

Enhancing Provision for Cycling in the Public Realm Improvement Project for Abergavenny Town Centre

Submission from Abergavenny Cycle Group Ver 1.1 (revised 2 March 2016)

Summary

Cycling is a cheap, convenient and sustainable mode of transport that reduces congestion and improves health and well being. The Active Travel (Wales) Act places new duties on local authorities, when exercising their functions under the Highways Act, to enhance provision for cycling unless it is impracticable to do so.

In Abergavenny town centre public realm improvement scheme there are two main issues relating to cycling: (1) provision of convenient and secure cycle parking and (2) permission to cycle in the Vehicle Restricted Area.

We propose that existing stands in St Johns Square and Nevill Street be retained, and additional cycle parking be provided close to the Market Hall / Town Hall end of High Street. We propose that cycling be permitted in the Vehicle Restricted Area while making it clear that pedestrians have priority.

1. Current legislation & design guidance

The Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013 places new duties on highways agencies and local authorities. Section 9(1) of the Act states:

The Welsh Ministers and each local authority must, in the exercise of their functions under Parts 3, 4, 5, 9 and 12 of the Highways Act 1980 (creation, maintenance and improvement of highways, interference with highways and acquisition etc. of land), in so far as it is practicable to do so, take reasonable steps to enhance the provision made for walkers and cyclists.

The Act therefore places a legal duty on Monmouthshire County Council to *enhance* provision for cycling (and walking) as part of the current town centre improvement scheme, unless it is impracticable to do so.

The Design Guidance of the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013 sets out detailed guidance on provision for cycling and walking. Section 1.2.6. indicates that for non-trunk roads the Design Guidance takes precedence over any other design standards that may be in force:

For all non-trunk road networks this guidance must be considered by local authorities when designing active travel routes, even where the advice in this document conflicts with current local authority design standards. Local authorities may also consider guidance contained in MfS and MfS2, but advice contained in this document will take precedence if there is any conflict.

2. Cycle Parking

Section 8.9 of the Design Guidance concerns cycle parking. It states:

8.9.1 The availability of appropriate cycle parking facilities at either end of a trip has a significant influence on the decision to travel by cycle. The absence of such facilities, and the consequent risk of vandalism and theft, has been shown to undermine investment in the overall network infrastructure.

8.9.4 Cyclists generally want to park as close to their destination as possible, for this reason and to reinforce the transport hierarchy, cycle parking should be sited as close as possible to the final destination or main access of buildings. Experience suggests that where this is not the case cyclists are likely to ‘fly park’ (park informally) in more convenient locations.

8.9.5 The required quantity of cycle parking should be carefully assessed. There should be adequate parking to meet demand including some spare capacity to allow for growth in cycling whilst avoiding cluttering the streetscape and affecting the space available for walking and cycling routes.

There are currently two locations for cycle parking in the area of the town centre subject to the public realm improvement scheme. There are four Sheffield stands in St John’s Square and four Sheffield stands on Nevill Street, near the junction with High Street. In addition there is a single Sheffield stand outside the Hen and Chickens pub on Flannel Street.



Cycle parking in St John’s Square



Cycle parking in Nevill Street

There is sufficient *total amount* of cycle parking in the town centre but it is not well *distributed* throughout the area. More can be done to provide cycle parking “as close as possible to the final destination or main access of buildings”, as required by the Active Travel Act Design Guidance.

We support the maintenance of cycle parking in **St John's Square** and believe that four stands is about right. The location is not critical, but closer they are to the Post Office entrance and/or centre of town (i.e. the Town Hall) the better. In **Nevill Street** the four Sheffield stands only operate at half capacity as they are placed too close to the wall to fit a cycle on each side. Reorienting them 60 or 90 degrees (to be more perpendicular to the wall) would allow cycles to be parked on both sides of the stands.

Proposed additional cycle parking

There is currently a lack of cycle parking outside the Town Hall and Market Hall, and fly parking is common here. Cycles are often locked to street furniture, benches or sign boards at this busy intersection. We appreciate the difficulties in providing cycle parking at this busy intersection which has high volumes of pedestrian traffic as well as access by large lorries.



