

Living Streets' 'Cut the Clutter' 2022

Ever since my partner, Viv, spent a year in a wheelchair I've been very interested in how difficult it is for pedestrians, particularly those with mobility issues, to get around our towns. Councils promote cycling, e-scooters and buses, often with financial support, on the basis that they are environmentally friendly; if they spent some of their budgets keeping the footpaths in a suitable state for people to walk then some of that subsidy might not be needed. Walking is the most environmentally friendly way of getting around, and it is also the healthiest - it is what we, *homo sapiens*, evolved to do. If everybody walked the sort of distances our ancestors did we'd all be a lot healthier than we are.



Every year Living Streets run a 'Cut the Clutter' campaign to highlight the problems people find getting around. I decided to focus very much on my local area, within half a mile of home: that is, in and around King's Reach, Biggleswade. I took a number of walks and recorded the obstructions I found.

The problems I encountered arise from a variety of causes but seem to fall into two categories: thoughtless actions (or inactions, such as not cutting a hedge) on the part of an individual, and poor design. The council will claim that they are not responsible for either, because (most of) the roads aren't adopted; however, they passed the plans, so surely bear some responsibility. Design issues, it has to be said, are many, and may have arisen as a consequence of the planning authority's reluctance to challenge developer proposals at a time when the then Deputy Prime Minister was reported¹ as wanting to pressure local councils to accept higher density housing than councils might have wanted.

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2002/jul/18/publicservices.schools>

Walk One. Tuesday 12 July, 9.30 - 10.30 am.

Route: footpath beside Ivel Valley School - Stratton Way Post Office - Stratton Way - Footpath to north of cemetery and south of Edward Peake school - Walker Mead - Sullivan Court - Maunder Avenue - Hawking Drive

Obstructions found:

1. Beside Ivel Valley school, the footpath (shared with cyclists and occasional horse riders) is becoming overgrown with nettles. There's over 2 metres gap at the moment, but should someone fall into them they might receive a nasty injury.



2. Further along this path there is a 'bridleway gate' (I think it is called), designed to allow pedestrians, horse riders and cyclists through but not motorbikes. (It's not actually locked and I think motorbikes do use it occasionally, so what's the point?) There is an unsurfaced gap to one side to allow prams etc through; this is 90cm wide, a little over the 81.5 minimum recommended for a wheelchair user ², but this space is, like other parts of the path, becoming invaded by stinging nettles. Should 'chair users have to risk getting stung as they go around?

² <https://www.ada-compliance.com/space-allowance-reach-ranges>



3. On Stratton Way there are a number of parking spaces that are laid out so that cars park 'end on', that is, perpendicular to the footpath. Drivers often position their vehicles in such spaces with one set of wheels against the kerb, so that part of the vehicle overhangs the footpath - which is inconvenient to pedestrians, and against the spirit of Highway Code rule 244 if not actually the wording (the driver may not feel their vehicle is 'on' the pavement). One vehicle today was parked leaving around 95cm of the path clear.



4. The footpath that runs north of Biggleswade Cemetery and south of Edward Peake school is very overgrown.



There also used to be (and was intended to be) pedestrian access from this footpath to Compton Mead, but this has been closed off for around four years by one of the residents.



5. On Walker Mead, pedestrians walking north on the east side of the road and wishing to turn into Finzi Grove are confronted by an array of bollards, many of which are placed only around 60 cm from a fence (this, in addition to the path on the north side of Finzi Grove being obstructed by a parked car):





6. The footpath on the north side of Parry Rise was completely blocked by a parked car.



7. The roads on the west side of Walker Mead all have narrow footpaths on one side; this will lead to complications for some, especially wheelchair users, and when a car is parked on the side with the wide pavement (as in the photo, at Blackburn Way), for the traffic calming cobbles are not easy for those with mobility issues, and can cause a wheelchair to turn over.



8. Sullivan Court seems to have been laid out by someone with shares in a company that makes bollards; some may be there to stop 'ram raiding' but probably aren't substantial enough.



9. The obvious route across the square in Sullivan Court for pedestrians going from Sainsbury's to Planets Way or Maunder Avenue is littered with, er, things - an 'A' board, cafe furniture, blocks that form seating, an RAF Tornado nose cone, a tree, parked cars (in marked spaces), parking signs and a fence.



