

# **A response to Sutton Council's draft Sustainable Transport Strategy (October 2014) from Get Sutton Cycling, January 2015**

## **Introduction**

Get Sutton Cycling, representing the London Cycling Campaign in Sutton, welcomes the opportunity to respond to Sutton council's draft Sustainable Transport Strategy (October 2014). As this feedback is on behalf of a stakeholder group, our observations are effectively limited to the 'comments' section (i.e. question 12) of the general response questionnaire.

## **Our overall impression**

The draft Sustainable Transport Strategy document purports to provide a comprehensive statement of Sutton Council's vision, objectives and proposals for sustainable transport over the next ten years. Although the objectives are clear and encouraging, we believe the actions to support them are, in general, too weak to give any credibility to the overall vision. Many of the proposals are vague and lack robustness. With insufficient evidence as to how the overriding objectives will be delivered, this is a strategy that lacks confidence.

Sutton Council has to show that the vision is something it actually intends to deliver. The final version of the Sustainable Transport Strategy will need to be fully promoted so that every resident, everyone who works or goes to school in the borough, and every visitor to the Council's website, is aware that Sutton aims to become London's most sustainable borough.

## **Cycling makes a positive contribution to the local economy**

The draft strategy notes that over 50% of car journeys made in Sutton are for distances of less than 5km (3 miles) and that therefore there is considerable scope to increase the proportion made by cycling. If a proportion of these short trips currently made by car were to be switched to bicycle, the local economy would benefit.

Cycling makes a positive contribution to the economy. Cycling can, amongst other things, help reduce congestion, improve public health and save the NHS money, create jobs, improve employee productivity, deliver goods efficiently, and boost the vitality of town centres.

Enabling cycling, through measures such as those outlined in the London Cycling Campaign's Space for Cycling initiative, is a cost-effective investment. Every pound invested on cycling potentially delivers benefits of at least £2, typically £5, and even up to £30 (Value for money assessment for cycling grants, DfT, August 2014). Enabling cycling will help the economy, improve quality of life, and give people genuine choice of how to travel.

One of the specific actions detailed in the draft strategy to ensure the transport network supports the local economy, relates to implementing selective road improvement schemes to reduce congestion. There is a proposal to submit a major scheme bid for Beddington Lane to TfL to "build upon the minor works that have been undertaken in recent years".

Our view is that it is essential that any scheme carried out here (and anywhere else) results in cycling infrastructure that is fit for purpose. The "minor works" of "recent years" on Beddington Lane, for example, have done absolutely nothing for cycling, other than marginalise the activity. If the Council is serious about ensuring the transport network is developed to support the local economy in a sustainable way, cycling infrastructure of the highest quality, must, from now on, always be delivered. Infrastructure that transforms the cycling experience, makes cycling feel safe and stress-free is essential. Whether Sutton successfully delivers on sustainability depends on it, and the credibility of the Council's vision today depends on it.

## New developments and bolder planning

The use of appropriate locations for new developments will clearly help influence peoples decisions on their travel options. Every new development, however, must be seen as an opportunity to shift the emphasis towards sustainable travel.

It was disappointing to read in a relatively recent planning document, therefore, that improvements to cycle connectivity will be provided only “where possible” and then only linked to so-called “existing” cycle facilities (see figures 1 and 2). This timid and disingenuous approach does little to suggest the Council is serious about sustainable transport.

