

Living Streets local street survey: exploring the findings from Phase 1 and 2

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 Living Streets website. The Cambridge branch website can be found at <https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/get-involved/local-groups/cambridge>

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. 98 responses were received in this initial phase, mainly from SE Cambridge. The survey was then extended in early 2021 to other areas and, in total, 242 responses have now been made. This second report analyses all the responses so far and considers next steps in the light of the findings.

Approach and focus

The focus of the on-line survey is 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 initially posted on the NextDoor Petersfield site and was available for two weeks (in Dec, 2020). It mainly attracted responses from residents of Petersfield, Romsey, Coleridge and Cherry Hinton. Subsequently, the survey was distributed online during January and February 2021, via residents' associations, to other areas of Cambridge: Abbey, Arbury, Newnham and Trumpington. During most of this period Cambridgeshire, including Cambridge city, was either in national lockdown or in COVID-19 tier 3.

The 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 results cannot be seen as representative of the whole range of pedestrians' views. However, they are 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=242), 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 local recreation/exercise. Over half also used local streets for shopping and amenities/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 (total = 242)	132	118	176	225
Responses as a %	54.54%	48.76%	72.72%	92.97%

There were some differences between responses across the different areas, depending on their local lay out and amenities. In the Mill Road area (Petersfield and Romsey), for example, the most heavily reported uses of local streets related to shopping and social activities/amenities whereas in Trumpington the most widely reported use was for recreation and exercise.

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, less than 6% were happy with their experience as a pedestrian. 94% 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 = 242	14	153	76
Responses as a %	5.78%	63.22%	31.40%

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) or offered a range of local shops and amenities (such as Mill Rd and Anstey Way). Worn and uneven surfaces were particularly mentioned as hazardous to walkers:

'Alpha Terrace has been getting progressively worse as the surface becomes worn away. The metal rain water drains then become a trip hazard. The surface is very uneven and is due a revamp.' (Trumpington respondent)

'Anstey Way at the junction with the High Street.....lots of small manhole covers, uneven patched repairs...' (Trumpington respondent)

Several long roads, such as Grange Rd, also attracted adverse comment for pavement quality. Mill Rd was reported for its narrow sections of pavement which made wheelchair

and pushchair access dangerous and for the numbers of parked vehicles obstructing the pavement. People mentioned a range of concerns and identified particular parts of longer roads, for example:

‘Milton Rd from the nail bar, Viking , Chesterton carpets right up to the co-op, we have to dodge speeding cyclists and large vehicles blocking most of the pavement’ (Arbury respondent)

Interestingly, the range of concerns was very similar across all areas. Older parts of Trumpington attracted more criticism in terms of pavement quality than more recent developments. Pavement parking was a source of annoyance in all areas but reported most frequently on busy shopping streets. In all areas the impact of contractor works on streets, and in some cases poor reinstatement of surfaces, was mentioned. Whilst signage, overhanging foliage and bins were a nuisance to some, the over-riding complaint was about the decay of pavements to the point where they had in some places become a real hazard. 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	224 = 92.56%	Deterioration of pavements and inadequate patching mentioned by majority; impact of road works such as laying cables and pipes with poor quality reinstatement
Pavements blocked by parked vehicles	174 = 71.90%	This was noted across the area but most frequent report was about Mill Rd. Contractors’ vehicles seen as hazards in some cases.
Pavements blocked by waste bins	150 = 61.98%	Some concerns, seen as temporary, usually a day or so only after collection day
Traffic signs and street furniture obstructing pavements	106 = 43.80%	Reports linked together obstructions and the width of the road.
Hedges protruding onto pavements	129 = 53.30%	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, puddles that never dried up through the winter, 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’ (Petersfield respondent)

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

‘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’ (Cherry Hinton respondent)

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

Reflections

No final conclusions can be drawn from what remains work in progress, drawing responses from a sub-set of interested local residents across Cambridge. But we must recognize that our 242 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 94% of people either replied ‘no’ (63.22%) or ‘it depends’ (31.40%). 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=224) reporting cracked and damaged pavements, over 50% noting obstructions of various kinds and many reporting the problems they raise.

Ways forward

Emerging findings from this study 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.

This recommendation was made after the analysis of data gathered in December 2020. When the survey was extended to five further areas of Cambridge, three questions were added: a request for the first part of the respondent’s postcode; for their age group (>65 or 65>, with a no-disclosure option); and a question about whether they considered themselves to have a disability that made walking more difficult. The results for the 144 people who gave their age group details are as follows:

- Under 65 years of age = 64.8%; Above 65 years of age = 34.5%
- Reporting a level of disability = 32%
- Postcodes reported: CB1, CB2, CB3, CB4, CB5

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.

This recommendation was also made after the initial phase of the survey. It remains 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 but this more extensive report underpins and extends the learning from the December 2020 pilot phase.

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.

Living Streets, Cambridge decided to extend the survey before undertaking this work as the initial returns were from a limited part of the city. The second phase has enabled the response to more than double in size (242 responses as against 98) and to be gathered from a much wider geographical area. There is now more varied and robust data to use to build a case for improvement.

LJJ 1st phase report, 5.1.21

LJJ 2nd phase report 11.3.21