

Mill Road for People: priorities for consultation

Following the removal of the bus gate, it is important that any public consultation on the future of Mill Road takes into account the full range of unique issues the area faces as a residential area, as a destination for shopping and eating in its own right, and as a through road into central Cambridge, **while keeping closely to the Local Plan objectives of: strengthening the distinctiveness of Mill Road; creating a low-speed traffic environment; and emphasising ‘place-making’ over vehicle movement.**[1] To bring people with a solution, it is important that any consultation seeks **positive views on how the area could be improved** alongside the potential impacts on any proposed scheme, across the following range of topics:

1. Mill Road as a destination with thriving businesses

Mill Road has a high proportion of independent businesses, cafes and restaurants, many of whom have been affected by the pandemic. It is important that any consultation on the future of Mill Road recognises this, and seeks to gather **firm data and evidence** on shopping habits in the area to determine whether these would be affected by any future road closures and to try and distinguish the impacts of any future scheme from the impacts of e.g. high business rates, the pandemic, or other nationally significant trends.

It should seek local businesses’ views on their positive vision for the area, and how any future solution can help their recovery from the pandemic, and contribution to a greener recovery. (For example, it should seek their views on the practicalities of access for deliveries, doing more by cargo bike, and the probable impact of cleaner air and a more pleasant street with more pedestrians on their turnover.)

2. Mill Road as a pleasant and safe residential area

Mill Road is surrounded by residential properties and is the main way that residents can travel into central Cambridge, access public transport, and take their children to school or nursery. It is, in places, a narrow street, with some front doors opening directly on to pavements, distinguishing it from the much wider Hills Road and Coldham’s Lane.

Mill Road is also currently a rat-run into the city centre. It is beset by dangerous traffic problems including speeding, parking on double yellow lines and pavements, and narrow pavements with obstacles that make active travel difficult for the less mobile. Speeding and dangerous overtaking make the street actively discouraging for cycling and other forms of active travel, and frequent queues at rush hour have a negative impact on air quality, and slow down busses, discouraging people from taking them.

Any consultation must gather evidence on the impacts of all of this on residents, including on their attitudes towards how this could be improved, and what would encourage them to shop locally and travel actively.

3. Mill Road as part of Cambridge

Any consultation on improvements to Mill Road must consider Mill Road as part of a wider traffic and development plan for the expanding city. It should seek to gather evidence on the actual and perceived impacts of any Mill Road restrictions on surrounding areas and seek people's views on how Mill Road could become a leader in traffic reduction within the context of a lower traffic Cambridge overall. Mill Road as a low-traffic neighbourhood must not be seen in isolation.

The Nature of the Consultation

The consultation

- Must be positive, focusing on a vision for Mill Road and seeking a wide range of views and ideas.
- Should be more than a yes/no response to a binary question about the bus gate or any other specific measure. It should ask people about options such as exemptions for taxis and deliveries and should address more than just the bridge: it should focus on a vision for the whole road.
- Should make use of drawings, as these are easy to understand for everybody, and should seek to engage residents, traders and other users of Mill Road with, for example, workshops and pop-ups showing alternative solutions, where people could also complete surveys.
- Must be grounded on good data, including: a thorough shopping survey; up-to-date air quality data for Mill Road, both before the installation of the bus gate and after it; traffic monitoring with cameras at either end of the road that would show through traffic.
- Should consider case studies from elsewhere, for example Francis Road, Waltham Forest. (We can provide a number of other case studies on request, should these be helpful).

[1] <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/media/6890/local-plan-2018.pdf> (p.93 onwards)