



Kingston Environment Forum (KEF) comments on cycling in Kingston and the mini-Holland scheme

Kingston Environment Forum (KEF) is the consortium of local environmental organisations that works with Kingston Council to promote environmental sustainability in Kingston upon Thames. KEF includes representatives from a range of local groups with an interest in environmental issues and activities in the Borough. We meet regularly to share information, concerns and expertise with relevant Council officers, and KEF representatives also attend Kingston Strategic Partnership meetings.

Members of KEF fully support the aims of the mini-Holland scheme and the Mayor of London to encourage many more people to take up cycling by separating cycling from other traffic and pedestrians and making it safer and pleasanter. We note the many benefits to public health and to the local environment that would follow from more cycling, such as fewer cars and less congestion and pollution, as well as the benefits to personal physical and emotional health and well-being from increased physical activity.

KEF would welcome updates on progress of the mini-Holland scheme and opportunities to discuss or respond to consultations on cycling in Kingston.

In order to encourage cycling, particularly new cyclists, we highlight the following hopes, concerns and requests from members of KEF.

On the mini-Holland proposals

We broadly welcome the proposals, and look forward to continuous routes that do not fade out (often at the places where they would be most useful) and are not used for parking cars, and to safe ways for cyclists to negotiate roundabouts. KEF members' priority is for clearly marked cycle routes, safely separated from other traffic and, where possible, from pedestrians.

Joined up cycling routes are crucial. Making sure that cycle routes, old and new, join up with each other and with the mini-Holland routes is an important task for RBK - we cannot expect developers to take on that responsibility. For example, the proposed linear park shown running north-south in plans for the new development in North Kingston could be a safe and useful cycle route parallel to Richmond Road, but, in current plans, it appears to start and finish on busy roads and not to be properly connected to existing cycle-paths or to the mini-Holland scheme. We hope that proposed new developments in the Eden Quarter will provide facilities such as cycle racks and cycle routes, and that they will link with existing cycle routes.

We hope that funding for the mini-Holland plans is not diverted to infrastructure projects (e.g. rail station "plazas") that appear to offer little to make cycling safer or pleasanter. Neither should mini-Holland funds be diverted to cycling infrastructure within the proposed new developments in Kingston, which should be funded by the developers themselves. The Council has an important role in ensuring that any new cycle routes in these developments are fully linked to mini-Holland and other cycle routes.

We hope that the mini-Holland plans will sort out confusing cycle-pedestrian routes outside Kingston Station and at the Wood Street-Skerne Road crossing.

Riverside boardwalk proposal: there is potential for conflict between cyclists and walkers and other river users in the proposed riverside boardwalk cycle path. In our experience walkers like to be as close to the river as possible, so a riverside boardwalk is likely to be crowded and less suitable for cyclists than a route slightly away from the riverbank.

Signage: paths shared with pedestrians need to be very clearly marked as such so that cyclists and pedestrians are aware of each other and considerate (see section on Market Place). Pedestrians need to be reminded that cyclists have the right to be there, and cyclists often need reminding that even on designated cycle paths there are likely to be pedestrians. Ideally, cycle paths would be painted a distinctive colour, separated from traffic and pedestrians by kerbs or green verges, and marked at frequent intervals with cycle symbols.

Lighting

KEF cyclists understand the importance of seeing and being seen at night, but as environmentalists we also believe that too much street lighting is wasteful of energy and harmful to wildlife: every road and path does not have to be fully lit from dusk to dawn. We recommend using lighting to direct cyclists (and walkers) to safe routes, leaving other routes dark, using motion-sensitive lighting where possible to avoid wasting energy on unused routes, and taking particular care on riverside routes where light pollution is magnified by reflection on the water with very negative effects on wildlife, especially foraging bats. Please see <http://www.furesfen.co.uk/Rivers-Light-Pollution.pdf> and contact Jason Debney at Thames Landscape Strategy for TLS guidance about bat-friendly, energy-efficient lighting, particularly suitable for riverside locations.

Kingston Market Place

Local cyclists have complained before about the encroachment of market stalls and their customers onto the shared route beside Next. This has begun to happen again since the opening of the new stalls with their gazebos, A-boards etc. There are also other obstructions - an ice-cream van, an electronic control box - where the cycle route is supposed to be.

Additionally, the new signage at approaches to the Market Place states that the space is a "Pedestrian Zone", but there is nothing to say that cycling is permitted, either on the signage or on the road surface. We understand from Kingston Cycling Campaign that the intention is to allow cycling, indeed to extend it to both sides of the Market Place, but, in the absence of clear signage to that effect, pedestrians, traders and law-abiding cyclists will assume that cycling is forbidden. This needs to be rectified as soon as possible, and not repeated elsewhere in Kingston. We are not asking for separate signs or additional street clutter, but rather for permission to cycle to be included in the existing large signs and/or on the road surface or pavers.

We also observe that, though cycle parking has been increased on the northern approaches to the Market Place, including a useful sheltered bike rack by Bishop's Hall, it has decreased at the southern end, so that the net gain is apparently one cycle rack. Whether or not cyclists are expected to cycle through the Market Place, it would make sense to have cycle racks at all the approaches. And generally, if cycling is to increase, provision of cycle racks has to increase substantially too.

Green cycle-ways

Where feasible, we recommend greening cycle and shared paths, with grass verges (preferably mown infrequently), wild flowers and trees, alongside the hard surfaces. Some "separation strips" could be greened. This would make them more attractive to walkers and cyclists, and probably shadier and cooler, as well as providing habitats for wildlife and sustainable drainage.

We also recommend creating more safe routes between local parks and open spaces as a way of encouraging cycling for leisure and health and well-being.

Traffic

The mini-Holland proposals acknowledge that traffic on Kingston's one-way system goes too fast. In some places heavy high speed traffic acts as a significant barrier, e.g. from the town centre to the Museum and Main Library, and from Kingston rail and bus stations to the town centre. We would like to see stricter enforcement (and possible reduction) of speed limits, and also more foot bridges at key crossing points to make better, safer links for pedestrians and cyclists. Introducing a blanket speed limit of 20 mph (as some other councils, e.g. Croydon, have done) could reduce accidents and make cycling and walking safer and easier, while having minimal impact on car journey times.

Safety

We acknowledge that a few cyclists are badly behaved - breaking speed limits, cycling where they are not allowed, jumping red lights, cycling on the wrong sides of paths and roads, failing to indicate or to use their bells. However, most cyclists are aware that they are the most vulnerable road users and therefore ride as safely as possible - and also, not all pedestrians are considerate or alert (e.g. endangering themselves and others by using headphones or texting while walking). A public education campaign alongside the launch of the mini-Holland scheme might help.