



28 May 2018

Dear Yvonne,

We were invited at the STPSG meeting on Monday to send you ideas for improving walking and cycling paths around the campus, particularly concentrating on the routes which might relieve South Road. I am submitting these on behalf of DBUG, incorporating ideas which have been suggested to me by members over the past couple of years.

I would be keen to meet with the relevant people in Estates and Buildings and the appropriate consultants, preferably before detailed designs are drawn up, and certainly before the planning application is finalised to discuss how the Super Route scheme can be broadened to include provision for cyclists that accords with current cycling design standards. I do have some knowledge in this area, following attendance at cycling infrastructure design courses and of course as a potential user. It would be good to have an open discussion to help get the best outcome for staff, students, pedestrians and cyclists. Perhaps a subgroup of the STPSG could be identified to help take this forward.

Super route on east side of South Road

It would be great if the super route could be replanned with sufficient width to allow cycling and (depending on the gradient) wheelchair users. As you know there have been comments to the travel survey in the past about South Road, and if the University is to increase the numbers of people cycling an alternative to South Road must be found. As well as benefitting the new colleges on Mount Oswald, such a route would assist anyone living on the new Mount Oswald housing estates, the other hill colleges, and people living further afield such as Spennymoor.



The rough alignment of the super route is shown as a red dashed line on this map. The transition of the path from Grey College to Lower Mountjoy includes a long flight of steps, which makes the route unsuitable for cycling or wheelchair users. At the top of the steps the route is fairly level as far as the tennis courts, as you progress south towards Grey College.

A alternative route already exists (shown in purple on the map) just inside Little High Wood which diverges from the proposed route by the tennis courts and which emerges close to the old Ogden building. This path has a more

gentle slope and is certainly not too steep for cycling. Ideally it would need widening to 4m to make it suitable for two-way cycling and increased pedestrian usage, but a narrower path could work if pedestrian use was discouraged (see the general comments on design below).

The existing path has a tarmac surface part of the way. It emerges in the yard outside the building, which may perhaps be an issue because of delivery vehicles, but it cannot have been assessed as a great risk as the main entrance to the old Ogden building is accessed this way.

Here are a couple of pictures to help in identifying the path.



The path emerges by the old Ogden building via the gap in the wire mesh fence seen in the right of this photograph.



At the top end of the path, it joins the main footpath at the south end of the tennis courts.

Design of shared pedestrian/cycle paths

There has been a tendency over the last couple of decades for local authorities to provide cycle routes which are shared with pedestrians. This has not been popular with cyclists, because it is not possible to maintain a consistent speed on heavily used shared paths. It is also not popular with pedestrians who can be surprised by cyclists approaching silently. The main reason it is popular with local authorities is that it is cheaper and requires less land as you can get away with paths of minimal widths.

It is now being recognised in recent UK design guides that where there is land available it is preferable to provide separated paths for cycling and walking. This is the norm in countries with a high rate of cycling like the Netherlands and Denmark, and that is what we should aim for here as well. It is particularly important, I think, to separate the two modes where there are significant gradients, so that cyclists gaining speed downhill are not mixed with people walking. Note that users of motorised wheelchairs and other motorised mobility devices can naturally share the cycle routes and move at a higher speed than they might normally achieve on pavements dominated by foot traffic.

I hope that the University will be able to separate the cycle and pedestrian paths on the main routes. The key to doing this successfully is to make it obvious which path is for which purpose. The painted cycle symbols on the ground and blue circle road signs used by councils are not very effective as they fail to provide an indication along the path. Instead, it is best to design a shallow splayed kerb separating the two modes, with the cycle path at a slightly lower level.



