



# BICESTERBUG

B i c e s t e r   B i k e   U s e r s   G r o u p

## **Submissions on proposed housing in NW Bicester**

**21/01630/OUT**

**22 June 2021**

Version 1.1

### 1. SUMMARY

BicesterBUG generally welcomes the aspirations of the development proposals however, the provision for active travel is still underwhelming and insufficient thought appears to have been given to walking and cycling with regards to making it the default option for local journeys and commuting.

Though the plans are currently only in outline, Bicester Bike Users' Group ('Bicester BUG') has concerns about the traffic flows and active travel provision through and to the development. Our concerns are mirrored by a more thorough analysis of the traffic modelling by Rob Dakin and the Elmsbrook Community Organisation. These reflect that fact that little has changed since the non-statutory consultation earlier in 2020.

Further engagement by Bicester BUG with the developers and planning authority would be appreciated to enable the plans to develop as recommended under LTN1/20.

### 2. COMMENTS

#### 2.1 Aspirations for Active Travel

The proposal does not make sufficient effort to attain the aims of the EcoBicester Planning Policy Standards, namely:

*"enable at least 50 per cent of trips originating in North West Bicester or on any other large mixed-use development, to be made by non-car means, with the potential for this to increase over time to at least 60 per cent"*

Nor would the current designs be sufficient to permit the attainment of the policy goal of a 200% increase (tripling) of cycling and a 50% increase in walking as committed to in the Oxfordshire County Council ('OCC') Local Walking and Cycling Plan ('LCWIP') for Bicester 2020.

In order to achieve these aspirations, a more ambitious plan for walking and cycling might have been expected, yet to date only a typical generic development street outline has been offered. The design would benefit from the input of a designer with experience of riding in urban environments and skills in active travel infrastructure, as per Summary Principle 20 of LTN 1/20 "All designers of cycle schemes must experience the roads as a cyclist."

The Department for Transport is clear on the issue of how to provide suitable active travel infrastructure: 'Cycling facilities should be regarded as an essential component of the site access and any off-site highway improvements that may be necessary. Developments that do not adequately make provision for cycling in their transport proposals should not be approved. This may include some off-site improvements along existing highways that serve the development.' (Emphasis added, DfT 2020, 14.3.12).

## 2.2 Pedestrian and Cycle Routes and Facilities

There are few dedicated pedestrian and cycle routes. For an eco-development, the design focus seems to have been mainly, if not wholly, on the motor car. A more ambitious development might have focussed on ensuring swift cycle access to and through the development with the minimum of interruptions. Instead, active travel seems to have been something of an afterthought.

Cherwell Design Standards has high aspiration for cycle storage provision, which is currently not mentioned. Bike storage has been poorly implemented in the existing Exemplar (aka Elmsbrook) (e.g. bike shed layouts unfit for bike storage) therefore the development should aim to address this serious enabling issue for cycling.

New cycling and walking infrastructure should comply with the Department for Transport Local Transport Note ('LTN') 1/20 Standards, including measures such as segregated off-road cycle paths and priority for cycle tracks over minor roads.

The plans should also be compliant with the Bicester Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan ('LCWIP').

Experience with Elmsbrook development has shown that assuming cyclists will use the carriageway is incorrect. The shared pavement facilities are the preferred option for the majority of cyclists.

Dedicated, off-carriageway provision ought therefore to be included in the plans, both as a practical matter and to comply with the current standards.

The statement by the developer that because the roads will be 20mph they will be therefore safe and inviting for cycling is not true. LTN1/20 Figure 4.1 states that where traffic volumes are 2000 pcu/24hr or more then mixing traffic with cycling will be “not suitable for all people and will exclude potential users and/or have safety concerns”, given the additional housing numbers and the developer’s own projections (Transport and Access Table 6.6) the estimation of 4000+ pcu/24hrs (Do minimum) and 5000+ pcu/hr (Do Something) means on carriageway cycling will not be accessible to all. We also note that Transport and Access ,Table 6.9 does not account for the increase in cycling and walking envisaged by OCC which also invalidates the assessment of ‘Pedestrian/Cyclist Fear & Intimidation’ data presented in Transport and Access ,Table 6.10 and supports our conclusion that active travel provision is insufficient both in terms of type and scale.