10. The south end of Blackburn Way is, if anything, worse for a pedestrian than the north end (pictured above, item 7):



11. One garden in Hawking Drive is very overgrown, reducing the effective width of the pavement to around a metre in places, perhaps less because of the corners around the parking bay:



The pavements in Hawking Drive also feature a surface that has been dressed with small - perhaps 5mm - shingle; this has caused two problems for pedestrians, which, although minor, act as a disincentive to walk along that route:

- Anyone wearing sandals or open shoes is likely to get a stone in their shoe, causing discomfort;
- The surface of the footpath is very abrasive, and anyone falling on it - and children do trip in the street - is liable to sustain more a severe graze injury than they would if the surface were smooth tarmac.

The rationale behind the choice of such a surface - which surely must have added to the cost of construction, and does nothing to encourage people to walk locally - is not known.

Walk Two. Tuesday 12th July, 2.30 - 3.00 pm

Route: Hawking Drive - Maunder Avenue - Aston Croft - (western recreation area) - Hunt Road - Maskin Drive - Sherrington Grove - Crick Road - Maskin Drive - Compton Mead - footpath south of Edward Peake School - Walker Mead - Chamberlain Park

Obstructions found:

12. On the south side of Hawking Drive a commercial vehicle was parked, obstructing most of the footpath:



13. On the north side of Maunder Avenue, a wheelie bin and a parked car in the way along the unmade footpath (this photo taken looking east):

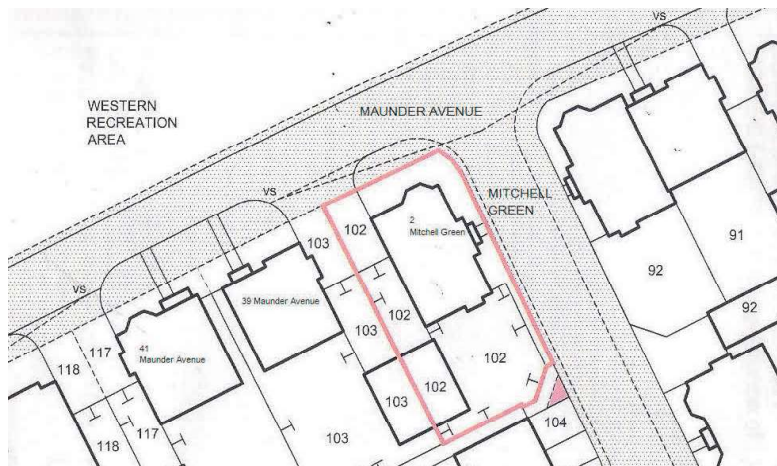


Bins are collected on a Thursday in King's Reach; this bin should surely have been in its owner's garden at this time. (Also, the delivery lorry in the background shows the problems caused by the narrow width of this and other roads on the development).

14. Further west on the north side of Maunder Avenue, a BT junction box cover protrudes somewhat untidily from the worn, unmade surface:



15. On the south side of Maunder Avenue, west of Mitchell Green, there is a width restriction:



A resident has used part of the adoptable footpath space at the point of this width restriction to extend their garden:



16. West of the junction with Aston Croft there is a dropped kerb to allow pedestrians to cross Maunder Avenue to reach the outdoor exercise equipment on the Western Recreation Area; the gradient of this appears to be around 1 in 5. Disabled groups³ recommend that ramps for wheelchairs should be no more than 1 in 12 for manual chairs, and 1 in 8 for powered ones. (The exercise equipment at the WRA is known to have been used by at least one wheelchair user as part of their rehab.)



