

## **Appendix 6 – Additional correspondence relating to the impact of the proposals on blind and partially sighted pedestrians**

### **Background Information**

As part of the consultation process, information on the proposals for Seven Dials was distributed to a number of stakeholders, including the Brighton & Hove Federation of Disabled People (the FED). No formal response was received from the FED during the consultation period, but concerns were raised at a subsequent meeting with officers relating to the impact of the proposals on blind or partially sighted pedestrians. This primarily concerned the part of the proposal which suggests replacing the existing traffic light pedestrian crossings with zebra crossings.

Subsequent to the meeting with the FED, correspondence was received from the regional campaigns officer at the RNIB dated 18<sup>th</sup> December 2012, which was responded to by officers in the transport planning team on 24<sup>th</sup> December 2012. A copy of this correspondence is included below to ensure members of the Transport Committee are fully aware of these issues.

Further to the correspondence between officers and the RNIB, an email was sent to all members of the Transport Committee by the involvement officer at the FED dated 8<sup>th</sup> January 2013. This stated the FED's opposition to removal of the traffic light pedestrian crossings and replacement with zebra crossings. The FED are generally supportive of the remainder of the scheme.

### **Correspondence**

*The initial correspondence received from the RNIB dated 18<sup>th</sup> December 2012 is included below:*

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing regarding the recent redevelopment proposals for Seven Dials. Whilst I understand that the consultation period has now closed, I am afraid I was not aware of the proposals until now. However, given the scope of the project and implications for local blind and partially sighted people, I feel it is important to now respond on behalf of RNIB.

Seven Dials is an extremely busy junction that can be very difficult and dangerous for blind and partially sighted people to navigate. There are two elements of the proposals which concern me. Firstly, the removal of the guardrails, and secondly the removal of the controlled crossing points.

Whilst guard railing is often considered 'unsightly' and unnecessary, railings can be a vital location aid for blind and partially sighted people who use it to navigate and locate safe crossing points. This is of particular concern for any locals who have received mobility training at Seven Dials and will regularly rely on the railings in order to get around.

Of somewhat more concern, however, is the proposal to remove the controlled crossing points and replace them with zebra crossings. This will be a major problem for many blind and partially sighted people who may no longer feel confident and able to traverse Seven Dials. With so many lanes of traffic in close proximity, it will not be possible for people to listen to the traffic to tell when it is safe to cross. Local visually impaired people will be absolutely reliant on the signal crossings and tactile cones to tell them when to cross.

I would urge the council to reconsider the proposal to remove controlled crossing points, as this will make Seven Dials even more difficult and dangerous for blind and

partially sighted people to use. Given the close proximity of Blatchington Court Trust, a high number of blind and partially sighted people will regularly have to travel through Seven Dials. The added stress of the struggle of crossing the roads could force many people to have to travel with assistance - which means in many cases that they simply will not travel. This has an impact on independence and mental wellbeing.

Seven Dials is a prime example of why controlled crossings are useful. In areas of similar layouts where such crossings do not exist, I would expect there to be campaigns running to have controlled crossing points installed. Therefore it seems preposterous to me that Brighton and Hove City Council would consider removing them, when in all likelihood they will be forced to reinstate them later at the request of the disabled community.

I do hope that these remarks will be taken into consideration when the final decision is made. If I can be of assistance in any other way, then please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely,

RNIB Regional Campaigns Officer (South East)

*The response sent by officers in the transport planning team on 24<sup>th</sup> December 2012 was as follows:*

Dear RNIB Regional Campaigns Officer

Thank you for your email regarding the proposals for Seven Dials roundabout and the possible effect they may have on disabled and blind or partially sighted users.

Before discussing the proposals in detail, I think it is important to acknowledge the current very difficult and dangerous layout of the roundabout and surrounding areas. The current conditions are extremely challenging for even the most experienced cyclists, and facilities for pedestrians are poor, with narrow pavements, long and convoluted crossing routes and an accompanying extremely high volume and excessive speed of traffic. These factors combine to make Seven Dials amongst the worst junctions in terms of accidents in the city, with 23 casualties recorded in the last 3 years alone. These factors of course also mean that Seven Dials can be very difficult and potentially dangerous for disabled and blind or partially sighted people to navigate.

The city council has therefore developed a scheme that we believe will significantly reduce the number of accidents taking place at the roundabout, while also improving the environment for all users, in particular pedestrians and cyclists, as well as improving the general appearance of the area in keeping with its conservation areas status.