30° splay kerb from *The joy of kerbs* by City Infinity, p. 31

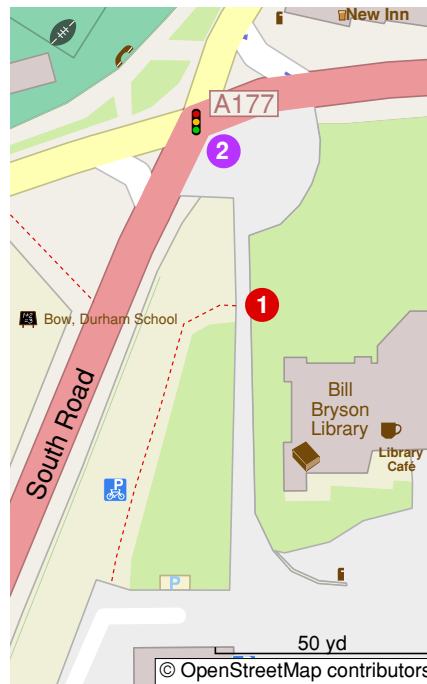
Using a smooth red asphalt for the cycle path and plain asphalt (or paving) for the footway helps, and if the cycle path is bidirectional the Dutch practice is to paint a narrow white dashed line down the middle of it. This makes it obvious to anyone joining the path which part is for cycling on, and which is dedicated to walking.

Approaching the New Inn junction

As the improved route approaches the New Inn junction, the existing path by the cycle racks will need to be widened. Separation could be considered here. At the north end the path turns tightly east to join the paved path past the Bill Bryson Library (marked 1 on the map below). This has hedges planted close each side in an effort to prevent people from taking the direct route across the grass. Aside from stopping pedestrians using the direct route, it also makes it quite constrained for cycling. It would be sensible to instead continue the path straight to the New Inn junction.

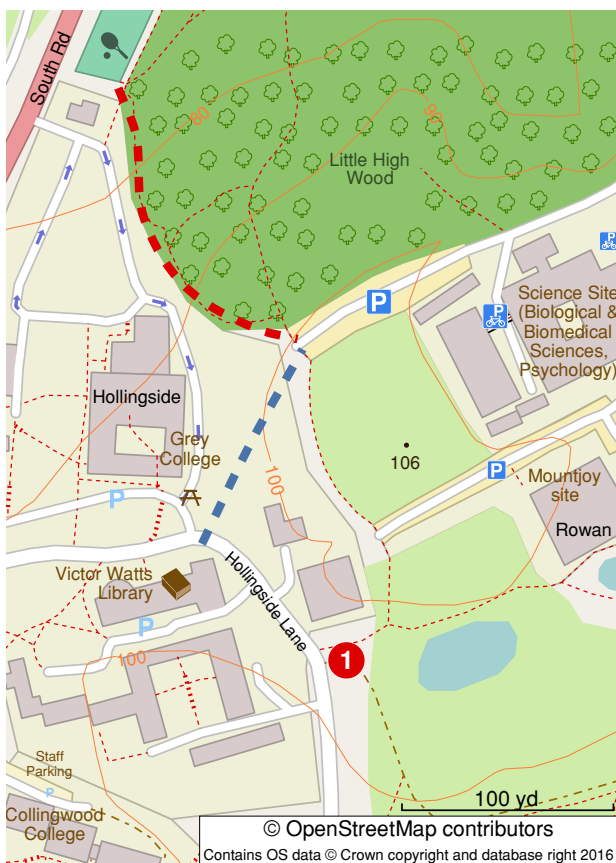
At the junction itself some redesign is required in conjunction with Durham County Council to provide proper access to and from the Lower Mountjoy site for cyclists. At present some cyclists cross the junction with the car phases of the traffic lights, and some use the pedestrian phases, which indicates that the current design is poor. Either way, access from the road into the campus is

not convenient, and a wide dropped kerb is needed at the place marked 2 on the map. The University should ensure DCC gives serious consideration to providing a direct diagonal crossing of the junction here for pedestrians going from Lower Mountjoy to the widened footway on Church Street. There should really be a full redesign of this junction with cycle lanes on the approaches and cycling lights to allow safe crossing of the junction.



Other routes on the east side of South Road

Access to the Upper Mountjoy part of the campus is not as good as it could be, either for walking or cycling. Firstly, it would be helpful for access to Biosciences, Rowan House and the proposed new maths and computer sciences building if there was an alternative to “Cardiac Hill” skirting Little High Wood on the western edge.



Perhaps the informal path that runs along the edge of the wood from the Grey College tennis courts could be improved (marked in red on the map). This would probably only be suitable for those on foot, owing to the gradient. Cycling access could be achieved via the purple route on my first map and then onward via the service road to the east of Grey College, linking with Hollingside Lane.

