

THE REGENTS NETWORK

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A WATERWAYS RESPONSE TO OLD OAK & PARK ROYAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK

April 2015



1.1 The threat?

The proposed development of the Old Oak area got off to a very poor start with a gross and strangely compromised and biased 'vision' from the Mayor (2013). And Park Royal was not immune from this malign intention of parachuting Croydon into West London.

1.2 The West London stretch of the historic Grand Union Canal did not fair very well either, and in presentations and discussion of the so-called 'vision' in 2013 the canal was sidelined and exploited with ignorant non-waterway uses and purpose.

1.3 There were worrying similarities with the Kings Cross Central development (that the Regents Network was involved with from its inception well over 10 years ago), where it was denied that there was any community or historic interest that needed to be considered. The care and development of the Regents Canal was totally sidelined, and the area was swept clear and an alien development has been imposed, which has no heart. The Kings Cross area wanted to be developed and improved, but it needed a pacemaker to give its heart a new and reliable life, but instead it has been given a solid glass and concrete lifeless substitute.

1.4 There is not much hope in the short term for Kings Cross Central (Regents Network is still involved on a regular basis tackling the development as it trudges on relentlessly through its next decade), although the recent alternative redevelopment of a large neighbouring area beside Kings Cross Station is highly successful, called the Regents Quarter, and it is developed on a human scale and with its heart more or less intact.

1.5 Have any lessons of Kings Cross Central been learned? Has the contrasting favourable outcome of the Regents Quarter been noted?

1.6 The answer is, unfortunately, not according to the Planning Framework for Old Oak and Park Royal which is being consulted on. The tone and presentation of the framework document is encouraging, but it is worrying that the basic structure and layout of the development areas has not shaken off the Mayor's so-called 'vision' that is being dumped all over London. Some of the details in the Planning Framework, such as street layouts and densities, seem to bear an uncanny similarity to the 2013 so-called 'vision' document. In fact, some of the maps and diagrams look like direct copies, and the greatly improved text is marred by the inclusion of cut and paste from the text of the previous document.

1.7 Has the threat gone away, or is it just more carefully hidden in the Framework document?

2.1 A positive approach?

The development of an 'opportunity area' in the Old Oak vicinity has been identified in the London Plan (revised and altered versions) quite sensibly, as no doubt some focus on this or any other area, with generous financial input, could be a benefit. However, the whole matter has become over heated firstly with the imminent arrival of Crossrail, and secondly with the optimism of becoming an HS2 hub. This has encouraged grandiose schemes and transformations that could completely swamp the character and background of the locality, as well as other parts of London for miles around.

2.2 Such an 'opportunity' could be locally welcomed, but only if it is handled with great care - and sympathy - as the potential upheaval could be devastating.

2.3 Having got over the initial shock of the Mayor's 2013 so-called 'vision', the manner in which the potential development is being handled has turned out to be surprisingly satisfactory. There now seems to be a sound GLA team involved, who are engaging with the local residents and businesses, and coming eye to eye with the 3 local authorities in the area. It is beginning to feel like the strong overhead pressure, from the Deputy Mayor for Policy and Planning downwards, has diminished. It nearly looks like the drive and motivation is more bottom up rather than top down. Well, nearly.

3.1 A big ask

The Planning Framework has a lot to achieve, and it will be a lengthy and uphill struggle. The briefings and meetings with GLA representatives have had a positive effect and have assisted the local residents and businesses to engage more closely with the GLA proposals. However, any results are at a formative stage, and the opportunity for full engagement with the consultees may not develop unless more time is made available for 'working together'.

3.2 Although there may be a constructive Old Oak Team, there is no sign of a positive engagement or interest from higher up in the authority to concerns from Old Oak and Park Royal communities and businesses, nor any understanding from their 'elevated' position of the many local issues and concerns. It has been questioned whether the Mayor and GLA are listening to the wrong people.

3.3 There are two major challenges for the Framework. Firstly it should engage fully with the overall mega development that will be so unfamiliar and unexpected. It is called upon to respond to and to justify such an unprecedented and out-of-character upheaval in this area of West London. With the huge presence of the developing transport system it may become a very busy area, but need not be an inner city clone.

3.4 Secondly the Framework should respond to the individual (and often localised) issues. There are likely to be very many of these, and taken together they may add up to a large body of opinion which would require a substantial re-think of sections of the document. One issue could be the potential disruption and upheaval over a long period of time, and this could require some serious revisions to the plan, rather than just mitigating measures along the way.