17. Further west on Maunder Avenue the footpath (on the east side) is quite overgrown:

³ <https://www.brainline.org/article/wheelchair-ramp-information>



18. On Aston Croft the footpath appears to run on the east side, but was obstructed by parked vehicles:



19. Crossing Maunder Avenue onto the Western Recreational Area involves traversing a narrow, once-grassed verge in which concrete marker stones denote the edge of the adoptable road; in places these protrude from the unmade surface, posing a trip hazard:



20. In Hunt Road, the location of the footpath is unclear:



21. In Maskin Drive, a parked vehicle restricts the space available on the pavement on the west side:



22. At the junction of Sherrington Grove there was plenty of space, but many bollards, an overgrown buddleia, and another dustbin with a long wait for the refuse operatives:



23. In Crick Road, parking spaces seem to be marked out on the east side, and available, but opposite what appeared to be the footpath was blocked by a parked car:



the other side of which are more parking spaces, seeming located across what is meant to be a footpath:



24. Walking back round Maskin Drive, on the east side I found a garden waste bag posing a trip hazard and, beyond, a garden bin - both five days after they would have been emptied by the refuse team:



25. On the west side of Maskin Drive and Compton Mead are an untidy collection of bollards, protecting what seems to be the (badly aligned) footpath (there is a parking space on the other side), ending in a collection of randomly placed container plants:



26. Half the width of the footpath at the east end of Chamberlain Park was blocked by parked vehicles:



27. Farther along, there is a footpath on the south side of Chamberlain P, but partly blocked by bollards, and in very poor condition:



which seems to end in a confused jumble of plants beyond a parked car:



Walk Three. Saturday 16th July, 9.45 am - 12.30 pm

Route: Hawking Drive - Darwin Drive - Rutherford Way - Gilbert Avenue - Wensum Grove - Thames Bank - Baden Powell Way - Saxon Gate shops - Baden Powell Way - Thames Bank - Wensum Grove - Whittle Drive - Anderson Road - Sanger Avenue - Babbage Lane - Hawking Drive

Obstructions found:

28. At the west end of Hawking Drive the gravel-dressed footpath just comes to an end; to reach the footpath to Stratton Way pedestrians must cross an uneven, rough surface, which, in winter, becomes muddy, and is often used for parking:



29. To get to Darwin Drive pedestrians must cross either a rough, unsurfaced area (that was originally planted) or a narrow step that is inset with cobbles; neither are ideal solutions for a wheelchair user (it is not known why a dropped kerb was not used at this point, which is shown as a footpath on Google Maps):



30. It's not clear where the footpath is in Darwin Drive; pedestrians may end up walking in the middle of the road, which puts them at risk of a trip hazard from the badly-deteriorated block paved surface at the junction with Rutherford Way:



31. The footpath along Rutherford way is (unusually, for King's Reach) wide and was generally clear, until I reached Gilbert Avenue, where it was completely blocked by a parked car and a bin (two days after bin collection day) :



32. Farther along Gilbert Avenue what seems to have been intended as a footpath (the west side) was blocked by a parked car; beyond that, two bollards that would appear to achieve little, apart from forcing vehicles to pass closer to the houses on the east side than might be desired - these houses have front doors that open directly onto the road:



33. Wensum Grove features a similar unsurfaced footpath to Maunder Avenue, although does not have a proper kerb; the grassed area that I took to be a footpath was obstructed by overgrown hedges and parked cars, and, in places featured rough surfaces, or lush grass (which is difficult for wheelchair users):





34. At the end of Wensum Grove there is an unsurfaced path that leads to Baden Powell Way and the shops and sports centre at Saxon Gate; in winter this becomes muddy:



35. This path meets Baden Powell Way opposite the Biggleswade Green Wheel, but there is no crossing point - any pedestrian wishing to walk further, such as to the A1 Retail Park, has to either take this risk of crossing the 40mph road at this point, or walk further to the roundabout near Saxon Gate:



36. Walking east along Whittle Drive I encountered a pair of bollards, with a gap of about 110cm between them; the purpose of both is questionable, but the one closest to the hedge seems to achieve nothing:



37. At the end of Whittle Drive there is a junction similar to others seen around King's Reach, with no space for a wheelchair or pram to get around the traffic calmer on one side:



38. In Anderson Road, bollards have been placed on the narrow footpath, presumably to stop cars being parked there by families visiting the playground; unfortunately, these also more or less prevent use of the footpath by pedestrians:



39. In Sanger Avenue a lone bollard stands, seemingly for no purpose whatsoever:



40. To return to Hawking Drive involves crossing what was intended as a planted space, and then a path worn into the rough unsurfaced area that separates Hawking Drive and Babbage Lane:

