

Cambridge Green Party response to the 'Mill Road 2022' consultation

March 20, 2022



Introduction and summary

We (Cambridge Green Party) are responding in the form of a separate document, rather than through the online consultation. We believe this consultation fails to meet all the criteria laid out in the government's Code of Practice on Consultation¹. The questions do not allow all views about Mill Road to be appropriately represented. For example, Q9 asks: "*What do you consider to be the most important issue affecting the way that you use Mill Road?*" and only one option can be ticked – most of the options given are closely inter-related and many respondents are likely to feel that two or more are equally important. We consider that congestion, parking, pavements are all important and are concerned that issues such as safety of pedestrians and cyclists are not listed as options.

We would like to see publicly available simulations or accessible models of the various proposals to better enable people to see how these would work.

We note that page 10 of the Mill Road 2022 brochure states that the consultation is linked to four other transport consultations. However, the document gives only the most general information and it is left to respondents (most of whom are not paid consultants or traffic experts) to work through the details of other transport schemes to understand how closing the bridge might impact on them or how they would impact on Mill Rd.

The key points of our response are:

- We believe that a transition from fossil fuel-powered transport to cycling, walking and use of public transport, and the use of electrically powered vehicles, is an essential step towards tackling the climate crisis as well as air pollution and other more local problems.
- Conversations about the long-term development of Mill Road have been on-going for many years and there is a wealth of evidence to draw upon. The Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) appears to have overlooked this. The consultation brochure and survey are disingenuous and appear to be a delaying tactic, prolonging decision-making and increasing conflict rather than promoting consensus.
- We are calling for any data about the temporary closure of Mill Road bridge during lockdown, particularly in terms of effects on traffic and impacts on local businesses, to be made available immediately. As the project progresses, key indicators including traffic flow (including bikes) and air pollution and should be monitored and the results published.
- None of the three options given ('do nothing', 'improve the quality of place' or 'changes to traffic in medium and longer term') are adequate as presented.
- We believe that, with careful planning and consultation, a partial closure of the Mill Road bridge could be implemented relatively quickly and with highly beneficial results. We would favour a modal filter, allowing only buses, cycles, electric scooters, taxis, emergency vehicles and private vehicles carrying blue badge holders through.

¹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/100807/file47158.pdf

- We suggest a number of additional measures that should be explored, including: tighter enforcement of the 20mph speed limit and of parking restrictions; providing a limited number of loading/unloading bays (with strict enforcement against illegal parking) to allow for shop restocking; designating more disabled vehicle parking spaces along the road; improving signage to direct car parking away from residential roads and into the local car parks; implementing further traffic restrictions such as single-lane traffic controlled by lights; improving bus stops; more bicycle parking and wider pavements.
- In the long term, a more integrated approach is needed to transport planning in Romsey and Petersfield, taking into account the needs and views of everyone who uses the area.
- We see the future of Mill Road as a flourishing social and commercial centre, inhabited and used by a diverse range of people and serviced by an excellent pedestrian, cycle and public transport network. If the right decisions are taken now, Mill Road could become a more liveable, sustainable centre of a vibrant community.

Background to the project

The GCP states in the consultation brochure that they “*want to **open the conversation now on how people see the future of Mill Road in the longer term.***” This ignores the fact that conversations about the long-term development of Mill Road have been on-going for many years^{2, 3, 4}. As far as the bridge is concerned, the various views are well known, and were initially gathered through the GCP/County Council survey in 2020⁵. Many of the pros and cons are well documented in the public domain, and significant evidence has been gathered. The GCP appears to have overlooked all this. The consultation brochure and survey are disingenuous and appear to be a delaying tactic, prolonging decision-making and increasing conflict rather than promoting consensus. Mill Road 4 People has determined that this closure and the 2019 closure for railway works have not significantly increased traffic elsewhere⁶. We are calling for any further data about the impact of the temporary closure of Mill Road bridge during lockdown to be made available immediately. Since a key concern is the well-being of the Mill Road traders, we also would like any available data on this before and after either of the closures to be made available.

It is important to note that the closure of the Mill Road Bridge during the early stage of the pandemic was carried out abruptly and with no public consultation or discussion with local traders. While a majority of residents were in favour of the closure, many of the traders felt that it seriously disadvantaged them. As a result, the community on which Mill Road justifiably prides itself (evidenced by the numerous community groups, Local History society, the annual Mill Road Fair, and the historical recognition of this area being “different” from the University part of town) became divided, with conflict between residents and traders. The bridge closure was removed in 2021 after a split County Council Highways and Transport committee meeting at which the Labour chair used the casting vote. This added a political element to the decision and added to the divisive nature of the project. These conflicts will now need to be recognised in the planning, development and implementation of the Mill Road improvements, as there is significant mistrust in the community. It is clear that in this case, there is no quick win.

² <https://www.cam.ac.uk/radicalmillroad>

³ <https://mill-road.com/time-for-a-mill-road-plan/>

⁴ <https://overmillroadbridge.org.uk/mill-road/mill-road-our-view/>

⁵ <https://consultcambs.uk.engagementhq.com/mill-road-consultation>

⁶ <https://millroad4people.org/2021/11/11/traffic-displacement-myth-or-reality/>

Response to selected consultation questions

We believe that a transition from fossil fuel-powered transport to cycling, walking and use of public transport, and the use of electrically powered vehicles, is an essential step towards tackling the climate crisis as well as air pollution and other more local problems.

- **Question 10: “How far are you supportive or unsupportive of the following three options for Mill Road?”**

We are opposed to options 1 and 2, and cannot support option 3 as it stands.

Theme 1. Do nothing: We do not support this. The Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) itself does not support this for reasons given on p.6 of the consultation brochure, and we are broadly in agreement with these.

