

Comments for Planning Application 25/00884/FP

Application Summary

Application Number: 25/00884/FP

Address: Aldi Stores Fairlands Way Stevenage Herts SG1 1FZ

Proposal: Incorporation of existing car park into foodstore car park, creation of a pedestrian route and ancillary works

Case Officer: Linda Sparrow

Customer Details

Name: Mr Teun van Leeuwen (Cycling UK Stevenage)

Address: [REDACTED] Stevenage [REDACTED]

Comment Details

Commenter Type: Organisation

Stance: Customer objects to the Planning Application

Comment Reasons:

Comment: This comment is submitted on behalf of Cycling UK Stevenage and is entirely focused on the aspects of this application that relate to cycling and active travel.

We are writing to formally object to the above planning application. Our objection specifically addresses the removal of part of Ditchmore Lane as an essential cycling link that connects Fairlands Way cycleway to the Old Town and Aldi. We urge the planning authority to pay special attention to cycling in this planning application, as it shares similarities with a previous planning decision that has severely reduced safe cycling access to the Town Centre: the changed layout of the Tesco car park and pedestrian/cycling bridge. This decision was taken approximately 25 years ago.

The inconvenience of the route across the Tesco car park is the most frequently mentioned Town Centre to Old Town connectivity problem in our engagement activities as a representative group. The current planning application attempts to fix the inconvenient Town Centre to Old Town connectivity that the Tesco car park planning application caused.

[DITCHMORE LANE IS ESSENTIAL FOR CYCLING]

Ditchmore Lane is an essential cycling link between Fairlands Way, Aldi, and the Old Town. Due to its limited use, interactions with motor vehicles are very rare. Despite being an old road, its gentle gradient means it falls largely within the standards set out in LTN 1/20. Alternative routes unfortunately do not, as these have inclines of between 7.1% and 14.5%. This is much more than the recommended maximum of 5% for 30m (LTN 1/20 10.8.23) and constitutes a critical safety risk where it is over 12.5% (ATE guidance: Critical safety issues for walking, wheeling and cycling).

Comfortable routes avoid steep gradients (LTN 1/20 5.2.14). The steep gradients make this route more difficult to cycle, disproportionately so for those with protected characteristics, such as women, older people, and disabled people.

[PROPOSED REMOVAL OF CYCLING LINK]

The application provides inconsistent information regarding cycle access. While the applicant acknowledges the current cycle route (Planning Statement [PS] 1.2, TN04 4.2) and claims the proposal will "improve cycle connectivity" (PS 4.1, 4.4; TN04 4.2), this is contradicted by other sections framing the route as pedestrian-only (PS 1.1, 4.1; TN04 5.1, 5.4; Application Form). Furthermore, the site plan includes "cyclists dismount" signage, undermining the claim of improved connectivity.

The Highway Authority and statutory consultee assumes in their response that the new path will remain for walking and cycling, just as Ditchmore Lane currently is, while also acknowledging the "cyclists dismount" signs. Such signs would, however, effectively ban cycling from the new path and remove a cycling link.

Cycling UK Stevenage views the current plans as retrograde for cycling, both in cases where a detour is required and where cycling is permitted on the path. Given the contradictory information in this planning application, we are responding to three possible intentions. At the end of our comment, we outline a preferred alternative.

[A: CYCLING IS BANNED FROM THE PROPOSED NEW PATH]

Banning cycling from the new path whilst removing an essential link will require people cycling to opt for detours. The proposal acknowledges the importance of pedestrian desire lines but ignores those for cycling. This is contrary to the Local plan policy for good design GD1, which aims to improve "the overall ease of movement within an area for all users" (all users includes those cycling); IT5 (i) which requires "safe, direct and convenient routes" and (ii) "Links to existing cycleways"; SP6a (ii) and IT7 (4) which support new pedestrian and cycle links with an emphasis on the Town Centre and the Old Town.

The applicant highlights an increase in safety given that, compared to a route that traverses the car park, the proposed route has a controlled crossing. However, this compares the proposed route to a theorised pedestrian desire line for those wanting to go from the Town Centre to the Old Town. There are three problems with this argument. Firstly, the applicant does not provide evidence that this route is commonly used or preferred (also noted by HCC). Secondly, it disregards the desire lines of people cycling. Thirdly, it disregards desire lines from other travel directions. The existing link is used for many other journeys besides travel between the Town Centre and the Old Town.

The view of Cycling UK Stevenage is that the removal of the current cycling link and the prohibition of the new route using dismount signs decreases cycle connectivity in a manner that is contrary to the policies of the local plan mentioned above.

[B: THE NEW PATH IS ALSO FOR CYCLING, BUT DISMOUNTING IS REQUIRED]

Dismount signs will cause cycling to be perceived as being banned, regardless of whether the local authority enacts a TRO for this. LTN 1/20 states in its summary principles (1.6) that dismount signs should not be used as they reduce the usability of a route for everyone and may exclude people riding non-standard cycles. Members of such groups have, in fact, objected to this planning application. LTN 1/20 clarifies the duty of the local authority under the Equality Act 2010 in ensuring that new infrastructure is accessible to all, explaining that adapted cycles, as well as traditional cycles, are used by many as a mobility aid.