3.5 Another important issue is with the style and extent of the transformation the whole area, and whether the locality will still have a heart? Does the Framework document consider this question? The Planning Framework aspires for Old Oak and Park Royal to be the focus of a world class transport 'super-hub' (Page 16, Para 2). The mega interchange stations will be a strong focus, but will not be where the heart will be residing.

4.1 Improvements, but not changes

What will be sought is improvements in the outlook and thrust of the Framework, and a few word changes and re-drafting will not achieve this.

4.2 The viewpoint needs to be revised and made more rational for its West London location and to fit in with the residents and businesses, rather than imposing a total metamorphosis where the locals are the ones who have to try to fit in. The locals may not concur with the Mayor's so-

called 'vision' that will help to transform the area "previously cut off from the rest of London" (Page 16, Para 2). The authority should take a closer look at the locality. The needs, as well as the knowledge and expertise of the locals, should not be underestimated.

4.3 It really requires the Framework to have Old Oak and Park Royal as the starting point, into which the 'opportunities' can be placed. There are going to be big changes, and these can be carefully integrated into the existing situation with a bit of expertise, and tailored to the needs of West London, rather than being imposed.

4.4 The transport issues are a different matter and are bound to have a greater driving force. But nevertheless they can still belong to the area rather than being an extension of some overblown inhospitable airport terminal.

4.5 Once the GLA Team have got a grip on a reliable and sound approach, then the drafting will be straightforward.

5.1 Questions from the London Assembly

There was an Assembly meeting on 17th December 2014 which considered the Mayor's Planning Framework for Old Oak and Park Royal. During the session a number of comments and questions were raised. One issue was that the use of the Grand Union Canal should be included for transportation of materials to sites during the construction phase, to which an assurance was given that this would be so.

5.2 Also it was commented that lessons should be learnt from Canary Wharf. Perhaps the Assembly should have considered extending this to include lessons to be learnt from the LLDC London Legacy Development Corporation (which is suffering from a number of problems), and from the Kings Cross Central development (which has no heart).

5.3 In their report of the session, the Assembly noted a number of concerns regarding the Mayor's proposals including that the timescales for the development of the planning documents are extraordinarily rushed, and that rushing the process limits the scope for meaningful consultation with local communities and local authorities.

5.4 Financial issues were also raised, and there were concerns that there remain too many uncertainties regarding the funding of infrastructure. The scale of the required infrastructure is vast, and the Planning Framework should include a detailed study of the extent of the work to be carried out. Figures 57, 64, 65, 71 and 75 in the Framework need to be brought together.

5.5 The Assembly also said that protection of industrial land must be strengthened. A firm commitment was demanded from the Mayor, which hopefully would serve to counter the idle comment in the 'Vision & Objectives' in the Planning Framework that "Park Royal will be protected and strengthened where possible" (Page 16, Para 3, underlining added). The comment from the Assembly that some of the industrial should not be sacrificed for housing could draw attention to the regularly mentioned 'relocation of businesses from Old Oak' in the planning document without assurances of where they will end up, or that they will survive.

6.1 Mind the gap!

A recurring problem that has regularly been raised by Regents Network and that has never been competently dealt with is the administrative gap between GLA 'up there' and the local authorities further 'down' where most of the decisions are made. There is a glaring gap in the Old Oak area between the Mayor's so-called vision of a World City (whatever that is, as no definition has ever been supplied) and the local Londoners and businesses in the area. Has this been made any more coherent with the MDC which has supplanted the local authorities in the locality? It may be more acceptable if the MDC is based in Old Oak rather than City Hall, and this has been suggested.

6.2 An important gap filler could be this Planning Framework, which is the 'public face' of the proposals to transform the area (out of all recognition) as the Mayor's so-called 'vision'.

6.3 This could be dealt with by a certain amount of re-drafting of the Planning Framework document, and attention should be brought to bear on this potential important role of the Framework. It would be a good pointer to the hopeful change in attitude of the GLA to the local residents and businesses, and to the MDC engagement at the local level.

6.4 To achieve this, it would be beneficial to have some understanding of the political pressures on the development of the area, and their subsequent aspirations and intentions. These influences may need to be cooled, and this could be achieved if the community and Londoners are given more prominence. The development should fulfil Londoners' requirements, rather than politicians' ambitions and empire building.