Theme 2. Improve the quality of place: We do not support this option as it will not reduce traffic flow – the proposed changes would essentially be cosmetic. We agree with the list of “Cons” in red on the right hand side of page 7. Although the list of “Pros” includes safer cycling, we do not believe there is any evidence that this will be achieved – instead this option will progressively lead to more and more congestion. The most effective way to make cycling and walking safer is to decrease motor traffic.

Theme 3. Changes to traffic in medium and longer term: Very little information has been provided on this option for making a considered opinion and there are no lists of Pros and Cons as is the case for Themes 1 and 2. No specific timescales are given beyond the vague “medium and longer term”. We cannot support this option as it stands on the basis that:

- The proposals lack any option of restricting the bridge traffic **in the short term**. Given that the lockdown closure of the bridge was introduced very quickly, we see no reason why a better organised and planned closure could not be undertaken in the short-term, with careful consultation. We would favour a modal filter, allowing only buses, cycles, electric scooters, taxis, emergency vehicles and private vehicles carrying blue badge holders through.
- The various suggestions for banning vehicle turns into Mill Road (for example from East Road/Brooks Road) closing some side roads along Mill Road, and restricting motor vehicles from crossing Mill Road bridge cannot be considered in isolation. There are also many other options not considered. A **more integrated** approach is needed to transport planning in Romsey and Petersfield. This needs to consider the impact on local residents in terms of congestion and parking; the problem of “rat-runs” developing in previously quiet streets to avoid road closures; the need for delivery vehicles to access shops and businesses; the need for the bridge to remain open for essential traffic. These issues have all been addressed successfully in other locations in Cambridge.

- **Question 13: Do you have any other comments on the future of Mill Road?**

We see the future of Mill Road as a flourishing social and commercial centre, inhabited and used by a diverse range of people and serviced by an excellent pedestrian, cycle and public transport network. If the right decisions are taken now, Mill Road could become a more liveable, sustainable centre of a vibrant community.

Mill Road is currently traffic-heavy and congested. Local car ownership is high, as evidenced by the demand for parking, but could potentially reduce rapidly if the area had better public transport and easier, safer cycling.

We hold Mill Road to be an exemplar of the sorts of diverse communities that Cambridge should foster. The local area (Romsey/Petersfield) is becoming increasingly affluent but still is home to, and the workplace of, many lower income people; many young families also live here who seek a healthy lifestyle for themselves and their children.

Mill Road is important to traders, residents, and to those passing along it to and from the station or travelling in and out of the city. All these uses must be considered, even though people who live and work outside the area are unlikely to respond to the consultation.

- **Question 15: Do you have any other comments about our proposals for Mill Road or how the road could function in the future?**

The approach taken with Mill Road must learn from experience locally and further afield. For example, the EU publication “Reclaiming city streets for people” contains a number of informative case studies⁷. Among these is an account of the experimental closure of Bridge Street, Cambridge, in January 1997. This reports that (according to evidence collected by the Cambridge Retail Group) there was no significant loss of trade resulting from the Bridge Street closure. It also states that *“opposition from traders has fallen significantly as the positive aspects of the scheme have become more evident.”*

Based on the findings of these case studies we conclude the following:

- Staged change, with time for adaptation between each stage, can be more effective than ‘big bang’ changes. However, **each change made must have a ratchet effect of reducing motor traffic**
- A mixture of ‘sticks’ (restrictions on driving) and ‘carrots’ (improvements that favour active and public transport) should be used
- It is important to obtain political support for the project at both City and County level. It is also vital to engage the media, so they understand how the road closure fits into a wider longer-term picture
- Stakeholders and residents should be involved in the development of the scheme. A core stakeholder group should be maintained through the whole process, and the wider community kept informed of progress
- Systematic data on all major issues being addressed, e.g. pollution, traffic movements, retail performance, local satisfaction, should be collected and published. This must start before the project to provide a robust baseline against which change can be measured.

We suggest the following specific actions for Mill Road. Some of these have already been proposed; some could be implemented immediately; some would require detailed evidence-based proposals and suitable consultation.

- Tighten up enforcement of the existing 20mph speed limit and parking restrictions, using traffic wardens, cameras and other suitable approaches. This would immediately increase safety and amenity for other road users.

⁷ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/94a8a003-be86-467a-9a85-63a5d52bf7ae>

- Introduce ongoing monitoring of key indicators including traffic flow (including bikes) and air pollution and make the results publicly available.
- Improve signage to direct car parking away from residential roads and into in car parks such as Gwydir and Kelsey Kerridge. Install electric car chargers in these car parks.
- Designate more disabled vehicle parking spaces along the road.
- Introduce traffic restrictions as part of an integrated approach to travel planning in the area. These could include:
 - A modal filter on the bridge (discussed elsewhere)
 - Reducing certain areas of the road to one lane, with traffic flow controlled by lights
 - Full or partial (using modal filters) closures of side-roads
 - Creating fully pedestrianised areas, either permanently or at certain times.
- Make bus stops as user-friendly as possible, with shelter, seating and Real Time Indicator Boards at each stop. A reduction in traffic would do a lot to improve reliability and journey time of existing bus services.
- Change Mill Road's designation as an arterial road. Mill Road should be promoted as a destination, not a through-route.
- Implement beautification and people-friendly improvements to the road such as wider pavements, micro gardens, trees, more seating and more bicycle parking. Improve safety for pedestrians at side roads e.g. through installing suitable crossings.
- Explore innovative solutions to enable daytime goods delivery to small traders. Restocking is one of the independent shop keepers' major concerns. Options to explore include providing limited number of loading/unloading bays at suitable places along the road (with strict enforcement against illegal parking).