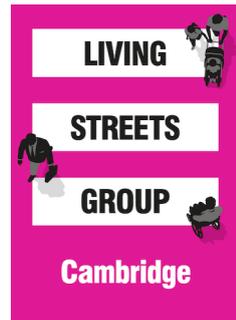


From Risky Streets to ‘Living Streets’? - The Living Streets local street survey of Cambridge



Executive summary

The recent Living Streets survey of local streets in Cambridge, distributed through local social media sites and residents’ associations, attracted over 300 responses. People reported widespread use of their local streets for a range of purposes: 74% for social activities and local amenities and 94% for exercise and recreation. Economic-related activity was important: 73% used their local streets for shopping and 29% for walking to work. The main local amenities regularly used were pubs, cafes and restaurants, indicating the significance of the local customer base for local economies.

A standout finding was the high level of dissatisfaction with pavement quality. 62.9% were critical of pavement quality and less than 6% were ‘generally happy’ with their experience as a pedestrian. Residents cited inadequate maintenance as a problem, with sloping, uneven, cracked and potholed pavements creating risks for pedestrians, along with street obstructions, pavement parking and overgrown hedges. Around 23% of respondents reported difficulty in walking, with some of them using mobility aids, and poor pavement quality was especially challenging for this group.

Action and investment is badly needed to improve pavement quality after years of decline, but a wider vision for walking is also important. Pavement improvement is linked to current ‘active travel’ strategies, enabling higher levels of physical activity, fewer trips and falls, lower pollution, healthier travel modes for children and the creation of a more sustainable, greener environment. Local people can help with this: they use their streets regularly and can help to identify key areas for action. A progressive partnership between local communities and policy makers, drawing on local and national investment streams, could deliver a genuine reorientation – moving us from risky streets to ‘living streets’.

Context

Living Streets is a national organisation focused on improving conditions for all pedestrians. In late 2020, a Cambridge branch of Living Streets was set up and is registered on the national Living Streets website. The Cambridge branch website can be found at <https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/get-involved/local-groups/cambridge>

In December 2020, Cambridge Living Streets launched a pilot survey to begin the task of understanding local views and concerns about being a pedestrian in Cambridge. It issued interim reports on the progress of the survey in January and early March 2021. This final report provides an overall analysis of the total of 313 survey responses received by the end of March 2021.

Approach and focus

The focus of the on-line survey has been on people as pedestrians – walking and using their local streets. Our questions were shaped by anecdotal comments on access and usage and by media reports. We wanted to understand how pedestrians used their streets and what they saw as the major issues in doing so. The survey did not define ‘local streets’; respondents identified these themselves.

We focused on two main issues: what types of activities local pedestrians engaged in – such as shopping, travel to work, exercise and access to amenities – and their views about the quality of the pavements and footways they used. We kept the survey short to encourage responses but left scope for people to add detail or reflect on key issues.

To engage, someone had to click on the link, and complete the form online. The survey was initially posted on the NextDoor Petersfield site and was available for two weeks (in Dec, 2020). It mainly attracted responses from CB1 residents in Petersfield, Romsey, Coleridge and Cherry Hinton. Subsequently, the survey was distributed online during January, February and March 2021, via residents’ associations, to other areas of Cambridge: Abbey (CB5), Arbury (CB4), Newnham (CB3) and Trumpington (CB2). During most of the period of the survey, therefore, Cambridgeshire, including Cambridge city, was either in national lockdown or in COVID-19 tier 3.

The January 2021 interim report recommended finding out more about the age and location of the respondents, and any mobility issues that made their walking more difficult. Questions were added to collect this extra data between January and March 2021. This extra data is highlighted in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Data on Age, Mobility and Postcode

Age	Mobility	Postcode
Total responses = 200	Total responses = 203	Total response = 193*
Age below 65 = 61.5% (n=125);	Reporting mobility issue = 23.6% (n=48)	CB1 to Jan.2021 = 100** CB1 Jan. 2021 onwards = 10
Age 65+ = 34.9% (n=71)	No issue = 74.3% (n=151)	CB2 = 61 respondents CB3 = 41 respondents
Prefer not to say = 3.4% (n=7)	Prefer not to say = 1.9% (n=4)	CB4 = 39 respondents CB5 = 42 respondents

* Note that postcode data was only collected from respondents from January 2021. Distribution from January 2021 onwards was mainly to CB2 CB3, CB4 and CB5.

** This is an estimate. The initial distribution of the survey was in CB1 and the location of the streets in people’s responses indicates that 91% of respondents (n=100) in this initial stage were resident in CB1.