This is not a matter of subjective views on convenience. We can see these principles reflected in the Cycling Level of Service (CLOs) assessment tool in LTN 1/20: requiring dismounting causes a path to have a score of 0 for Cohesion/Connections, whereas shared use typically results in a better score of 1. This means that the aggregate score of the town's cycle network would objectively decrease if dismounting were required.

[C: CYCLING IS PERMITTED ON THE PROPOSED NEW PATH]

As mentioned above, Ditchmore Lane in its current state represents a convenient and safe shared use path between Fairlands Way cycleway and the Old Town, with virtually no interactions with motor vehicles. The proposed removal of a section of Ditchmore Lane and the implementation of a new path would, even if cycling were allowed, offer a decrease in cycle convenience, one of the core principles in LTN 1/20.

The path in the proposal is not traffic free and exposes people cycling to risks that are absent in the current situation. Such interactions are particularly hazardous in a car park (also mentioned by the Highway Authority). The Junction Assessment Tool (LTN 1/20 Appendix B) could be used to assess the risk this introduces, but this assessment has not been provided.

All east-west foot and car traffic has priority. Foot traffic priority is designed in and will include parents with children (TN04 - Proposed Car Park Amalgamation). People walking and cycling will, in practice, give priority to motor vehicles as there is no signage suggesting otherwise. Even with cycling being permitted, this proposal would be a step backwards in safety and convenience, which is not supported by policies IT4, GD1, IT5, SP6, and IT7 from the local plan, nor the NPPF (117).

North-south cycle and pedestrian movements would interact and compete for space with people using the seating area and with east-west movements between the store and parked cars,

including parents with children (TN04 5.5). Walking/wheeling between a parked car and the store is an active-travel segment, but it is usually part of a car-based trip. Any conflict, particularly where east-west directions are prioritised, would decrease the convenience of this essential cycling link. The proposed design would add delay and conflict at the very point where the existing Ditchmore Lane link is quiet and direct. The current situation avoids any competition between the convenience of east-west car park access movements and those on a north-south active travel trip.

The design of the new path includes seating and other design measures, attempting to turn the path into a destination. While we are not opposed to this in principle, balance is missing from the proposed design. LTN 1/20 already regards shared use as a last resort (6.5.4) where various groups should be consulted prior to implementation. Street furniture such as seating can be used to discourage cycle through traffic (LTN 1/20 7.4.6) and the application mentions using design to discourage fast cycle traffic. It does so by reducing convenience.

Even if cycling is permitted on the proposed path, the interaction with motor vehicles and increased conflict with pedestrians would decrease the quality of the cycling link as it introduces a point of interaction with motor vehicles. Without a similar, or higher quality alternative route, we argue that the current cycle link should remain intact. Any proposed developments should not discourage cycling.

Finally, we have concerns about the consideration of the safety of women and girls in this design. The 'Safer Parks: Access for Women and Girls' report (Safer Parks Consortium, 2025) highlights the importance of clear sight lines, limiting concealment opportunities, appropriate vegetation, and careful bench placement. The proposed planting to screen the path from the car park risks reducing passive surveillance and increasing concealment, and this is especially problematic because the route is away from the main road where passive surveillance oversight is already limited. It is not clear from the application what assessment has been undertaken to show that these issues have been identified and mitigated.

[CYCLE PARKING]

The proposal significantly increases the number of car parking spaces, but does not increase the number of cycle parking spaces or improve their quality or placement. The current cycle parking facilities at Aldi are divided across two locations, north (next to Ditchmore Lane) and south. The cycle parking in the south is rarely used and is not directly reachable by cycle. The cycle parking in the north is further removed from the store entrance than the closest non-disabled car parking, is low in capacity, and is uncovered. The staff cycle parking uses a type of rack that is not recommended as it does not accommodate non-traditional cycles, offers poor stability, and requires bikes to be lifted, meaning it is unsuitable for some users (Place & Movement Planning and Design Guidance for Hertfordshire Part 4, Chapter 6 3.3). In line with national and local sustainable transport priorities, a planning application which aims to improve parking generally

should also improve cycle parking facilities.

[PREFERRED SOLUTION]

In our view, cycling and wheeling should be addressed to a similar degree as walking and driving. In line with SBC and HCC priorities we suggest that any new proposals prioritise walking, cycling, and wheeling. Any link between Fairlands Way cycleway, Aldi and the Old Town should maintain, or increase, the convenience of cycling. We agree with the comment submitted by the Highway Authority that a shared-use route alongside the eastern border of the car park is better for cycling than the design from the application. It would, however, not improve cycling whilst greatly improving infrastructure for motor vehicles.

These proposals are not mutually exclusive. Both a dedicated cycling link on the eastern border and an improved pedestrian and cycle link that goes straight across the car park could be implemented. In such a design, prohibiting cycling on the path through the car park would not be required, as people cycling would prefer to use the calmer traffic-free route along the eastern border.