

Taff Trail Rerouting - Our Response

Friends of Hailey Park - July 2023

Executive Summary

We do not support Cardiff Council's proposal in its current form.

We believe Cardiff Council is now faced with the following options:

1. To implement the alternative proposal made by Cardiff Cycle City to reroute the Taff Trail along the alignment of the former Glamorganshire canal and Gabalfa Road (<https://cardiffcyclecity.org/2023/08/07/hailey-park-taff-trail-changes/>.) We feel this proposal has considerable merit and we would like to see park users and the local community consulted about it.
2. To invest in the short term to enable the Taff Trail to follow its current alignment, widening the path where possible without tree removal and, where widening is not possible, ensuring the path is maintained to its designed width including regular cutting back of undergrowth and scraping to the surface margins. We are broadly in support of local resident Will Pargeter's comments and suggestions which would work well with this option.
3. To proceed with the current proposal despite considerable local opposition and a lack of support from stakeholders including ourselves and the cycling community. We believe this would be unwise and would create more problems than it would solve because it puts more tarmac in the park and introduces more risk of conflict between cyclists and other park users.

Now that alternative viable proposals have been brought forward, we would like to see park users, the local community and active travellers consulted about all of the above three options.

Background

- The Taff Trail currently forms an important part of Cardiff and South Wales' strategic Active Travel infrastructure which is particularly popular with cyclists.
- The Taff Trail, as it passes through Hailey Park, has many shortcomings which have led to accidents and conflict between path users especially as some cyclists anecdotally believe the Taff Trail is a "cycle track".
- The reduction in peak hours commuting as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic has created a reduction in commuters on the Taff Trail at former peak times.
- In many places, the Taff Trail is functionally much narrower than designed because of the incursion of undergrowth and associated loss of surface.
- Cycling, both as a means of transport and as a sporting activity is expected to continue to rise.
- Therefore, In the long term, Cardiff needs a good quality, higher capacity cycle route to service the same areas as the Taff Trail.
- As a general principle, strategic cycle infrastructure should take space from roadways rather than parks and public green spaces

- The sections of the Taff Trail immediately north and south of Hailey Park have their own problems which means that a more strategic long-term solution is necessary.

Notes

1. Some of the options may cause it to be necessary to relocate some of the benches alongside the current Taff Trail alignment but this must be within the park and, wherever possible, alongside the path near their original location.
2. In some places, the Taff Trail passes over tree roots. It may be necessary to use a “no dig” method to ensure that the tree roots are not disturbed by the path and vice-versa like the one being used by Gloucester County Council in Cheltenham (<https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/gloucestershire-county-council-news/2021-news-archive/news-march-2021/tree-friendly-cycle-scheme-in-west-cheltenham/>)
3. We have included our earlier response to the original consultation as the [Appendix](#)
4. We note that we have not seen the equalities impact assessment for the current proposal, despite having requested it several times.
5. The areas of the park that the proposal covers are currently very popular for informal enjoyment



Long term cycle route

We believe it would be possible to design a suitable route for commuters and faster cyclists that would follow the principle of taking space from roads rather than parkland. We have looked at a number of options available including running alongside the Taff Vale Railway line or alongside the Ysgol Gyfun Glantaf site as well as re-use of current roadway. The current detailed proposal from Cardiff Cycle City is an example of the kind of solution that could meet these requirements.

Appendix - Submission on behalf of the Committee of the Friends of Hailey Park to the original Taff Trail Consultation

Introduction

The committee greatly welcomes the opportunity to put its views forward to Cardiff Council in relation to the current consultation on proposals to alter the section of the Taff Trail that runs through Hailey Park. We commend the consultation process for making an effort in December 2019 to engage with Mary Street resident given the likely concerns that we felt they may have. We understand they will be making representation collectively themselves about the scheme.

This response is based on significant discussion among ourselves as a committee; engagement with our Friends membership; and feedback received on our social media channels. We acknowledge that the proposed route considers our nature and conservation requirements that we have raised previously. We also wish to point out that several of our committee are cyclists and/or walkers, either for pleasure or for commuting purposes, and speak from an informed perspective on the matter.

We stress that the proposals would be the most fundamental alterations to the park since its inception in 1926 so its presentation is zealously guarded and protected. At the same time, we are acutely aware of the negative associations should the park bear witness to a very serious accident and a death. We recognise the status quo is probably untenable, and we have demonstrated our commitment to finding workable solutions. We hope that our extensive and intimate knowledge of the park is taken on board by planners.

Lastly, we remain committed to ongoing dialogue with the Council, our elected members and other stakeholders about the welfare, quality and amenities of Hailey Park.