In terms of responses, it is likely that we attracted a sub-set of people with a pre-existing interest and views about walking in their local area. Some of them may have been working from home and, consequently, may have been more likely to use and appreciate their local areas. They would be able to work online and have time to complete the survey. This self-selection will have shaped the range and type of responses, meaning that results may not be representative of the whole range of pedestrians’ views. However, having gathered over 300 responses, the survey has begun to identify some key issues for Living Streets to take forward in planning its future work.

Findings

These findings report on the 313 survey responses received before the survey closed at the end of March 2021. The highest levels of response were from the CB1 and CB2 postcode areas, with fewer responses from CB3, CB4 and CB5. This may reflect our level of success in

distributing the survey through social media groups and residents’ associations. It could also suggest that people in some parts of the city make more use of their streets for walking and are therefore more likely to be interested in responding to the survey.

Question 1 asked people to report on their use of their local streets.

Q1: Do you walk regularly around local streets?

100% of people responded to this initial question (n=313), which is not surprising as people not using their local streets would be unlikely to be interested in taking part. At this point, only 1.6% (n=5) self-reported use of a wheelchair or mobility scooter (n=4) or not accessing local streets (n=1) as they were unable to walk. However, from access problems reported later in people’s responses and from the mobility data collected from January 2021 onwards, it became evident that nearly 25% of respondents had encountered a problem in using local pavements.

The survey provided people with four categories to define how they used their local streets: shopping, work, social activities/local amenities and recreation/exercise. Many people selected more than one category, the most popular combination being use for shopping, access to social activities and recreation/exercise.

As Table 2 below shows, nearly 30% used local streets for their journey to work, reported by people as a ‘walk to work’. A few additional reports highlighted walking as part of the journey to work, with comments about walking ‘to the station’ and ‘to the bus stop’. Over 70% reported using local streets for shopping and social activities. More than 90% walked on local streets for recreation and exercise; this very high figure may reflect the impact of pandemic-related lockdowns in which local exercise was urged by government and public health leaders and wider travel restricted.

The results from Question 1 are set out below:

Table 2: Use of local streets

Category use of local streets:	Used for shopping	Used for work/journey to work	Used for social activities/ local amenities	Used for recreation and exercise
Number of respondents (total = 313)	228	90	232	290
Responses as a%	73%	29%	74%	93%

There were some differences between responses across the different areas, depending on their local lay out and amenities. In responses from the CB1 area, for example, a high proportion of people used local streets for shopping and social activities/amenities, reflecting the availability of local shops, cafes and pubs in the area, especially around Mill Rd. In contrast, in CB2 the most widely reported use was for recreation and exercise. In all areas, respondents reported using local streets to accompany children to and from school.

Q2: Are you generally happy with your experience as a pedestrian in Cambridge?

This was the opening question in a series that focused on specific aspects of the pedestrian experience. The choice of aspects reflected those previously reported anecdotally by residents or noted in media coverage. Three categories were included for this initial response: 'Yes', 'No' and 'It Depends'.

As Table 3 sets out, overall, less than 6% were happy with their experience as a pedestrian. Almost 63% were not happy and nearly a third reported that it depended on the circumstances. 31% (n=99) of people replied that 'it depends' and many of these later reported local concerns.

Table 3: Overall pedestrian experience

Are you generally happy with your experience as a pedestrian in Cambridge?	Overall YES	Overall NO	It Depends
Total of responses = 313	17	197	99
Responses as a %	5.4%	62.9%	31.6%

Responses on aspects of pavement quality

People were then asked to comment on their experience in particular areas, in all cases reporting on 'pavements they regularly used'. These were about the quality of pavements (whether they were uneven, sloping, cracked, potholed) and obstructions on pavements (by parked vehicles, waste bins, traffic signs or other street furniture). Table 4 below sets out the level and type of responses received.

People commented on their local streets and also on streets that they used as thoroughfares (such as Queen Edith's Way) or that offered a range of local shops and amenities (such as Mill Rd and Anstey Way). Worn and uneven surfaces were particularly mentioned as hazardous to walkers:

'Alpha Terrace has been getting progressively worse as the surface becomes worn away. The metal rainwater drains then become a trip hazard. The surface is very uneven and is due a revamp.' (CB2 respondent)

'Pavements just in a bad state from weather and being dug up; easy to trip on cracks, holes, hardware' (CB1 respondent)

'Anstey Way at the junction with the High Street...lots of small manhole covers, uneven patched repairs...' (CB2 respondent)

Several long roads, such as Barnwell Rd, Cherry Hinton Rd and Grange Rd, also attracted adverse comment for pavement quality and overhanging hedges at various points. Mill Rd was reported for its narrow sections of pavement which made wheelchair and pushchair access dangerous and for the numbers of parked vehicles obstructing the pavement. People mentioned a range of concerns and identified particular parts of longer roads, for example:

