

## **Press Release – Abingdon Liveable Streets – 10<sup>th</sup> July 2020**

### **Let's improve Abingdon's walking and cycling network!**

Did you notice how air quality improved during the Covid-19 lockdown? Would it not be great if we could make this a lasting legacy, especially for our children's health?

Most of our air pollution comes from the burning of fossil fuels; nitrogen dioxide is known to cause respiratory problems and carbon dioxide is a greenhouse gas. We can reduce air pollution, especially near schools, by leaving our cars at home and enjoying the benefits of walking and cycling to move us around.

"More walking and cycling will reduce pollution, greenhouse gases, congestion and noise", said Sally Reynolds of Abingdon Carbon Cutters, "It's all the benefits we felt during lock-down, but without having to stay at home."

The government have offered funding for innovative plans which substantially change the road use in their Emergency Active Travel Fund. Oxfordshire County Council submitted a bid for the first phase of funding, but were only allotted half of the possible grant. Fortunately there will be a second tranche of funding and groups of Abingdon residents want to be involved in constructing the new bid and formulating a longer-term plan

As a result, a new coalition called Abingdon Liveable Streets has been formed. The group aims to improve our walking and cycling routes so that people can travel without needing to use their cars and everyone can go to school or work safely. The group is a collaboration of Abingdon Carbon Cutters, AbiBike, Abingdon Freewheeling, Abingdon Health Walks and the Town Council.

We need your help! An electronic questionnaire has been sent to all schools in Abingdon for distribution to parents and students. We need you to identify problem areas where better walking and cycling routes could be constructed. It would be useful if parents and children could think of where the new routes could go, perhaps using satellite maps and/or street maps to look at your local area and work out if they are feasible. We'll get wider input through the Neighbourhood Plan process.

We have had hundreds of responses so far – all anonymous as we do not ask for personal details - some quotes are given below and show that there is a definite need for better infrastructure:

A Larkmead School mum said "My son currently walks to school. He would like to cycle but I worry about the volume of traffic and the fact that people are often in a rush to get to work - the lockdown has given him freedom and independence to cycle, but traffic is sadly already building."

Another concerned Larkmead parent suggested cycle lanes on Spring Road and measures to curb the speed of cars; "Priority for cyclists. No cars parked on Spring Road and definitely not on cycle-lanes....causes too many dangerous situations".

A Fitzharrys parent said "The road from Wootton to Abingdon would be a perfect cycle route with appropriate cycle paths and car management. Most children do not cycle, but it would improve the traffic into Abingdon if they felt confident to do so.

There were comments about improving bus services too: "the bus which goes from outside the college to Wootton (no 4) leaves about 10 minutes too early for the school kids to catch it home in the afternoon".

Our current survey results, for students and parents that have replied so far, have revealed that:

- 73% of students travel to school by foot, scooter or bike, 9% use buses with the remaining 18% travelling by car for some or all of the time.
- 98% of respondents agree that it is better for the environment, and for fitness, for students to walk or cycle to school whenever possible, and avoid using cars.
- 29% of people said there was no safe way for students to walk or cycle to school.
- To improve safety travelling to school, 37% of respondents favoured widening or improving an existing cycling or walking path to improve safety. A further 19% favoured creating a new path, 22% thought reducing the speed limit for cars would help and 8% would like better public transport.

We currently have over 25 people involved in surveying routes and creating ideas. Once collated, the surveys will be valuable inputs to the Neighbourhood Plan and become the basis for an Abingdon LCWIP (Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan), a key document that Oxfordshire County Council would use to plan and gain funding.

Robin Tucker of Oxfordshire Cycling Network (OCN) is co-ordinating the results and will liaise with the District & County Councils in time for the second tranche of money. “We’re building a vision for how people can get around healthily and safely. It’s not about stopping cars, but it will reduce their danger by reducing speeds and giving people safer spaces to walk, cycle and use mobility aids.” said Robin, “As well as the residents already involved, we’ll ask for more input through the Neighbourhood Plan process. We hope our plan will help Abingdon to raise funds from developers, the County Council and national Government for our proposals.”

Caroline Townsend,

Chair, Abingdon Carbon Cutters

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Links for further information:

1. <https://abingdoncarboncutters.org.uk/>
2. <http://cyclingkoxfordshire.org/campaign/what-good-looks-like/>
3. <https://twitter.com/OxLivSts/status/1274564550243876864>