

Talk Back

Talking Together about cycling through the town centre

Talking Together Talk Time session: 6th November, 2009 Central Hall, Dolphin Centre

There were heartfelt views on each side of the debate, and although there was evidence that some people's views changed during the course of the discussion there was no consensus about the way forward.

A number of key points and inferences stood out from the debate:

- How people behave and should behave in the large public spaces of the pedestrian heart is a very important question.
- Disabled people, particularly those with hearing impairments, visual impairments and impaired mobility have clear reasons for opposing cycling in the pedestrian heart. Disabled people being "buzzed" or shocked by cyclists was a common experience that caused anxiety in most and disorientation and very serious worries in some. These negative impacts are elucidated in the disability equality impact assessment.
- It appears that there may have been more collisions between cyclists and pedestrians in the pedestrian heart than have been reported to the Police.
- The Police themselves ride cycles in the pedestrian heart – the police representative's personal view was that the trial period had been successful.
- Few have a problem with responsible cyclists but many are concerned by the anti-social behaviour of those riding cycles dangerously.
- Some cyclists felt that the only responsible option was to dismount in the pedestrian heart, other cyclists felt that the health benefits and convenience of allowing cycling were strong arguments for continuing to permit it.
- CCTV analysis was cited by cyclists as evidence of the way that in 98% of cases where people and cyclists come into relatively close proximity, pedestrians are wholly unaffected. This analysis looked at over 300 cases on Bondgate.
- Solutions were suggested. Some felt that continuing to allow cycling may be less dangerous if cyclists had clearly marked routes through the town centre. Others felt that banning cyclists at particular times of day (before 9am and after 5pm) may work. There was considerable support for the need for better education for cyclists and talk of a need for a well-publicised code of conduct. These "middle ways" were not welcomed by those who felt either that policing them would be too difficult or that allowing cycling in pedestrian areas was either too dangerous or just wrong in principle.
- Cycling *per se* is not a form of anti-social behaviour.
- Many felt that dangerous cycling was perpetuated by an irresponsible few who would be unlikely to take notice of codes of practice, restrictions or

bans. There was an acknowledgement that this is not an argument for doing nothing.

- In some ways this issue sets a precedent about the way Darlington views sustainable transport and may have repercussions long into the future.
- Other places are awaiting with interest to see what a cycling demonstration town like Darlington decides to do.