

The proposed Jackdaw Lane bridge

As many will have heard, Oxford City Council's "Cycle City Plan 2012-16" includes a proposal for a bridge across the Thames at 'Jackdaw Lane', and an initial allocation of up to £10,000 for a feasibility study, though the full work is estimated to cost over £2 million.

Although no details of what they are really thinking of have been published, it is clear that this would involve a cycle track from the scrapyard to the river through Aston's Eyot, a bridge spanning the 50m-wide river and towpath, and some sort of clover-leaf on the other side to bring the track back round to the towpath. Given the cost, the chances are they would want it to be able to operate day and night, and so it is likely to be lit with street lights on the stretch through Aston's and onwards to the Abingdon Road, if not along the towpath - like the route from University Parks to Marston Road.

The council document clearly considers this an unrelieved benefit to us all, and totally ignores the downsides to the wildlife and quiet uses of Aston's Eyot. At the moment the fact that the area is *not* en route to anywhere else is one of the main reasons why Aston's is such a haven for wildlife and a pleasantly peaceful place to wander about in. Turning it into a cyclists' 'motorway' would irretrievably alter that ambience - anyone who regularly walks the towpath or Meadow Lane knows how many cyclists, in their haste, treat walkers as impediments and show scant respect. If it were also street-lit, the Eyot would be urbanised, turning it from its currently remarkably rural aspect into a sort of street, affecting nocturnal wildlife and very probably drawing in more undesirable persons at night.

The bridge itself, if built to conform to Sustrans's minimum slope standards would need at least a 100m lead-in ramp, or 160m if the preferred lesser slope were employed, thus creating a massive visual and physical obstruction at the river end of the track. Since the clearance over the river would need to be the same as at Donnington Bridge, 16ft (5m), one can visualise scale of the structure. To build it large machinery, bulldozers, cranes, lorries bringing hardcore, steel and concrete would need to be brought on to the Eyot, causing months of very destructive disruption.

All for what ? It would not provide a useful route into the town centre, and the gain in time over Donnington Bridge into South Oxford would be minimal. It would help a few commuters living in East Oxford to get to the railway station traffic-free, but does that justify ruining a resource precious to far more people ? The council announced their intention without consulting Christ Church, the land-owner, whose permission would be required for the project. There would certainly be disruption to the towpath used so intensively in university term-time for coaching boat crews, and almost certainly Christ Church's new bridge from Jackdaw Lane would have to be replaced by something suited to massive cranes etc.

While supporting cycling in general, the Friends of Aston's Eyot committee are firmly against this proposal, as are many people in the Iffley Fields Residents Association. We would encourage everyone to write to the councillor responsible, Colin Cook (cllrccook@oxford.gov.uk), to encourage him to spend the feasibility money on more directly useful and less destructive cycle projects - of which there are many - and abandon this superficially attractive, but very flawed, scheme.

A fuller discussion is available on our website <http://friendsofastonseyot.org.uk>

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