'Milton Rd from the nail bar, Viking, Chesterton carpets right up to the co-op, we have to dodge speeding cyclists and large vehicles blocking most of the pavement' (CB5 respondent)

Interestingly, the range of concerns was very similar across all areas, although older parts of Trumpington (CB2) attracted more criticism in terms of pavement quality than more recent developments. Pavement parking was a source of annoyance in all areas, but reported most frequently on busy shopping streets. In all areas the impact of contractor works on streets, and in some cases poor reinstatement of surfaces, was mentioned. Whilst signage, overhanging foliage and bins were a nuisance to some, the over-riding complaint was about the decay of pavements to the point where they had in some places become a real hazard. Table 4 below quantifies these responses.

Table 4: Pavements: quality and obstructions

Nature of problem	Numbers/ percentages reporting this	Range of concerns
Pavements that are sloping, uneven, cracked or potholed	284 = 90.7%	Deterioration of pavements and inadequate patching; uneven surfaces; impact of street works such as laying cables and pipes with poor quality reinstatement
Pavements blocked by parked vehicles	228 = 71.5%	This was noted across the area; the most frequent reports were about Mill Rd. Contractors' vehicles seen as hazards in some cases.
Pavements blocked by waste bins	196 = 62.6%	Some concerns about blocking narrow streets, but generally acknowledged as temporary, usually same day or day or so only after collection day
Traffic signs and street furniture obstructing pavements	130 = 41.5%	Reports linked together obstructions and the width of the road, though Milton Rd was seen as hazardous.
Hedges protruding onto pavements	166 = 53%	Reports from several areas as well as tree root damage and slipping on wet leaves

Are there any other pavement issues you notice in your area?

Finally, respondents were asked to comment on any other issues that concerned them. Many gave details of concerns already reported, emphasising the dangers they experienced in their daily activities. Alongside this, people added points about flooding of parts of roads after rain, puddles that never dried up through the winter, dog mess, lack of dropped kerbs for buggies and wheelchairs and the dangers for pedestrians of pavement parking and adults cycling on pavements. One respondent commenting on pavement parking raised a related concern about her safety:

“Do not feel safe as a young woman with males pavement parking day and night in Greenlands’ (CB2 resident)

Poor lighting quality made walking on uneven pavements after dark more dangerous. There were several reports of dangers for wheelchair users and of slips and falls; some individuals

did not use their local streets because of such dangers. The following comments reflect widespread concerns about the poor state of local pavements.

'Terrible holes and dark patches, where you cannot see if there are holes at night' (CB1 respondent)

'Many of the dropped curbs on the Whitehill estate have poor drainage, meaning they are puddles most of the year, and the raised paving for visually impaired are muddy or obstructed. There are lots of roots growing through the paving, making it unsafe' (CB5 respondent)

'The corner of Green End Road, Scotland Road and Chesterton High St (is) uneven and broken, I fractured my ankle here last October'. (CB5 resident)

From January 2021 onwards, respondents (n=203) were asked to report if they had a disability and 23.6% (n=48) volunteered the information that they had some degree of disability that made it difficult to use local streets safely. However, respondents at all stages of the survey raised concerns.

The following comments highlight that some of those residents experience considerable challenges in getting around their local streets.

'We are both coping with a degree of mobility issues and often resign ourselves to walking in the roads, dodging traffic rather than risking tripping up and falling on pavements'. (CB1 respondent)

'No maintenance is ever done, and whenever any other type of work is being done, a patch is made as opposed to actually renewing a large stretch of pavement. My husband has some trouble walking and it is a nightmare to deal with the potholes, the mud, the hedges, and the steep incline of many of the pavements around here'. (CB3)

'Steeply sloping pavements are quite difficult to negotiate on a mobility scooter especially when the slope is across rather than along the pavement. Some of the slopes on Newmarket Road exceed manufacturers tolerance for my mobility scooter'. (CB5 resident)

'This is particularly problematic when using my manual wheelchair or my mobility scooter because I can get stuck. Particularly annoying is the area around the zebra crossing on Ditton Lane, north side of Newmarket Road between Wadloes Road and 605 Newmarket Road, corner of Mill Road near Brookfield's hospital. Cycle path along Barnwell Road is great then abruptly runs out at dangerous roundabout near big Sainsbury'. (CB5 resident)

'Someone should regularly try a wheelchair around Cambridge – lots of crooked pavings, lack of dropped kerbs and obstructions' (CB1 respondent)