Given that Rob Dakin’s modelling calls into serious question the robustness of the traffic modelling, we are deeply sceptical of the suitability of using the main carriageways within the development as the high quality cycle infrastructure which is required under the Government’s LTN 1/20 guidance and which would enable the modal share of cycling required by the Eco Bicester plan and OCC LCWIP for Bicester.

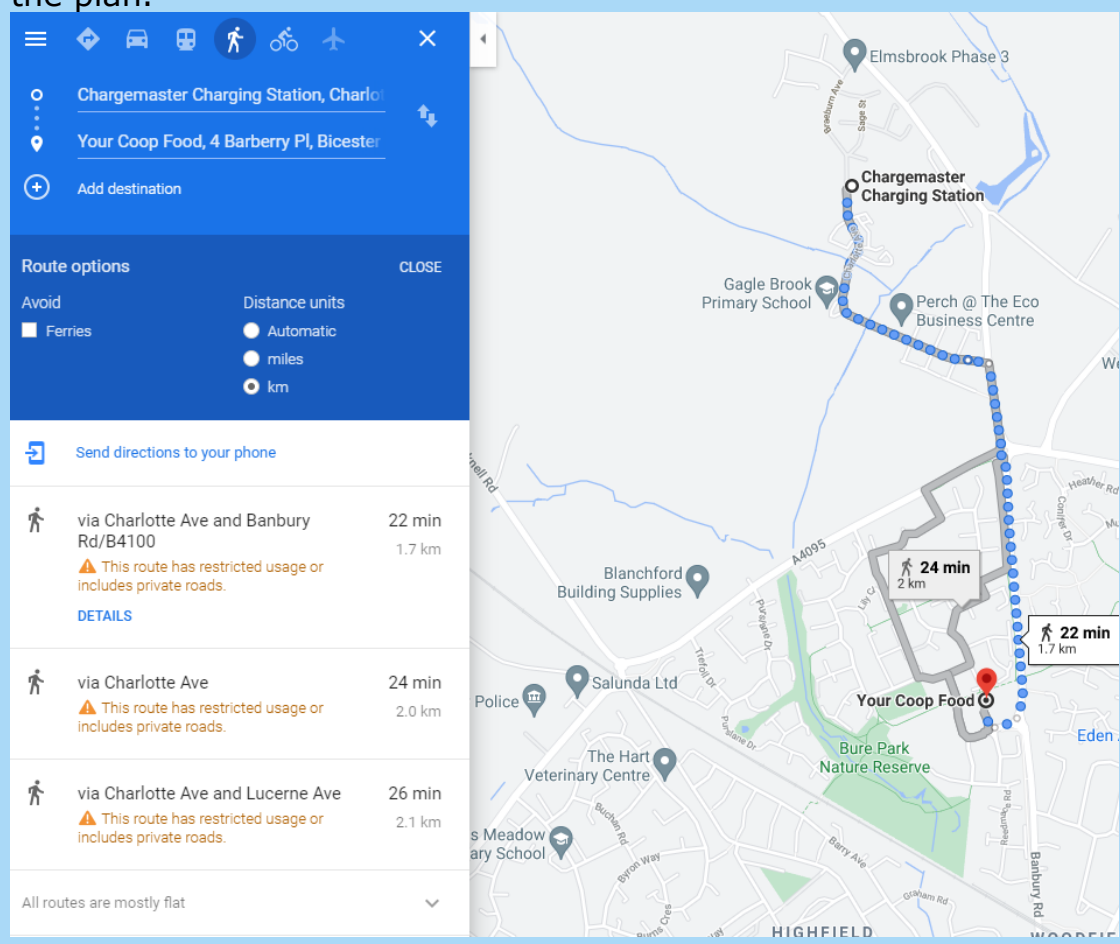
The poor modelling of cycling and walking numbers undermines the quality of the transport proposals and has implications for the need for improvement to surrounding active travel infrastructure. We note that the applicant has acknowledged the impact on the B4100/Charlotte avenue junction with regards to motorised transport and has suggested mitigating changes, but this is not the case for cycling and walking.