7.1 Flashback

Turning over the pages of the Planning Framework document there are sections that recall some glaring newspaper headlines such as "Must these ghastly slabs be Boris's legacy to this city?" (7 October 2014) - not referring directly to Old Oak, but many other 'at risk' parts of our capital city. It especially brings to mind the fate of the Thames that is allowed to be targeted by avaricious over-powerful developers of countless towers. The same fate has been perpetrated on our canals.

7.2 A recent article in the Evening Standard even referred to the Old Oak development as the "Canary Wharf of the West". This may have been an accurate description of what is intended - do they know something that we do not, even now?

7.3 This is a bit of a worry that a prominent view supports the 2013 so-called 'vision' when we are led to believe that substantial changes are being made to provide a more 'reasonable' and human scale development that takes good heed of the wants and hopes of the local Londoners.

7.4 It is a matter of trust. Knowing what the Mayor's wish list seems to be, it is a worry that the local residents, business and communities may not be listened to. It would be very sad if the truth is that the Mayor has lost the plot for Londoners.

8.1 More than one plan

It has been mentioned on a few occasions that this consultation should provide an alternative plan for development of Old Oak and Park Royal. Much of the detail of the rail connections and stations may already be determined, and will have a significant effect on the potential surrounding development. But their interaction with the locality could still be reconsidered.

8.2 However, it is the 'opportunity' that is being forcibly imposed for a mega development that needs to be given watchful consideration. There are many ways of providing 24,000 homes and 55,000 jobs. This will not come about without great changes, but it could be achieved with a development that fits in and is welcome in West London. An alternative plan should be provided, and then let the Londoners choose.

[See Para 10.1 below].

9.1 Time Limited

A 20 year project cannot be planned to cover the needs, variations, policies, politics etc of the next couple of decades, let alone trends and fashions. Only building regulations are updated year on year.

9.2 Does the Planning Framework identify all the issues that need to be attended to in the next 20 years in Old Oak and Park Royal?

9.3 Kings Cross is a good example of the weakness and inadequacy of long-term planning, as the development is being put together piece by piece over 20 years or more. It is crying out for a reappraisal of what has been attained, before the next decade of buildings are bolted on. Serious flaws in the planned scheme, and particularly omissions, have come to light. The planning consent was for an 'outline' scheme within certain defined parameters which should

indicate that there would be an opportunity to make variations as the scheme progressed over the years. But the local authority planning procedure has not provided for changes of mind and improvements at the detailed planning stage.

9.4 However, the developers could submit a new planning application part way through, but this is not the intention of the developers at Kings Cross Central, who are only attempting at present to reduce significantly the proportion of affordable and social housing that was agreed (and only secured by the community groups after a long struggle).

9.5 There is a need for a scheme to be devised that has a limited life before it has to be reassessed and maybe modified if required, although careful constraints need to be included. It will be tricky for the GLA to come up with a viable and progressive means of time limiting the planning stages at Old Oak without compromising the whole project.

A FLAWED CONSULTATION?

10.1 **Flawed - a Supreme Court Judgement**

This Opportunity Area Planning Framework consultation could be considered to be unfair and unlawful, according to an important judgement made recently in the Supreme Court (6 months ago, 29 October 2014).

10.2 The Supreme Court ruled that Haringey's consultation on its Council Tax scheme was unlawful as it failed to outline alternative methods of dealing with cuts to funding. The Court posed the question: When a local authority consults interested persons before making a decision which would potentially affect its inhabitants, what are the ingredients of the requisite consultation?

10.3 The judgement revealed the surprising fact that the core principles of consultation had never been 'approved' by the Supreme Court (or the House of Lords in the past). The Court said that consultations must embody fairness, but went on to consider the duty to consult on alternatives, and that consultation must be at a time when proposals are still at a formative stage.

10.4 The text of the Press Summary from the Supreme Court of the judgement can be seen at: https://www.supremecourt.uk/decided-cases/docs/UKSC_2013_0116_PressSummary.pdf

10.5 It is made clear in the judgement that this applies to all public authorities, and that the same common law requirements of procedural fairness will inform the manner in which the consultation should be conducted.

10.6 In the case of this Planning Framework, the consultation cannot be said to be taking place at a 'formative stage' as it is based firmly on a proposal formed in 2013 (the 'vision') and detailed in a pre-prepared document that puts forward proposals that have already been developed to a high degree before being presented in the consultation. Although there are suggestions that there could be variations, there is not a comprehensive range of alternatives presented. Just providing the opportunity for questions about the Framework does not satisfy the 'formative stage' requirement.