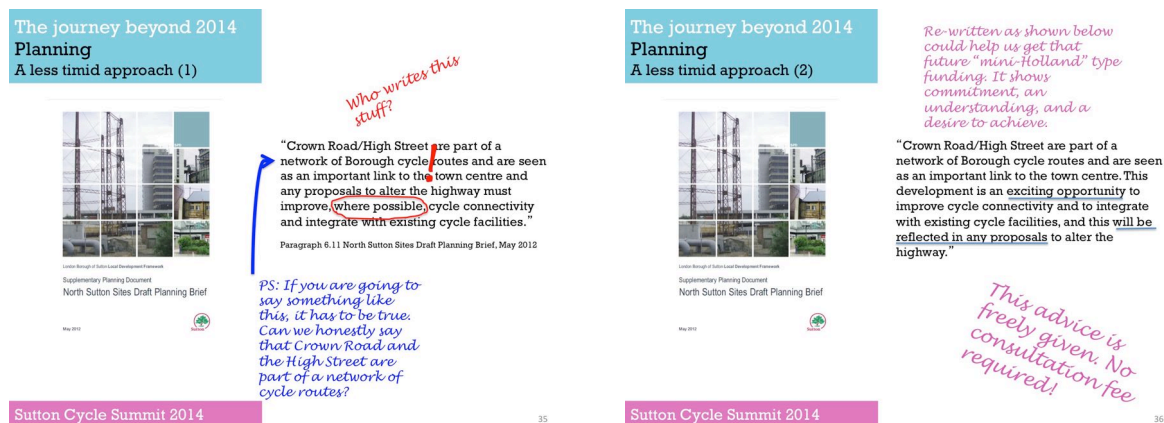


Figure 1: Sutton Cycle Summit 2014 | Slide 35

Figure 2: Sutton Cycle Summit 2014 | Slide 36

Meanwhile, a housing development completed during the latter part of 2014 in Malden Road, Cheam, close to the local amenities on offer in Cheam Village, is only accessible by a one-way street. One-way streets effectively design-out cycling (and design-in car use) from the outset. All that is needed here are some inexpensive “except cycles” plates, as authorised for use by the Department for Transport in 2011. Again, oversights like this diminish the Council’s credibility for understanding what helps to deliver sustainable transport use. There needs to be full cooperation across all planning departments within the organisation.

## Travel Plans that make a difference

It was a great achievement for Sutton to be the first borough in London to complete school Travel Plans for all of its schools. But it’s all very well having a Travel Plan, it’s another thing to act upon it.

Glenthorne High School’s Travel Plan for 2008 identified an ongoing travel problem as “lack of cycle lanes that lead safely right up to the school gate” (see figure 3).

Part 3a: Our Travel Problems: Update		
Use this section to give an update on the issues you listed in your last STP Review.		
Issue/concern	Still an issue? Yes/no	Update 2008
A217 has very heavy traffic	Yes	A217 has very heavy traffic
Too many people who park near to the school when dropping off/picking up	No	
Lack of cycle lanes and crossings	Yes	Lack of cycle lanes that lead safely right up to the school gates.

Figure 3: Glenthorne High School: Details from School Travel Plan Rewrite 2008 (accessed 5 March 2014)

Six years later, a whole new school intake, and the School Travel Plan for 2014 notes that there is still a “lack of cycle lanes that lead safely right up to the school gate” (see figure 4).

Part 3a: Our Travel Problems: Update		
<i>Use this section to give an update on the issues you listed in your last STP Review.</i>		
Issue/concern	Still an issue? Yes/no	Update 2014
A217 has very heavy traffic	Yes	A217 still has very heavy traffic
Too many people who park near to the school when dropping off/picking up	No	
Lack of cycle lanes and crossings	Yes	Lack of cycle lanes that lead safely right up to the school gates.

Figure 4: Glenthorne High School: School Travel Plan 2014 (accessed 4 January 2015).

In May 2014, Get Sutton Cycling asked councillors representing the [Stonecot ward](#), within which Glenthorne High School is situated, to consider the idea, and explore the possibility, of providing protected space for cycling on main roads close to the school. As of 1 January 2015 they have not indicated their willingness to do so. Without political support for cycling, across all parties, sustainable travel is destined to fail.

### Enabling smarter travel choices, requires walking and cycling to be enabled

Cycling needs to be enabled as well as encouraged, and it is good to see the commitment to implement high quality cycle routes and measures using best practice designs based on the latest London Cycling Design Standards (published December 2014). The reference to the London Cycling Campaign’s Space for Cycling initiative is also very welcome.