Finally, a few respondents expressed wider views about their hopes for the future for Cambridge streets. Attention was drawn on the one hand to the need to respect and protect the character of Cambridge as an historic city when improvements are made and on the other to improving street quality as part of a more radical re-design of streets to give pedestrians priority. These contrasting views are exemplified below:

'This is Cambridge. The fact that ancient lanes or surfaces are uneven because of the tree roots of beautiful and mature trees, or the settlement of aged stone paving is no reason to damage the trees or pull up (and possibly sell off at profit) old and lovely paving. Whatever improvements are made it is imperative that these valuable assets are preserved and not stripped out under the guise of health and safety. I write this as an older member of this community with mobility restrictions'. (CB3)

'I think that the focus on the quality of pavements is lacking in the kind of expansive vision that would truly make things better for pedestrians. First, pedestrians need to have priority over motorised vehicles at intersections. Intersections need to be designed so that pedestrians do not have to stop constantly. Pedestrians should be given the direct routes around the city, and their routes should be free of vehicle traffic. Overall, the widths of pavements is completely inadequate and makes pedestrians unsafe. If we eliminate/ substantially reduce the number of cars and other motorised vehicles, then the pavements could be expanded and everyone would be safer and healthier'. (CB1)

Conclusions and recommendations

The on-line survey produced over 300 responses from interested local residents across Cambridge. The conclusions set out below focus on the key issues and implications that emerge from the data collected.

1. **People use and value local streets:** Local streets are important locations for economic and social activity outside the city centre. A large proportion of respondents in this survey use their local streets for social amenities and recreation and nearly 30% reported walking to work. In addition, parents use local streets to walk children to and from school. Clearly, people care about, value and widely use the amenities they can walk to locally. It makes sound economic sense to improve the quality and accessibility of local streets to encourage residents and visitors to maximize their use.
2. **Many local streets are currently hazardous:** Everybody has to walk, even if they also drive, cycle or use public transport. But a significant number of our 313 respondents identify real problems for themselves as pedestrians. Those accessing local streets in wheelchairs or using walking aids fare the worst, encountering hazards that must concern any organisation focusing on 'living streets'. Overall the response to the question 'Are you generally happy with your experience as a pedestrian in Cambridge?' was that 94% of people either replied 'no' (62.9%) or 'it depends' (31.6%). This suggests a wide degree of dissatisfaction with the quality of some local pavements.
3. **Local people can be partners in setting priorities for improvement:** Local people can provide really useful information about what needs improving in their local streets. They use them regularly; they are the people who have to cope with the overall deterioration of fragile pavements and the inadequacies of repair and surface reinstatement. The survey provides helpful detail of the types of concerns people have, with large numbers (n=284) reporting cracked and damaged pavements and over half noting obstructions of various kinds. Local people can help identify the priorities for investment as Cambridgeshire County Council begins to

tackle pavement quality across the county. Local people can also identify what we might term 'pavement abuse' such as persistent pavement parking, abuse of loading/unloading regulations and adults cycling on pavements.

4. **Walking is a key part of a sustainable and healthy future:** Making local streets work for local people is not only about investing in adequate maintenance, timely repairs and improving monitoring and management of contractor works and 'pavement abuse', vital though all these undertakings are. It is also about developing a vision of the central importance of walking as part of the 'active travel' agenda, one that central and local government now acknowledge is a vital component of a sustainable and healthy society. Upgrading and extending pavements and footways helps everyone to walk more. The County Council, Greater Cambridge Partnership and the Combined Authority should be working together with the city to invest in improving the walking experience in Cambridge – and across the whole county and Combined Authority. Improvements for pedestrians should rank as highly as improving the cycling experience, the other essential for 'active travel'.

5. Next steps for Living Streets Cambridge:

- a. Alert policymakers and influencers to the findings in this report to enhance their understanding of residents' concerns about pavement quality in Cambridge.
- b. Highlight findings through questions to the County Council Highways and Transport committee and to the Greater Cambridge Partnership and Combined Authority boards.
- c. Press for commitment and investment to improve footways: in Cambridge city, this could initially focus on pavements frequently identified as of major concern in the survey returns.
- d. Press for strategies such as the national 'Walk to School' investment and local 'School Street' and COVID-related schemes to be extended and adequately funded.
- e. Highlight the importance of safe walking as part of the 'active travel' agenda and link it more clearly to public health (including increasing physical activity and safety, reducing trips and falls) and to the sustainability/green agenda (including reducing the need for car travel, cutting pollution).
- f. Distribute and publicise the findings to community groups in other parts of the county that might want to conduct their own surveys of footway/pavement use and quality.

Living Streets, Cambridge Local Group Survey

Report author:

Linda Jones, Emeritus Professor of Health, The Open University

27.5.21

Contact:

cambridgegroup@livingstreets.org.uk