10.7 Also the requirement for an alternative scheme to be presented has not been fulfilled, nor the option of giving good reasons why any alternatives have been rejected. It is noted in the Planning Framework that "an illustrative masterplan has been produced, showing one way that the Old Oak area could be comprehensively developed" (Para 5.16). This implies that there could be alternative plans, but then the Framework fails to provide those alternatives.

11.1 A revised consultation?

Rejection of the consultation and a re-run may be seen as disproportionate at this stage, and it is considered that a challenge by Judicial Review on the validity of the Framework consultation seems unlikely, so long as reasonable measures are now taken by the Mayor and GLA.

11.2 These measures will be required to mitigate the disadvantage and unfairness that the consultees have suffered, and which may not provide unreasonable difficulties to the authority.

11.3 First thing the MDC should do is to provide an alternative scheme for a large part of the development which could respond to comments and concerns of the consultees. For instance, there is a widespread opposition for a proliferation of tower blocks, and it should be noted that it has been suggested that ‘mansion blocks’ could provide a similar level of accommodation. The alternative should not be a near repeat of the current scheme with variations, it should be devised from a completely different (though not necessarily opposing) standpoint. For fairness, an alternative scheme must have genuine integrity and attributes. In addition, this alternative scheme could in itself have variations.

11.4 Fairness may require that interested persons be consulted not only on the preferred option but also on discarded options. A reasoned assessment needs to be made of the two (or more) schemes, and the authority in favouring one scheme must give full reasons for rejection of any alternatives.

11.5 Finally, the authority must ensure that there is meaningful participation of the consultees, and in these circumstances this means that realistic alternatives should be provided.

11.6 The outcome of rectifying the potentially unlawful and improper consultation should reasonably be obtained by an extension of the consultation period with the addition of measures dealt with above. As the London Assembly noted, this framework and associated planning issues are being dealt with in undue haste, so the extension of the consultation to rectify its ‘oversights’ would not necessarily be detrimental.

RESPONSE TO CANAL ISSUES

Page by page

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|---------|---|
| Page 29 | Figure 16. Index: Add the GU Canal.
It is an entity in itself, and should not be subsumed in other ‘places’ |
| Page 32 | Para 5.3 De-designation of industrial land is unacceptable; so is the phrase ‘de-designation process’ which really means ‘disposal’ of industrial land, which is a disaster in this area. |
| Page 34 | Para 5.8 A rethink is needed on “displacing existing employment uses” as this sneakily means disposal of industrial land.
The assessment process is nonsense.

Para 5.9 Areas for relocation will be speculative and cannot be reliable, so loss of industry is more likely the result.

Para 5.10 3rd bullet point Line 9. One of many references to ‘active frontages’ to the canal. This not acceptable, as the canal does not need to be animated, which would be contrary to its important characteristic as a quiet haven. |
| Page 39 | Figure 23. Index: Separate the new and existing amenity spaces rather than grouping them together. It is important that existing spaces such as the canal are not considered as provision of amenity space for the new development. |
| Page 40 | (d). The GU Canal towpath is officially part of the navigation, so should not be considered as yet another ‘street’, although it could be used for (limited) public use. The towpath is also <u>not</u> a cycle highway, although it could be used as a shared path for recreational and family cycling. |

