

Living Streets local street survey: findings from the pilot stage

Context

Living Streets is a national organisation focused on improving conditions for all pedestrians. In late 2020, a Cambridge branch of Living Streets was set up and is registered on the national website - . The Cambridge branch website can be found at - .

In December 2020, Cambridge Living Streets launched a pilot survey to begin the task of understanding local views and concerns about being a pedestrian in Cambridge. Most responses in this initial stage were from SE Cambridge (Petersfield, Romsey, Cherry Hinton). In total, 98 responses were received and this report analyses those responses and recommends next steps in the light of the findings.



Approach and focus

The focus of the on-line survey was on people who regularly used their local streets. Questions were shaped by anecdotal comments on access and usage and by media reports. We wanted to understand how people used their streets and what they saw as the major issues in doing so. The survey did not define 'local streets'; respondents identified these themselves.

To engage, someone had to click on the link, and complete the form online. The survey was posted on the NextDoor Petersfield site and was available for two weeks (x-y/12/20). During the period Cambridgeshire, including Cambridge city, was in COVID-19 tier 3.

This set up makes it likely that we attracted a sub-set of people with a pre-existing interest and views about walking in their local area. They would be able to work online and have time to complete the survey. This self-selection will have shaped the range and type of responses so it cannot be seen as representative of the range of whole range of pedestrians' views. However, it is very helpful in flagging some key issues for further investigation.

Findings

Q1: Do you walk regularly around local streets?

100% of people responded 'yes' to this question (n=98), which is not surprising as people not using their local streets would be unlikely to be interested in taking part.

The survey provided people with four categories to define how they used their local streets: shopping, work, social activities/local amenities and recreation/exercise. Many people selected more than one category, the most popular being using local streets for both shopping and social activities. Results are shown below in Table 1:

Table 1: Use of local streets

Category use of local streets:	Used for shopping	Used for work/journey to work	Used for social activities/local amenities	Used for recreation and exercise
Number of respondents	78	27	77	11

(total = 98)				
Responses as a %	79.59%	27.55%	78.57%	11.22%

Q2: Are you generally happy with your experience as a pedestrian in Cambridge?

This was the opening question in a series that focused on specific aspects of the pedestrian experience. The choice of aspects reflected those previously reported anecdotally by residents or noted in media coverage. Three categories were included for this initial response: Yes, No and It Depends. As Table 2 sets out, overall, one person was happy with their experience as a pedestrian. 99% were either not happy and or replied that it depended on the circumstances.

Table 2: Overall pedestrian experience

Are you generally happy with your experience as a pedestrian in Cambridge?	Overall YES	Overall NO	It depends
Total of responses = 98	1	64	33
Responses as a %	1.02%	65.30%	33.67%

People were then invited to comment on their experience in particular areas, in all cases reporting on 'pavements they regularly used'. These were about the quality of pavements (whether they were uneven, sloping, cracked, potholed) and obstructions on pavements (by parked vehicles, waste bins, traffic signs or other street furniture).

People commented on their local streets and also on streets that were used as thoroughfares (such as Queen Edith's Way) and offered a wide range of local shops and amenities (such as Mill Rd). These two long roads attracted most concern, though people mentioned particular parts of each road and for different reasons. For example, Queen Edith's Way attracted criticism for cracks and potholes leading to deep puddles and flooding at times. Mill Rd was reported for its narrow sections which made wheelchair and pushchair access dangerous and for the numbers of parked vehicles obstructing the pavement. Table 3 sets out headline results.

Table 3: Pavements: quality and obstructions

Nature of problem	Numbers/ percentages reporting this	Range of concerns
Pavements that are sloping, uneven, cracked or potholed	91 = 93.85% 13 reports about sections of Queen Edith's Way 9 reports about sections of Mill Rd	Deterioration of pavements mentioned by majority; impact of road works such as laying cables and pipes with poor quality reinstatement
Pavements blocked by parked vehicles	61 = 62.24% 16 reports of this along Mill Rd	This was noted across the area but most frequent report was about Mill Rd
Pavements blocked by waste bins	49 = 50%	Some concerns, seen as temporary, usually a day or so only after collection day
Traffic signs and street furniture obstructing	24 = 24.48% 6 reports from Mill Rd	Reports linked together obstructions and the width

pavements		of the road.
Hedges protruding onto pavements	42 = 42.85%	Reports from several areas and also tree root damage and slipping on wet leaves

Any other issues?

Finally, respondents were asked to comment on any other issues that concerned them. Many flagged earlier concerns, emphasising the dangers they saw. Alongside this, people added points about flooding of parts of roads after rain, dog mess, lack of dropped kerbs for buggies and wheelchairs and the dangers for pedestrians of adults cycling on pavements.

Poor lighting quality made walking on uneven pavements after dark more dangerous. There were several reports of dangers for wheelchair users and of slips and falls; some individuals did not use their local streets because of such dangers. The following comments reflect widespread concerns about the poor state of local pavements.

‘Someone should regularly try a wheelchair around Cambridge – lots of crooked pavings, lack of dropped kerbs and obstructions’ (Respondent 15)

‘Pavements just in a bad state from weather and being dug up; easy to trip on cracks, holes, hardware’ (Respondent 36)

‘We are both coping with a degree of mobility issues and often resign ourselves to walking in the roads, dodging traffic rather than risking tripping up and falling on pavements’ (Respondent 54)

‘Terrible holes and dark patches, where you cannot see if there are holes at night’ (Respondent 71)

Reflections

No final conclusions should be drawn from what has essentially been a pilot study, drawing responses from a limited number of people mainly living in the SE suburbs of Cambridge. But we must recognize that our 98 respondents identify real problems for themselves as pedestrians. Those accessing local streets in wheelchairs or using walking aids encounter hazards and even dangers that must concern any organization focusing on ‘living streets’.

The overall response to the question ‘Are you generally happy with your experience as a pedestrian in Cambridge?’ was that 98.97% of people either replied ‘no’ (65.30%) or ‘it depends’ (33.67%). This suggests a high degree of dissatisfaction with the quality of some city pavements. Responses to later questions in the survey provide more detail of the types of concerns people have, with large numbers (n=91) reporting cracked and damaged pavements, about half noting obstructions of various kinds and many reporting the problems they raise.

Ways forward

Emerging findings from this pilot suggest that particular groups of people find negotiating local streets difficult: for example, those pushing children in pushchairs, those in wheelchairs or experiencing some degree of difficulty in mobility.

Recommendation 1

In any future extension of the survey it would be helpful to be able to group respondents more easily by area and perhaps by age and health status.

National press reports have flagged the increasing use of local area shops during this COVID-19 pandemic and the high numbers of people reporting their use of their local areas for shopping (n=78) and social activities and amenities (n=77) would suggest that this is also the case in SE Cambridge. Yet at the same time, there is evidence from this survey that pedestrians are finding pavements challenging to negotiate and this may deter some from staying local.

Recommendation 2

It would be useful to explore the impact that pavement quality may have on people's decisions about which shops and amenities to use.

It is clearly very challenging for Living Streets as a newly created local branch to follow up all the concerns raised by this survey. It will take more work to create a persuasive case that might lead to real improvements.

Recommendation 3

The data already gathered could be used to plan a more forensic assessment of a limited number of widely-used streets to help build a case for improvement.

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