



## Churchfield Paths Questionnaire: Feedback to Residents.

### Introduction

This report summarises the results of the survey conducted for Weybridge residents about the Churchfields paths. The purpose of the survey was to gain a good understanding of the needs and experiences of all path users in order to ensure that new signage and calming measures being proposed as part of the Brooklands Accessibility project are designed and implemented to best meet their needs.

The survey was conducted between mid-December 2020 and mid-January 2021. It covered a range of simple questions about the users of the paths, their experiences and possible safety improvements. It also invited them to offer free-form answers to the following questions:

- What do you most enjoy about using these paths?
- What could be improved about these paths?
- Do you have any comments about your interactions with other users of these paths?
- Do you have any further comments to make on this project?

Respondents were also invited to comment in a final question on their experiences of other footpaths in Weybridge but this is not covered in this report.

148 responses were received by 20<sup>th</sup> January. We would like to thank all the people who contributed to the survey and we were very pleased to see so many responses to the open questions, where a wide variety of information was provided to us.

For various reasons, including COVID, we were not able to ensure that the survey was fully proportionately representative of all elements of the population (e.g. schoolchildren or elderly people who have no access to the internet). However, those points of view were strongly represented in some of the comments we received. We got a 50-50 split between male and female respondents. The age distribution was somewhat skewed towards people over 65.

We believe this survey does provide an adequate snapshot of people's views, and also a useful baseline against which to reassess the effectiveness and safety of the paths in future surveys.

### Who currently uses these paths?

A wide variety of people use these paths for daily local commutes to school or work (15%), travelling to a specific destination (67%) and for leisure/exercise (80%).

We asked respondents to indicate which of these different ways they travelled on the paths

Walking	90%
Running	19%
Walking with a dog	15%
Walking with push-chair/small child	13%
Walking with a stick or frame	3%
Cycling	26%

So quite a few people do cycle on the paths today, although the typical frequency of this (a few times a month) is much lower than the typical frequency of walking on them (a few times a week). People who cycled were asked to self-identify as cautious, confident or competitive, and were split roughly 50-50 between cautious and confident, with no one claiming to be competitive. 20% of respondents had children who cycled on the paths.

### **What do people most enjoy about these paths?**

It's very clear that people enjoy their time on these paths and some respondents were quite lyrical in their descriptions of what they liked about them. The three most popular factors mentioned were lack of traffic, convenient routes to get around the area and greenery/proximity to parks. Some mentioned the ability to stop and chat. Some mentioned that they were a particularly suitable place to take small children cycling. Others pointed out that they represented the only safe cycling route to school in the area for Heathside School students, who would otherwise have to encounter large vehicles and busy right hand turns on their route.

Overall, in response to the multiple-choice question, a majority agreed or strongly agreed with the statements that they felt safe on the paths (72%) and that other people were generally considerate and friendly (86%).

A number of comments (13%) expressed gratitude for the work already done and general support for the proposed changes.

### **What concerns do people have about these paths?**

The improvement most frequently requested was better lighting. This work is now in progress.

A small percentage of respondents (13%) felt that the paths were too narrow for shared use, particularly near the church, and wanted to see cycling made illegal on them. Having said that, actual evidence of problems on these particular paths was hard to find. Only a small number of actual collisions or near-misses here were described in the comments (though some described incidents on other paths), with 9% of users saying this happened frequently, and 18% encountering them occasionally. On the other hand, 48% of respondents had never seen a near miss or collision. Very few people reported having verbal exchanges with other types of user about their behaviour, which would be another indicator of discomfort on the paths.

Unsurprisingly, congestion is a problem at certain times of day, but was only stated to be a frequent problem by 6% of respondents and an occasional problem by 37%. Some people said that Heathside School students often failed to move over to make room, while others found them polite and considerate most of the time.

Other concerns mentioned were:

- Path surface poorly maintained or slippery (16%)
- Better management of vegetation needed (9%)
- Litter/overflowing bins
- Dog mess not being picked up and dogs not on leads
- People congregating at night/ Need for CCTV
- Safety issues in Melrose Road.
- Concern at potential use by e-scooters and e-bikes
- Lack of social distancing by some users
- Consultation with residents happening too late in the process

## **How might concerns be addressed?**

There was moderate support (40%) for additional guidance and courtesy signage to encourage more considerate behaviour by all users. Some comments indicated a need for cyclists to reduce their speed and be more careful when overtaking from behind, making people aware of their presence rather than brushing past and surprising people. A few respondents were not keen on the idea of too much signage and felt that it wouldn't have any effect. However, research shows that a "code of conduct can reduce the potential conflict between users through promotion of a common perspective and understanding of the path and the community it serves". The Weybridge Society is now developing a proposal for courtesy signage and a set of guidelines.

There was also a moderate level of support for more physical measures to reduce speed (30%). Some people were under the impression that existing barriers were going to be removed, which is not the case. Others pointed out that the current chicanes were cumbersome for pushchairs and Surrey CC's intention is to replace the current set with barriers set further apart, and possibly introduce more chicanes.

11% of respondents wanted to have clear markings on the ground to show cyclists and pedestrians where to position themselves. This would restrict the width of the path for people walking, who are in the great majority on these paths. It is not considered good practice any more by the Dept of Transport and would likely be less attractive and impractical with the need for lots of blue signs and paint on the ground, since the paths would merge and diverge in and out of the chicanes.

The concerns about width have already been partially addressed by clearing away vegetation and smoothing the blind corner near the park entrance. The path width now meets the minimum guideline standard for a shared-use path in most places, except near the church, where SCC are looking at ways of making it wider.

## **Conclusions**

A very detailed analysis of the survey results and comments has helped to understand user needs better and has not revealed widespread safety problems on these paths. Safety is being enhanced by the widening, resurfacing and lighting of the paths. Replacing the barriers will make life easier for people with buggies. The right kind of signage will create a sense of shared space and encourage people to look out for each other.

The strong concerns that have been raised by a relatively small minority of people, while very understandable, should be balanced against the safety risks for people who cycle around Weybridge,

as the paths provide safer routes, particularly for older cyclists and schoolchildren. The Weybridge Society therefore continues its support for this project which will reduce the need for people to cycle on busy polluted roads and improve health and wellbeing.

Having said that, a few people, including some supportive of the upgrade, have expressed a view that the improvement of the paths might result in an increase in the number and speed of people cycling, to the detriment of the safety and enjoyment of people on foot, particularly very small children and the elderly.

We therefore think that it would be highly desirable to expand on the work done so far, and set up a community initiative, led by Weybridge Society, to promote and support safe active travel on these paths, including running the survey annually. We will produce proposals for doing this, including the establishment of an informal 'Weybridge Paths Partnership' with the involvement of local residents and council representatives. This could also address the issues with other shared-use paths in Weybridge that were raised in the question on this topic in the survey.

We welcome any thoughts from local residents on this idea or any other points arising from this report. Please send these to [footpaths@weybridgesociety.org.uk](mailto:footpaths@weybridgesociety.org.uk)