### 2.3 Links to the Local Cycling and Walking Network

Firstly, the statement that the Bicester LWIP has only been recommended for approval rather than voted on and accepted by OCC is out of date. Secondly, it is clearly implied from the documents that the existing network of cycling and walking provision adjoining and linking to the site is deemed to be of sufficient quality. This is not the case. For example, there is no ‘off-carriageway continuous cycle route’ from the Site to Bicester North train station nor to Bicester Village train station. The assessment of the travel time to the stations in section 4.5.3 of Appendix 6.2 of the application has a speed of 320m/s which is clearly incorrect (corresponding to 1152km/h) and an over optimistic estimation of travel time of 6/9 minutes to Bicester North and Bicester Village station respectively.

The nature of the shared paths and numerous waits at toucan crossings as well as non-continuous cycle routes make these estimates highly optimistic. Improvements to the routes should be made to improve these active/public travel connections. In addition, the existing shared path infrastructure (where existing) is not of high quality or in line with current LTN 1/20 standards. Consideration must be given as part of this planning application to remedying these deficiencies in the existing network.

Table 4.2 in Appendix 6.2 of the application contains incorrect (lower than reality) walking distances to local amenities. For example the walking distance to Jardines Pharmacy and Coop is 1.7km not 1km as indicated (see googlemap screenshot below). This undermines the diligence of the travel planning for active travel and the credibility of the plan.



Residents from the east of the development could be expected to use the B4100 to directly access Bicester town by pedal cycle, but the road is shared with fast moving and heavy traffic and as such is completely unsuitable for the vast majority of cyclists. This should also be addressed.

Given the ongoing consultation to upgrade the Roundabout at Banbury Road/Skimmingdish Lane with the potential for fully segregated cycleways around the junction in the CYCLOPS form then

we strongly suggest upgrading the shared path connection to Charlotte Avenue with segregated walkway and segregated cycleway so as to integrate into the new junction and cope with the increased volumes of pedestrians and cyclists.

#### 2.4 Missing Links to local centres and Bicester

Although prominence is given to maintaining a view of St Lawrence's Church, no provision for active travel access is made to actually access the church. This is a serious oversight and ought to be remedied.

The proposed Pedestrian/Cycle route from Caversfield assumes that the Fringford Road already provides a safe cycling route, which is not the case. It is stated in the proposal that "This footway is considered to be wide enough to accommodate young cyclists that might wish to travel to the Primary School without the need to use the carriageway." This is a proposal that is not in accordance with the law and highway code, the pathway would need to be upgraded to an official shared path for this to be the case. Note that shared paths are no longer preferred in LTN 1/20.

In order to connect to neighbouring communities, active travel links to the site via Aunt Ems Lane (the lane between the B4100 and the Fringford Road) should be included in the plans. BicesterBUG rejects the notion that the Fringford road offers a suitable route, as outlined above. We reiterate that one low cost possibility would be to provide a dedicated active travel corridor between NW Bicester and Caversfield by closing Aunt Ems Lane to motor vehicle traffic. We note that the developer has assessed the connection (in ES vol 2 Appendix 6.1 and 6.2 Transport assessment), we disagree with the assessment and contend that with minor changes suitable active travel provision can be constructed. The reasoning that the existing route via skimmingdish lane is shorter than an alternative via Aunt Em's lane and the east development parcel (e.g. via Home Farm) is not proven

Alternatively, Aunt Ems Lane could be made one-way for motor traffic from the B4100 to the Fringford Road to maintain access, allowing the current E-Bound lane to be segregated into a bi-directional active travel route. This option would provide safe access between the proposed development, Caversfield, the church and the school. The addition of a path along the eastern side of the B4100 from aunt em's lane to St Lawrence Church and a crossing to the proposed development site would make a valuable addition to the active travel connectivity of the development and the wider area. This would unlock active travel access to the church which is currently not possible from Elmsbrook or Caversfield.