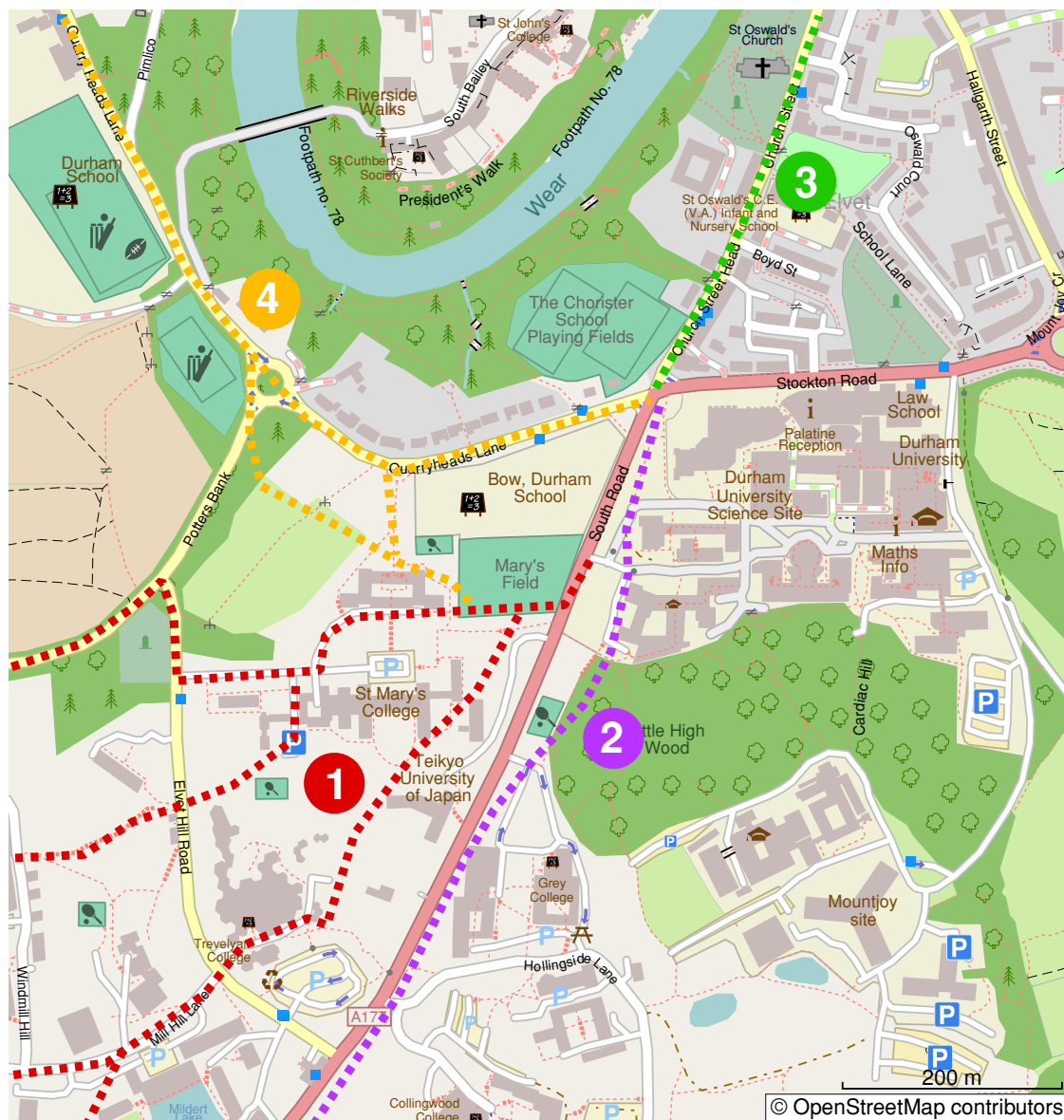
Secondly, the foot and cycle access from Hollingside Lane to the Upper Mountjoy site is quite narrow (marked by 1 on the map). I am not sure how this stands in relation to the proposed car park access road. If the car park access from Hollingside Lane goes ahead then it would be sensible to allow cyclists and walkers to leave Hollingside Lane as early as possible, as the likely volume of car traffic could make it more dangerous.