In acknowledging the potential impact of the proposals on disabled and blind or partially sighted users, the scheme has been discussed with members of local groups representing such users. The feedback with regards to the impact of the scheme on disabled users generally has been positive, and this is due to the increase in pavement space, removal of guardrailings and introduction of raised crossings, all of which are seen to be of benefit.

It is, however, accepted that some blind or partially sighted users and groups representing them consider that the removal of the current traffic light crossings and replacement with zebra crossings will have a negative impact on their ability to safely traverse the area. However, in considering the above, it is also important to understand the many benefits that the scheme will deliver to all users, including those

with visual impairments. Such benefits include a significant reduction in the amount of carriageway space available for vehicles, leading to a far more controlled and slower movement of traffic through the area as well as much widened pavements and greatly reduced crossing distances for pedestrians. The introduction of zebra crossings in place of traffic lights is intended to significantly reduce the waiting times for pedestrians, who currently have little choice but to wait for the green man to appear, and the slow response time causes many people to cross the road during the red man phase, bringing with it obvious dangers.

The speed of traffic would be further reduced by the fact that the crossings are to be raised, and thus the desire is to create an environment where vehicles give way to pedestrians and a sense of pedestrian priority is created across the entire area instead of it being heavily dominated by vehicular traffic as it is currently. It is therefore felt that zebra crossings are fundamental to changing the way the area operates by giving greater priority to pedestrians and enabling crossing on demand rather than waiting for traffic lights to change.

The issue of zebra crossings has also been discussed with the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association and whilst they also agree that traffic lights provide the highest level of benefit, they do acknowledge that in simplistic terms, zebra crossings are accessible and useable for visually impaired people. They recognise that amongst partially sighted users, the movement to cross the Zebra maybe delayed as the person needs to ensure they are both orientated and also able to identify when traffic has stopped by listening and possibly using some remaining functional vision (if they have any) before they decide to cross.

To allay any fears about a possible increase in accidents involving partially sighted pedestrians, the safety record of several of the busiest zebra crossings in the city has been reviewed, including the very popular facilities on Western Rd / Church Rd in the city centre and the facility closest to Seven Dials, located in Davigdor Road. In the last 3 years, there have been no accidents at any of these locations involving partially sighted pedestrians, and the safety record of these overall is excellent with no more than one 'slight' pedestrian accident recorded at any of the locations.

The feedback to the public consultation has also been analysed further and responses from those who indicated they have a disability have been considered separately. The response to the proposals from those with a disability was positive, with 59% indicating support for the changes to the roundabout (49 people with a disability responded to the consultation in total).

I hope the above is useful and shows that a number of factors have been considered in developing these proposals. It is understood that a change in the physical layout of a busy area such as Seven Dials needs to be carefully communicated to those users with visual impairments and therefore the council would be very pleased to work with you in identifying and contacting such people to ensure they are aware of the possible changes. We would also very much like to work with you on any issues that may arise during the detailed design stage, such as correct layout and appearance of tactile paving. If you feel you can be of any help in relation to these matters then please do let me know.

Kind Regards

Principal Transport Planner

*Further correspondence was received from the RNIB following the above response but has not been included in this document. A copy of any further correspondence is available on request.*

## Summary

The correspondence above demonstrates that there are some outstanding concerns relating to the impact of replacing the traffic light crossings with zebra crossings, specifically in relation to blind or partially sighted pedestrians.

As stated in the response to the RNIB, the city council believes significant benefits will result from the installation of zebra crossings that will benefit pedestrian users in the area. A review of the safety record of some of the busiest zebra crossings in the city indicates an excellent safety record and no reported accidents involving blind or partially sighted pedestrians.

A further issue to note that is not mentioned in the correspondence above is that there are a particularly high number of complaints to the Council relating to drivers ignoring red lights at Seven Dials presenting an obvious potential hazard to the pedestrian, particularly those who are blind or partially sighted.

Having carefully considered the representations from the RNIB and other local groups representing disabled, blind or partially sighted users, as well as the responses of individuals who identified themselves as having a disability, it is not proposed to amend the proposals at this time. The Council will work closely with local blind and visually impaired groups during and after implementation to determine whether or not the concerns expressed will be borne out in practice. The Council will also work with the Fed to identify any partially sighted users of Seven Dials and work with those users to ensure the changes are communicated effectively and alternative quieter routes identified if this is deemed necessary.

If it is found that the new layout creates additional problems for blind or partially sighted users, the Council could consider reverting one or more of the zebra crossings to a traffic light crossing. This would not incur substantial wasted expenditure as the existing traffic lights are now over 19 years old, and the useable life of a typical traffic light installation is 10 – 15 years, meaning they would need to be replaced in the near future were they to be retained at this location.