Unfortunately, the delivery mechanisms detailed in the draft Strategy, to bring about, what should be transformative changes, appear to be very similar to the old, tried, trusted and largely unsuccessful interventions that have ensured that cycling levels have remained around 1%, at best 2%, of all trips in the borough.

One of the actions listed to encourage cycling, for example, is to implement the Green Wrythe Lane to Carshalton Village Quietway. The reference to a Quietway here is totally misleading. Quietways will be high-quality routes, which form part of a cross-London network, and are to be delivered end-to-end. It is unlikely that the first Quietway route in Sutton will be completed before 2017 at the earliest. Furthermore, the proposal for a Green Wrythe Lane effectively involves converting a pavement to shared-use. Attempting to encourage cycling by effectively discouraging walking is hardly a winning formula for sustainable transport.

Another specific action that we cannot support relates to the proposed feasibility study of developing the Sutton gyratory system as a shared space scheme. Shared space is not good for blind people, for those with difficulty in moving, or the aged, in almost any circumstance. If this proposal relates to the conversion of the complete gyratory (i.e. a kilometer or two of heavily trafficked roads) to shared space, it’s not clear who will benefit. Certainly not pedestrians.

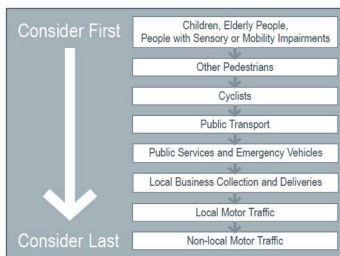
However, a study into the feasibility of providing segregated cycle paths along the route of the gyratory, accompanied by separate crossing points for pedestrians and cyclists, would be welcomed if included in the final version of the Strategy. Anything that can be done to make the Sutton gyratory look and feel less like a motorway, and more like part of a thriving people-friendly town centre, needs to be a priority.

It would be useful if the final version of the Strategy could provide examples of the locations, and types of intervention, that reflect both the Space for Cycling ambitions and the London Cycling Design Standards guidelines. London’s most sustainable suburb cannot settle for less.

### Some recommendations

In conclusion, here are some suggestions that we recommend Sutton Council consider adopting in order to enhance their credibility on delivering a Sustainable Transport Strategy:

- Ensure that all Sutton Council employees who are responsible for the delivery of cycling infrastructure are fully aware of the latest best practice guidelines and have undertaken full training. Declare publicly that this is the case, and update accreditation annually.
- Provide a clear and robust cycling strategy, showing level of support from councillors. Detail the challenges, and how these are going to be met. Explain how cycling is not “anti-motorist”.
- Produce a quarterly report outlining the current status of sustainable transport projects, and outwardly promote to the public.
- Feature sustainable transport in all correspondence sent to Sutton residents. Display the road user hierarchy on the home page of the Sutton Council website.



- Provide clear data relating to any set targets on a regular basis, and show how these are going to be met.
- Liaise continuously with other London boroughs on projects. Share knowledge and experience. Assess challenges and commonalities. See what works and what does not. Declare that this is being undertaken, and provide evidence to prove this is the case.
- Liaise with Transport for London to ensure plans to make streets fit for cycling are not compromised when developing routes across or along non-borough controlled roads. Declare this is being undertaken, and provide evidence that this is the case.

### Final thought

Cycling has to be a key component of any sustainable transport strategy. If Sutton is to be crowned London’s most sustainable suburb, cycling levels will need to be up there with the best. The borough has to compete with thirty-two other authorities. At the start of 2015, the support for the London Cycling Campaign’s Space for Cycling initiative from councillors in Sutton was the lowest of any London borough with the exception of Bexley.

Get Sutton Cycling hope the comments and observations made here are useful, and wish the Council every success in taking the Sustainable Transport Strategy forward.

*This response was prepared by Charles Martin, on behalf of Get Sutton Cycling | 4 January 2015*