paper on shared space accompanies this response for your information. The group's main concerns about shared space are outlined below:

- The shared space only works if all space users are able to interact with each other. This is done through eye contact and fails to work for people with sight difficulties.
- Conventional kerbs and segregation provide high value tactile information to blind and partially sighted road users but in shared space schemes kerbs are removed. The removal of kerbs opens up substantial risks that blind and partially sighted people will have insufficient information to make basic judgements as they navigate a shared space, compared to sighted people.

These and other issues combine to leave blind and partially sighted people facing a significantly worse experience of the street environment than ever before.

The group felt that they were unable to comment further on the plans in any depth due to the lack of information supplied by the local authority.

Key questions and next steps

The following presents a list of questions the members would like to raise as part of this response.

- Why do cyclists need access to the town centre?
- Why can't they dismount and walk through pedestrian areas?
- Does the local authority intend to introduce cycle tracks for cyclists to follow, as part of the proposal? If yes will these be segregated? If segregated how?
- Are these plans part of a larger cycle route?
- Is the local authority consulting with cyclists on the plans?
- Has an equality impact assessment been done which involves wider groups like older people and disability groups?
- When completed how will the changes be communicated to blind and partially sighted people?

- Once implemented how will RMBC monitor if things are working well?

The members would be happy to work closely with RMBC, to negotiate practical solutions that support the aim of promoting cycling, whilst ensuring the safety and inclusion of blind and partially sighted people. We would like to invite RMBC councillors and staff involved in the proposals to walk the area with us. We would also welcome an opportunity to meet with any cycling organisations or groups to devise workable solutions.

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