

Bedford Borough Council's PSPO Cycling Ban Consultation - CCNB Response

Cycling Campaign for North Bedfordshire (CCNB) held a number of meetings with borough officers and the police prior to the introduction of the PSPO on 16 May 2016 banning cyclists from riding through the pedestrianised areas of the town centre.

CCNB was in favour of the proposal to fine the minority of cyclists who ride in an aggressive and reckless manner. We were however concerned the effect the order would have on a number of disabled residents who use a bicycle or tricycle as a mobility aid in the same way that others use a mobility scooter. It was stated by the borough at the time that the police had a long practiced discretionary process around disabled persons and this would be continued by the enforcement officers.

In January 2018 enforcement was contracted out to a private company, Kingdom Securities. We were disappointed to hear that within the first month of operation they had given out 181 fixed penalty notices (FPNs) to cyclists. By July this had increased to 935 and September to 1127. Over this period a number of reports were heard of the aggressive behaviour of the officers towards the elderly and foreign visitors.

By targeting all cyclists, including the disabled, the ban had the effect in 2018 of reducing in the order of 6% the number of responsible cyclists (the majority) coming to the town centre for their shopping. Most of the routes into and through the town involve using the heavily congested roads around the town centre.

In 2012 the Borough analysed 32 hours of town centre video footage they had recorded looking at interactions between cyclists and pedestrians and observed that cyclists went slower when there were more pedestrians around, altered their course early to avoid interacting with pedestrians and got off their bikes and walked when it was very busy.

This backed up earlier Government research which had shown that serious incidents between cyclists and pedestrians in pedestrian areas are extremely rare and that there are no real factors which should exclude cycling in these areas.

To put it into perspective it should be noted that nationally over the five years 2012 to 2017 there has been a 148% increase of fatalities/serious injuries to pedestrians caused by users of mobility scooters.

In July 2018 the Department for Transport (DfT) published an 'Inclusive Transport Strategy' in which it acknowledged that many people use a cycle as a mobility aid and stated that it would explore by 2020 the feasibility of amending legislation to recognise this use in order to increase the number of disabled people cycling.

Riding a bike may be easier than walking for two-thirds of disabled cyclists, but they often remain invisible to society. In Cambridge for example it has been estimated that more than a quarter of disabled commutes are made by bike.

Duncan Dollimore, Head of Campaigns at the national cycling organisation Cycling UK, last year equated PSPOs to "geographically defined ASBOs" and expressed incredulity that they are being used to "restrict the use of public space and criminalise behaviour not normally regarded as illegal... [like] the pernicious pastime which undermines the very fabric of our society: cycling."

As pointed out nearly a year ago the signage used at each entrance to the pedestrianised area is ambiguous and in fact one might be illegal. The official sign for 'No Cycling' is a red circle containing a picture of a bicycle. The government's Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions document states that no variant of this sign is permitted. In other words the additional PSPO plates which contain a red circle sign containing a bicycle with a red diagonal are not legal and could in some people's minds mean that the cycling prohibition sign has been deleted. This technicality may have made all the FPNs issued to date illegal.

In summary, CCNB believes the minority of cyclists who behave in an aggressive and reckless/irresponsible manner and give cycling a bad image should still be fined **but not** the majority including the disabled who ride responsibly.

CCNB
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