

Safe Streets for Widcombe

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I am here today to ask for your commitment to providing pedestrians in Widcombe with formal, controlled crossings in the new Rossiter Road scheme. I am speaking not only for myself, but for over 350 people who have signed a petition to that effect¹.

Our main concern is with the White Hart Junction, where Widcombe Hill and Prior Park Road meet Pulteney Road. Each of these roads has a pedestrian refuge in the middle to aid crossing. Under the new scheme, these islands will be removed. The existing T junctions will become mini roundabouts. Crossing points on Widcombe Hill and Prior Park Road will be 'courtesy crossings'.

It is our contention that courtesy crossings in this location are inappropriate and potentially dangerous, for two reasons.

First, the nature of the traffic. Both roads are extremely busy in both directions at rush hour, and traffic levels are not expected to fall once the new scheme is in place. Currently at rush hour, each road has a long line of standing traffic waiting to exit onto the Parade. When the new scheme is implemented, traffic along the Parade will be reduced and reversed. Drivers exiting Prior Park Road and Widcombe Hill will have priority, meaning there will be a constant stream of vehicles exiting these two roads.

Pedestrians like me who cross these roads every day know that drivers are not focused on our safety, but on reaching their destination as quickly as possible. Drivers block "keep clear" boxes, don't indicate their intention to turn, drive on the pavement and ignore the speed limit - mini roundabouts and courtesy crossings won't change this. We do not, unfortunately, live in a culture of "shared space" – if drivers think they have priority, they will take it. A courtesy crossing, with no obligation to stop, and no refuge for pedestrians in the middle of these wide roads, is not the right solution in this environment.

Neither it is appropriate for the type of pedestrians using this junction. Crossing these roads is already dangerous and likely to become more so if this scheme is introduced in its current form, particularly for the most vulnerable in the community. Every day, many accompanied and unaccompanied children cross these roads going to and from pre-school and school. Children have the right to a safe route to school. There are many older people, some of

¹ Petitions were held at Widcombe Infant and Junior Schools, Widcombe Acorns Preschool, Widcombe Surgery, the Baptist Church and a number of business along the Parade. People were asked to sign on the school gates and by visiting houses on Widcombe Hill, Prior Park Road and the roads immediately adjacent. The petition has been signed by Widcombe Councillor Ian Gilchrist, and by every business on Widcombe Parade bar two, one of whom is completely against the entire scheme, and one who is worried about where delivery vehicles will stop.

whom might have limited mobility, vision and cognitive skills, living in this area. They must cross these roads to access vital services on the Parade.

A courtesy crossing demands a negotiation between driver and pedestrian to determine who will give way. We cannot comprehend how anybody could think it appropriate to ask children and older people to 'negotiate' with vehicles, particularly in a location such as this.

We haven't seen any baseline research on pedestrian or traffic flow at this location, although we are assured that this has been done. The only consultation carried out on the latest proposals has been by the Widcombe Association, a non representative body, and took the form of a two page document that many people haven't received or read.

We, however, have spoken to a large number of residents and visitors in Widcombe. We have knocked on doors. We have been into every business on the Parade. We have been to the schools and the pre-school. Almost everyone we have spoken to shares our view that while the scheme is fine in principle, we need formal, controlled crossings, that are recognised as such by pedestrians and drivers, and where drivers know they must stop to allow pedestrians to cross.

We understand the Widcombe Association has a "vision" for the Parade, with fewer street signs, traffic lights and road markings. But that vision is merely a folly if it results in preventing pedestrians - young and old, able bodied and disabled - from crossing the White Hart Junction safely and accessing their own schools, services and village street.