Fly-parked cycles outside the Market Hall



Proposed location of new cycle parking stands

We propose new cycle parking to be installed on St John Street, outside the Bonmarche shop window. This would be close to the Town Hall and, importantly, visible from existing fly parking locations. We believe it would reduce the incidence of fly parking on other street furniture. Three Sheffield stands would be sufficient.

Dual purpose street furniture

There is an increasing variety of dual purpose street furniture available, e.g. bollards with cycle parking loops. While these don't provide the same 'all day' security as a Sheffield stand, which is designed to allow the frame and both wheels to be secured, they are a good solution for short term parking demand that's typical of a shopping area where space is at a premium. We would recommend that, where appropriate, dual function bollards are considered as part of the scheme.

Retrofitting existing street furniture for cycle parking

Existing street furniture (bollards, signposts etc) can be retrofitted at very low cost to provide the kind of short term cycle parking that is most useful in a shopping area where space is at a premium. We would recommend that where possible, this is considered as part of the scheme. One good location for bollard mounted cycle parking hoops are on the bollards on Cross Street outside the Halifax and British Heart Foundation shops.



3. Cycling in the Vehicle Restricted Area

The 'red square' zone of Nevill Street and High Street is a Vehicle Restricted area, with permitted access for motor vehicles at certain times of day, and for certain purposes, e.g. access and deliveries. Vehicle Restricted Areas are covered by Section 6.7 of the the Design Guidance of the Active Travel Act. It states:

6.7.6 Allowing cycling in VRAs can cause concerns, particularly to disabled people with physical, sensory and cognitive impairments who may not expect cyclists to be present, and this issue can be therefore be contentious. However, serious consideration should always be given to allowing cycling through VRAs. These areas are often prime destinations where shops and services are located and so good access is important.

6.7.7 Research into the level of conflict between cyclists and pedestrians was carried out by TRL in the study 'Cycling in Vehicle Restricted Areas (2003). This study found that cyclists alter their behaviour according to the density of pedestrian traffic – as pedestrian flows rise, the incidence of cyclists choosing to dismount also rises and those cyclists who continue to ride do so at a lower speed.

6.7.8 Including cycling in the ban on vehicular traffic can create major barriers to cycle movements across urban centres, particularly if the VRAs are large. If cyclists are required to travel longer distances via more heavily trafficked routes around the VRA this will tend to suppress cycle trips and reduce cycle safety.

6.7.9 If cycling is not to be allowed within the VRA for all or part of the day the alternative routes that cyclists would need to take to complete all of the journeys affected by the restrictions should be assessed, based on the guidance in this document. In general, any alternative routes around the VRA should be of equivalent coherence, directness, safety, comfort and attractiveness and meet the minimum requirements for an active travel route.

6.7.10 If restrictions on cycling are considered necessary, they may only be required at certain times of day. Permitting cycling before 10 am and after 4 pm can meet the needs of commuter cyclists while avoiding the busiest periods of pedestrian activity. Providing a period when no cycling is allowed will also enable those people who wish to be certain of a vehicle free space to gain access. Cycling should not be restricted during any times when motor vehicles are permitted.

At present cycling is **not permitted** in the Vehicle Restricted Area at any time, despite Nevill Street being part of National Cycle Route 42.

Even so, many people do ride cycles in the Vehicle Restricted Area and we are not aware of any conflict between cycles and pedestrians nor any enforcement of the prohibition of cycling. Nevill Street is rarely too busy to cycle safely and when High Street is busy with people on foot, most cyclists dismount and walk their cycles. It is easier to dismount and walk than to attempt to weave through a crowd of pedestrians. When the area is emptier, e.g in the mornings, Sundays, late afternoons and evenings, many people ride their bikes without any conflict with pedestrians. This

suggests that 'red square' is already largely self-regulating, as is the case with many other such Vehicle Restricted Areas elsewhere in the country.

There are no obvious alternative routes to Nevill Street and High Street. Therefore the optimum solution is to allow considerate cycling on Nevill Street and High Street at all times. We would be content to see signage or paving slabs indicating Pedestrian and Cycle Zone, 'pedestrian priority - considerate cycling welcomed'.

Figure 6.1 - 'Pedestrian Zone' / 'Pedestrian and Cycle Zone' signage