It would also be possible to make a link as shown by the blue dashed line on the map. Depending on the terrain it may have to include 'switchbacks' to reduce the gradient to acceptable levels.

Main routes on the west side of South Road

As you know, I submitted a DEBUG response in April 2017 to the consultation on the St Mary's Field teaching block development. Rather than go into a lot of detail, I provided a summary of the main issues, together with a map, and asked to meet with the University (and the County Council to cover some aspects) to go over the ideas in greater detail. No-one got in touch with me, which was disappointing. Now that the super route has come forward for consultation I hope this is the time to explore the ideas properly.

I am including the map again. You will see that it has some similarities to the proposals from Philip Warwick.



As I said in the accompanying letter, the following issues would require collaboration with the County Council:

- Church Street and New Elvet (marked 3 on map)
- Quarryheads Lane and Margery Lane (marked 4 on map)

The “super route” (marked 2 on the map) is covered earlier in this letter. The red lines (marked 1 on the map) show possible routes on the west side of South Road, and correspond to suggestions by Philip Warwick. As you will see, I agree with him that a route into St Mary’s to follow on from the bottom of St Aidan’s Steps would be useful for accessing the new teaching block. Cyclists should not need to use this route, but a cycling route through the college along the main drive from Elvet Hill Road would be very useful (as shown on the map above), especially if it could pass alongside the new teaching block to emerge on South Road. There are many DBUG members who cycle to the University from Neville’s Cross, and by connecting with Potters Bank in this way the last part of the journey could be off-road. People living in the relocated Ustinov College and in the new student housing at the Neville’s Cross junction would probably come this way, and Potters Bank is also used by cyclists travelling in from Meadowfield and Brandon.

The junction of Potters Bank and Elvet Hill Road needs safety improvements and a mini-roundabout might be an option here. It would be good if pedestrians had a safer means of crossing Potters Bank to reach the footpaths across Observatory Hill. These issues will need to be raised with DCC. Ultimately, would it be possible to create an official cycling and walking route across Observatory Hill to Ustinov College, avoiding Potters Bank?

I believe that a route following on from Mill Hill Lane down the side of Trevelyan College and between St Mary’s and Teikyo would have even greater potential benefit, especially if designed as a route for cycling as well as walking. People living in the existing estates in Merryoaks and the north end of the new Mount Oswald estate would thereby gain a very pleasant and safe route to travel to the University. Students living at St Aidan’s, Van Mildert, Trevelyan College and the two new colleges on Mount Oswald would also find such a route useful. By staying on the west side, it would avoid some of the steeper gradients and would give direct access to the new teaching block. The proposed super route, by contrast, is unlikely to attract anyone going to lectures in the new block, and many people will continue to use South Road.

There are various options for creating such a route, so I hope that the University will adopt a can-do attitude and find solutions to any objections that arise from the colleges or other quarters.

Other routes

I very much support Philip Warwick’s suggestions of links from the Business School through to St



Aidan’s. The other route which could do with improvement in this area is the footpath which leads down the side of the field to Potters Bank from the north-west corner of St Aidan’s College (marked in red on the map). The rural nature of the path is attractive, but it is uneven in places, and much better drainage is need as it can be very muddy at times. Again, this would be useful as an alternative route for students living at Ustinov College and elsewhere in Neville’s Cross.

It is a great pity that when the University sold the land on which Chevallier Court has been built, the developers were not required to provide a through cycle and walking route to both the Business School and Merryoaks. The University needs to develop a proper movement strategy for access across the estate, identifying opportunities like this that need to be safeguarded and achieved over the longer term.

Conclusion

As Philip observed, the University owns the land to make many of these connections a reality. The messages coming from the travel surveys have been consistent in showing that danger from traffic and the lack of safe routes put people off cycling, and pedestrians also dislike the narrow pavements along busy roads. Obviously the hills are also a factor for cycling and walking, but e-bikes are becoming much more affordable, so we should be ambitious about achieving greater numbers of people choosing cycling for their journeys. New routes like those proposed by DBUG, Philip and others could help a great deal with these aims, as well as making the campus environment generally more pleasant and attractive.

Best wishes,

Matthew Phillips