- Page 42 (i). Add GU Canal to ‘sensitive areas’.
- Para 5.24 Line 5. For “design of buildings at entrance points” read ‘Gateway’ which is a discredited notion that still gets trotted out without any justification.
- Para 5.24 Line 17. Add ‘GU Canal’ after Wormwood Scrubs as it should be included as a sensitive location.
- Page 44 Para 5.26 It should be noted that views from and along the canal should not be of glass and concrete buildings, nor of buildings that ‘animate’ the surroundings. One of the great assets of the canal is as a quiet haven, and the surroundings and developments around the canal should not get in the way of this.
- Page 47 Rewrite the ‘place vision’ for the Grand Union Canal paragraph. It should not be fronted by active uses; it is not a key cycling route although available as a shared path for recreational and family cycling; thank you for including it as a freight route.
- Page 48 Para 5.28 Disposal of waste facilities. If there are spaces in other areas of London where a recycling centre and commercial premises could be re-sited, why not consider those spaces for residential, and leave the established industrial land in Old Oak alone. ‘Cleansing’ of the area is not welcome - or justified, especially as the location in question is already surrounded by significant and busy rail infrastructure. Powerday should be given green light to stay, and encourage future investment. Certain operations in EMR are acceptable provided they are run in a 21st century way. This applies to other so-called ‘nasty’ industry or commercial sites that may be indispensable.
- Page 49 Delete active frontage along the canal.
- Page 50 Para 5.36 Not certain about a ‘Grand Union Square’ especially as Granary Square in Kings Cross is recommended as an example - it is a bleak, unimaginative failure.
- Page 53 Active frontage is shown as set well back from the canal, and is OK.
- Page 57 Remove active frontage from canal side.
- Page 62 Grand Union Canal page:
 Vision: Canal not available as a cycling route; replace with ‘as a key east-west shared path for pedestrians and cycling, as well as a freight route’. Delete ‘Fronted by active uses’.
 See page 109 - Green Infrastructure as an alternative, beyond which could be active frontages.
- Key facts: Delete cycling route, as this has become a serious problem for the canals throughout the country. Replace with ‘shared path’.
- Key Objectives: 2. Line 4. Delete ‘more’ as canalside buildings should be ‘fully’ restrained in height.
 5. Delete - active frontages are not welcome along the canal.
 7. There are no new towpaths.
 Line 2. Canal cannot provide cycling routes, and the towpath is a shared path where recreational cycling is welcome under certain circumstances.
 Line 6 mentions a ‘cycle Quietway’ and a definition is required.
 8. Lighting must be low level, otherwise dark shadow areas are created.
 11. Opportunities for ‘residential’ moorings should be restricted, but ‘visitor moorings’ are welcome.

12. Thanks for mentioning using the canal itself. Freight is dealt with, but passenger transport should also be developed (a good commuter route to Paddington or Camden, as well as towards the west).

Para 5.67 A walking route is OK, but cycle route not. Line 7. Delete active frontages, as this will certainly not raise the 'quality' of the canal.

Para 5.68 The examples from the Lee Navigation have not been successful, and the character and interest of the canal has been compromised. Do not believe all that Canal and River Trust say or recommend.

Para 5.69 Ad 'recreational' to cycling. Delete dining (however that got included!). Delete employment use as it makes no sense. These uses should not be used to provide 'active' frontages. Note: the main attraction should be the historic canal itself, not the commercial frontages which are very superficial in comparison.

Para 5.70 Line 4. If the canal is considered to present an 'uninviting environment' then do something for the canal itself rather than suggesting changing its use and character. A bit of TLC and maintenance (especially from CART) would not go amiss.

Page 63 Para 5.71 Line 6 As well as building heights being an issue, add 'bulk' and 'closeness to the canal'.
Line 8. Add 'not' after 'there will' as no opportunities for taller buildings are acceptable however 'good' the design may be said to be. So-called exemplary architecture does not mitigate the negative effect of large scale buildings close to the canal. That's a nonsense notion.

Para 5.73 Every word about promotion of water freight is heartedly agreed with.

Figure 44 Extend green amenity spaces where possible, but ensure that active frontages are deleted from the diagram.

Page 66 Para 5.83 bottom. It sounds like a new 'pedestrian/cycle connection' is suggested, as the connection would not be possible along the canal towpath.

Page 70 e. A cycling route to and from the Wesley Playing Fields along the canal is not acceptable, reasons already mentioned.

Page 71 The Grand Union Canal should be added to the diagram, and the index.

Page 72 Para 6.8 bottom. The cycle route to the canal as stated is OK, but it must not continue along the canal.

Page 73 Infrastructure ii No cycling along the canal, unless it is specifically restricted to leisure.

Para 6.11 Proposal for canal wharves is welcome, as well as the maximising of the use for freight transport.

Page 74 Streets & Public Realm a. No active frontages along the canal.

Page 94 Walking & Cycling Proposals a. At last, a mention of segregated cycle infrastructure. Essential, and gives the reason why the towpath cannot be used as a cycle route as it is not sufficiently wide for segregation.

b. Cycling ‘best practice’ is mentioned, and surely this includes the important issue of conflict with pedestrians, baby buggies, wheelchairs, dogs and family groups on a shared path that is too narrow, such as the canal towpath.

Para 8.38 Bottom It states that streets should be ‘comfortable’ for all pedestrians and cyclists, and this should be extended to the canal towpath situation.

Para 8.39 Line 7 The text actually states that the canal towpath provides a leisure route for cyclists and pedestrians and is likely to be designated as a future ‘Quietway’. And it goes on to note that the towpath is narrow and its capacity limited. This confirms that nowhere in the Planning Framework should the Grand Union Canal be suggested (or designated as) a cycle route.