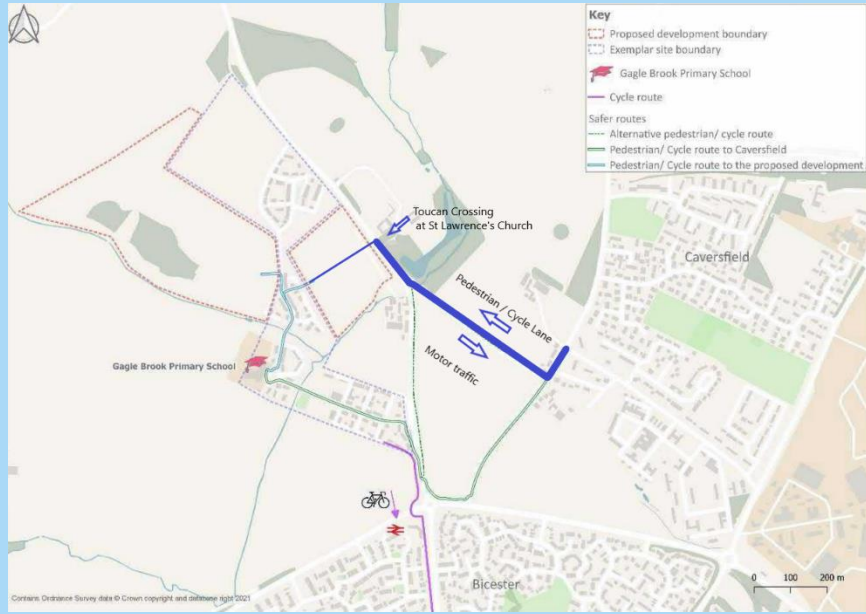


Figure 1: Aunt Em's Lane Connection (taken from Fig 5.3 of Appendix 6.2)

## 2.5 Vehicle Access

The proposed access to the development along Charlotte Avenue and Braeburn Avenue will have a negative impact on the walking and cycling provision along those routes. This will be especially problematic on the Charlotte avenue route where this will pass Gagle Brook Primary School. Consideration should be given to creating an access point at Home Farm or a Park and Stride facility which could serve both the school, church and business centre.

The proposed traffic control lights at the junction of Charlotte Avenue and the B4100 are a result of insufficient effort on the part of the developer to mitigate car traffic through modal shift to active travel. The doubt shown in the traffic modelling by Rob Dakin implies that the vehicle levels could be in excess of the already borderline levels further reducing the attractiveness of walking and cycling. The traffic lights themselves would provide an *additional* barrier to active travel by restricting free movement of pedestrians and cyclists across Charlotte avenue through increased traffic and offset (non desire line) controlled crossings.

## 2.6 Public Transport

The bus stop on the east side of the B4100 north of the Toucan crossing needs to be linked to these active travel paths, it is currently on a grass verge inaccessible to most users.

## 3. REFERENCES

EcoBicester Planning Standards

[https://portal.oxfordshire.gov.uk/content/publicnet/other\\_sites/EcoBicester/standards.html](https://portal.oxfordshire.gov.uk/content/publicnet/other_sites/EcoBicester/standards.html)

Cherwell Design Guide SPD (2017)

Oxfordshire County Council (2020), Local Walking and Cycling Plan for Bicester

Department for Transport (2020), Local Transport Note 1/20