Summary

- *Education should be written into the project to address the issue of speed & mixed use*
- *As Active Travel Bill drives this project it also needs to take into account vulnerable or elderly users or even those who want a leisurely walk or cycle*
- *Equality Impact Assessment – Was this considered?*
- *Path flooding – northern section goes through a bog as it's an area that retains water. In addition, since the consultation began the bank has been undermined in some parts along the southern end due to recent flooding*
- *Speed concerns are likely to remain unaddressed*
- *We suggest Ppassing places may alleviate some pressure*
- *Markings/signage not just for using new path but also to ensure safety at hotspot areas*
- *Mary Street issues*
- *Northern end of Hailey Park: will create hotspots going around woodland as children often play in there plus many who come by car will often walk through the gap between the woodland and run into a blind spot as they walk on to Taff Trail*
- *Proximity to children's play area*

- We have to remember Hailey Park is a park and not the Taff trail. It is a park for outdoor play, connecting with nature, sport, dog walking etc. Often this conflicts with the basis of Active Travel Bill
- Its on a Strava route
- Park is long and thin so it will feel like its being dissected by paths and fragmented

Speed of cyclists
We recognize that the scheme is designed to reduce conflict between different types of user, inherent in which is the desire to reduce the impact of speeding cyclists.

· It might seem an obvious point to make but what seems slow to cyclists is quite fast to a walker. And even worse if you have restricted mobility, sensory impairments, or are accompanied by young children (in buggies, on push-alongs, scooters, bikes, etc.). Unless their speed is curtailed significantly then the scheme will, frankly, have failed in its primary purpose.

· There is a view shared by some of our membership that it is possible for modifications to actually encourage cyclists to speed up through providing a wider and/or straighter path.

· At this point we think it is relevant to make a distinction between cyclists who cycle for leisure/pleasure and those who do so as their commute to work. For the latter, time tends to be a critical factor in dictating how fast they cycle. Commuting cyclists will be restricted width-wise before they enter Hailey Park from the north or south, then see a wide track along, which they are likely to speed up to save time, knowing that they will be restricted again on exit of the Park.

· The converse of this, however, is to make the riverside pathway meander more than it currently does. We appreciate there are complications to this – there are no options that are free of complications – but it would likely achieve the desired reduction in speed.

· We are not persuaded that the current scheme will achieve this, particularly if cyclists choose to ignore the new course provided for them (see below for concerns about the lack of enforcement).

Segregation of walkers and cyclists

Assuming that cyclists obey it, the proposed scheme does allow for segregation so we are satisfied the frequency of accidents and near-misses probably is reduced. Safety is our primary concern.

· However, an alternative option, and one that would also allow for segregation of walkers and cyclists, would be for 'lay-bys' along the riverside path throughout the park. We are mindful that walkers in the park inevitably stop to chat, take in features of the park, watch a game if it's in process, wait for slower members of their party to catch up and so on. A lay-by would allow for this to happen away from the route cyclists would wish to take.

· The idea with regard to 'lay-bys' would also work well if path was reduced in size to be only 4 metres wide because it is a shared use path. However, this would mean that it cannot then be modified to become a segregated path without considerable expense and disruption.

Character of the park

Neither of the options we propose – lay-bys and a meander – would adversely affect the character of the park to the extent that the current proposals do. Neither do we believe that a scheme involving either or both of these options would be beyond the wherewithal of an organisation with the expertise and experience of Sustrans/Cardiff Council.

· We note that the Cardiff Cycle City group has made an alternative proposal, which would deal with many of the concerns we have raised and we believe this merits serious consideration. This document can be found here

<https://cardiffcyclecity.org/2023/08/07/hailey-park-taff-trail-changes/>

· It will also mean that there will be fewer open spaces for play particularly as you go down towards the tennis courts.

Enforcement and education

· It is not only reckless cyclists that contribute to anti-social behaviour on the Taff Trail through Hailey Park, but some irresponsible dog owners and other users. Any modifications to the path must include an ongoing programme of education and enforcement to tackle the problem of these forms of anti-social behaviour on and around the paths in the park. As always these things are often a minority of people but the whole issue needs addressing even as a reminder to some.

· We have long argued the need for greater emphasis on education. The proposed scheme appears to be interpreted as a discreet project, and focused on situational and design solutions. But we believe that a broader approach is required both in terms of scope (i.e., one that considers the social and behavioural) and take a longer-term view beyond completion of engineering works.

· As a committee we would be keen to be party to activities that monitor the improvements through investigation and observation; and whichever design goes ahead we would expect that in the early days post-completion our local neighbourhood officers and PCSOs would prioritise Hailey Park for patrols to ensure cyclists obey the new layout.

· We would be keen to be involved in a more community-focused approach to education too that involves us in a 'pop-up' events on the park (which might take the form of a cafe, stands, children's activities, etc.), which is amenable to and considerate of all users of the park, including cyclists – and to be done on a number of occasions possibly alongside either council officers or PCSOs.

· We think there is scope for 'smarter' use of markings and/or signage not just for those to use proposed path, but also for ensuring the safety at 'hotspot' areas (which will remain) as a safety warning to slow down at the areas rather than speed up, and where the Taff Trail branches off with other paths.