The paragraph goes on to suggest a pedestrian and cycle route on the north side of the canal, and this would be a new route and would need to comply with the safety (and comfort) requirements, in other words, wide enough to separate the cyclists and pedestrians.

Page 95 Delete the blue cycle route along the canal, as the canal cannot be used as part of the cycle network, nor a link from Park Royal to Ladbroke Grove.

Page 96 Para 8.41 It states that segregated facilities will be required to assist cyclists on busy streets, which is an excellent idea to protect the safety and comfort of the cyclists. By extension this sort of measure should also apply to the safety and comfort of pedestrians on the canal towpath.

Line 6 mentions the London Cycling Design Standards (2014), and does this deal with consideration of pedestrians on shared paths, or is it only the safety of cyclist on busy roads that is dealt with.

Para 8.42 Refers to TfL’s Pedestrian Comfort Level Guidance. Does this deal with the problem of paths shared with cyclists?

Page 97 Construction Freight, Deliveries & Servicing a. Proposes that maximum use should be made of rail and water transport during the construction period. Arrangements for rail freight seem to have progressed, but water freight has not yet been given serious consideration. Further negotiations should be pursued through TfL and the LWC Freight Group.

Para 8.46 Bottom. Usefully it states that challenging targets for use of sustainable transport will be set and enforced through the Strategic Transport Strategy, although this has not yet been fully developed.

Para 8.49 to 8.62 There is a lot of detailed information on freight proposals that need to be developed into practice, and it is very useful that the Planning Framework Document covers much of the preliminary detail.

Page 100 The photo shows an empty canal ready and waiting to be used.

Page 103 Figure 64: Shows the GU Canal available for natural drainage, but Canal and River Trust have recently increased charges for discharge into the canals to a very high level.

Page 105 Figure 65: As 5 of the 7 waste sites are located beside the GU Canal, the canal should be added to the diagram.

Page 108 Para 9.21 Add a further bullet point dealing with heating and cooling using the canal.

Figure 66: The Olympic Energy Centre was sited beside the Lee Navigation, but all the materials and fuel were brought in by road although a water delivery contract had been developed.

- Page 109 Green Infrastructure. The canal is described as a green corridor - one of its many attractive attributes. It is worth considering addition of more greenery alongside the canal, and in place of the active frontages that could be set back a bit.
- Page 123 Figure 72. Add the canal. The diagram illustrates the open space network that is detailed in Para 10.40, and as three of the items are related to the canal, then the canal should be shown on the diagram.

CYCLING

It looks like it will be necessary to arrange for the issue of cycling on the towpath of the Grand Union Canal to be investigated more fully.

The towpath is not wide enough to be a shared path. A recommended minimum width for a multi-use path beside a waterway is 3.7m, to allow for a separation gap between the pedestrian and cycling paths (Sustrans), and an absolute minimum should be 3m (DfT), but allow for the set-back from the waterway edge.

If a transport route is shared, then the hierarchy of users is relevant. “The concept of a hierarchy of users has been established for use in the planning and design processes for new developments and proposed traffic management schemes. This places pedestrians at the top, followed by cyclists then public transport, with unaccompanied private car-users last. The objective of such a hierarchy is to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable road users are fully considered in all highway schemes (DfT)”.

Current situation

The towpath is used regularly as a fast and direct route by cyclists, including very fast commuter cyclists at certain times of the day.

This may seem acceptable at the present as the towpath is not busy. However, the towpath is less used by pedestrians these days as they have already been forced away, and do not use the towpath so regularly as it has got a reputation as dangerous and uncomfortable. There have been many conflicts with cyclists, and the pedestrians usually seem to come out worst.

Our towpaths are for everyone, including robust walkers as well as mothers with pushchairs, family groups, the gentle elderly out for a stroll, dog walkers, school children and the disabled, for instance. Note that the Scrubs Lane access ramp was recently rebuilt (2010) to comply more closely to accessibility for all. A wide range of cyclists are welcome to fit in provided they move at a reasonably slow speed and give way to pedestrians who have priority (Canal & River Trust), as much as the pedestrians give way to them.

Everyone can enjoy the canal together, and it can be the next best thing to a visit to the country.

Safe but slow

The safety of cyclists is of utmost importance, and the towpaths can provide a safe and easy-riding alternative to the roads. But the cyclists must compromise for the improved safety by cycling at a reasonable speed. The solution is, of course, for the roads (and drivers) to be made safer, rather than the canals taking the strain.