Mary Street

The most problematic part of the scheme is that which encroaches and impacts on Mary Street. There are several concerns:

- The gradients at the section from the bridge to Mary Street appear questionable. We would be concerned at the number of possible accidents that occur as cyclists speed down the hill and try to turn left into the tunnel under Bridge Road.

- Loss of short term parking for park visitors/users.

- Reduction of (speeding) cyclists on the riverside pathway potentially leads to their increase in the vicinity of the children's play areas.

- We wonder about the health of the trees along Mary Street should their roots get dug out as the path passes underneath their canopy.

- Which leads to another problem, namely the autumnal leaf slush and fallen branches that will accrue here and create hazards for cyclists (prompting them to stick with the familiar riverside pathway?)

- We would hope that the removal of the tree stump opposite no. 20 Mary Street has been factored-in.

We wonder whether cyclists might be diverted on to the carriageway along Mary Street and for pedestrians to use the existing pavement; though we recognise that in respect of the latter, it is very much the norm for residents and visitors alike to mount their parked cars on the park-side pavement.

However, it is our belief that this would be acceptable according to active travel guidelines because Mary Street is a quiet suburban road. But it would effectively be turning a current traffic-free cycle route into one with a few yards of potential traffic danger.

Proximity to children's play area

- Proposed changes to the trail take the path in to conflict with children's play area and reduce the areas for children to openly play. This needs to be addressed as there were rightly great concerns regarding this. Again it raises the concern that the Taff Trail through Hailey Park needs to be treated differently from the rest of the trail so that the park doesn't just become a superhighway and just a vehicle for an active travel project.*

Northern end of Hailey Park

- This is the trail from Tŷ Mawr Road that will go around woodland next to the car park. Not sure how it will work in principle as this area is generally a bog in the winter around those trees, and then you have the gap between the woodland from the car park. This gap between the woodland trees is about 5m wide, which is heavily used from people leaving car park on to the field. It could create a blind spot. (and a semipermanent large puddle that acts as a habitat for frogs every year for frogspawn and later tadpoles.*

- In addition, there is the possibility of a bottleneck where the 'new Taff Trail path' meets the other path by the river in the corner of woodland as you go south. We would also hope there is enough signage here to ensure which path is the Taff Trail and which goes along to the Loop Bridge to avoid excessive pressure on the gravel path from cycling around the meadow when people get lost.*

- As highlighted in the zoom meeting the woodland next to the car park is heavily used by dog walkers, teens and young children as it's a great play area for all. One aspect is , and then you have the gap between the woodland from the car park. This gap between the woodland trees is about 5m wide, which is heavily used from people leaving car park on to the field. It could create a blind spot. As the woodlands are also used then children or dogs may end up in other blind spots as they go from woodland on to the middle/back field. Tim Pargeter came up with a good solution at the zoom meeting, which may take up space in car park (he has written to the cabinet member I believe to follow up his ideas).*

- The wonderful benefits we have now achieved through getting council not to mow in parts of the middle/back field will be lost when the path uses up space and areas will have to be mown again. This year so far CC has only mown the pitch areas and around edges next to paths. The no mow areas have seen an increase this year in not just pollinators but birds (2 of which are on the red list) as it now provides more food for them both. The middle/back field provides swathes of wild flowers throughout the season.*

Equality Impact Assessment

We are concerned that the issue of gradient and the likely continued speed suggests that an Equality Impact Assessment for the whole proposal (not just for the Mary Street section) has not been conducted.

Active Travel

A number of members of the community have approached us with concerns that the Sustrans consultation in 2018 engaged more fully with cyclists than other park users and

that this would have the effect of placing the requirements of cycle commuters above those of other path users.

· We are fully aware of the need for any scheme to remain within active travel legislation, guidance and best practice. However, from the moment Sustrans conducted its inadequate consultation with park users, there is a fear – one that is shared with us frequently by members and non-members – that the interests of park users are being relegated below those of cyclists in the name of active travel and to reduce congestion and volume of car traffic. This would mean some users no longer exercise or go out – sadly many older people will not complain to authorities as they don't know how to or fear they won't be listened to. Plus the system of reporting isn't very good either (FoHP have spent several years of meetings with council and this was often an issue discussed, i.e. how to tell council of incidents and have them recorded in correct place).

· The character of Hailey Park cannot continue to be sacrificed by bearing the brunt of infrastructure to encourage people to choose alternatives to using their car. There now needs to be more work done to address the wider problem of introducing a safer network of cycleways throughout the city rather than just relying on open spaces and parkland.

· Looking at Hailey Park from the point of view of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (in conjunction with the Active Travel Bill) it could be argued that the priority function of the park is to promote wellbeing. This transcends not only broader active travel considerations in Cardiff and Llandaff North but also narrow conceptions of recreation and leisure (e.g., a narrow focus on walking, cycling, sports, and goal directed/destination focused activity).

Friends of Hailey Park Committee

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