**The March 2018 (Do minimal) Alternative:**

A proposal supported by the Executive committee of Brighton Area Buswatch.

Written by Peter Elvidge (Secretary) 15-3-2018

Brighton Area Buswatch (the local bus user group) remains deeply concerned about the Valley Gardens scheme, so much so we have created this new alternative.

Our earlier comprehensive proposal (‘The Alternative’) may have been seen by some, as being too comprehensive!

Our ‘Do minimal’ 2018 Alternative heads in the opposite direction, with the aim of matching the present council proposal, as closely as possible; as can be seen from the attached diagrams. This would make it even easier to implement, even at this late stage.

These could be summarised as:-

1. Provision of effective bus lanes, with proper enforcement.
2. Improvements to the St. Peter’s bus stops.
3. Adjustments to the Grand Parade/Church Street junction.

Broad overview and details:

Our first priority must be the retention of the existing bus lanes. These currently work well, providing very useful bus priority in both directions- from St. Peter’s Church, to/from near Edward Street. However, current plans are to formally remove these bus lanes, and introduce a low usage corridor. However, for this to act as a proper bus corridor, the signing and camera enforcement would need to be guaranteed being close to 100% effective.

This looks to be far from the case, giving us additional serious concerns over the proposals.

As far as is known, the suggested ‘bus lane’ signage has no legal standing on its own. So without there also being formal bus lanes, it would probably not be enforceable (and so would be open to legal challenge). Obviously if there are examples where this signage has worked, without a formal bus lane, where the bus lane would otherwise be under great pressure, and is not in a shopping area; then we would withdraw our concerns.

Enforcement cameras would serve little purpose, if there is nothing to enforce!

In brief: our greatest concern is the likely lack of any *true* bus lanes northbound and southbound from Trafalgar Street.

Problems- heading north: Even if northbound traffic enforcement worked well at the North Road junction (and there are some question marks over this); there would still be considerable traffic turning left out of North Road, on to the former bus corridor (especially when the east side of Valley Gardens becomes congested).

All this traffic has to go somewhere. Without proper enforcement, there is a high risk that this general traffic will heavy ‘misuse’ this corridor, causing buses to suffer from considerable delays, as they head north towards the London Road shopping area, on the former bus lanes!

Observations made at the St. Peter’s Place junction, show that when the junction becomes congested (most days, for a substantial period of the year- often for several hours a day); it is not the junction itself which is the primary problem, but northbound traffic queueing back from the Oxford Street traffic signals, preventing traffic moving through the junction. This does not appear to have been taken into consideration, in the traffic model, which is said to show the junction to be free-flowing.

Relocating A23 northbound traffic from York Place to St. Peter’s Place will make little difference to junction capacity, and any marginal improvement is likely to be more than offset by Lewes/University bus services (often using bendy buses) being forced to turn right at the junction, which is likely to make the junction significantly worse.

The need for a Southbound bus lane: At busier times, when traffic on the east side of the valley become congested (far more likely than at present, because of the capacity restraint at the Grand Parade/Church Street junction). This will make it even more attractive for general traffic to use the former bus lanes, in a southbound direction. Without effective enforcement south from Trafalgar Street, general traffic would be free to use the former southbound ‘bus route’, particularly causing problems at the south-eastbound ‘bus’ exit, towards Edward Street.

As can see from the diagram, the first of our **2018** (do minimal) **proposals** is more holistic, and takes into consideration Trafalgar Street may not be an ideal route for substantial traffic flows.

As stated at the beginning, the design mirrors as closely as possible the current proposal, so the scheme retains all proposed pedestrian/cycle facilities. Thanks to better enforcement, the two lanes on the west side of the valley, are likely to carry far less traffic than the current proposal. So reinforcing the ease of access into the gardens from the west.

Bus measures: This maintains all the positives from the current scheme, while creating a number of positive bus measures including:- effectively maintaining a northbound bus lane, all the way from the Church Street/Marlborough Place junction, up to the St Peter’s Place junction; so preventing buses from potentially being seriously delayed along this corridor, and especially entering the London Road shopping area. It would also retain a partial southbound bus lane, preventing through traffic, while maintaining essential access.

Further positives include significant time savings for buses heading to/from the universities/ Lewes, and it would relieve pressure on the London Road/St. Peter’s Place junction.

For further details of this proposal, together with our concerns (and solution) to problems at the *St. Peters bus stops*, are explained in Appendix A (and seen on our attached diagrams).

**The Grand Parade/Church Street improvement**: While retaining effective bus lanes remains our highest priority, two other important issues are addressed in our second proposal.

By making simple changes to the Grand Parade/Church Street junction, potential difficulties for buses turning right out of the ‘bus’ corridor (towards Edward Street) can be avoided, and the likely problems at the Grand Parade/Church Street junction can be significantly reduced. This proposal can be found in Appendix B.

Conclusion: The importance of retaining the bus lanes in Valley Gardens should not be underestimated, neither should our other proposals.

While the group welcomes the promise to *consider* further bus lanes, outside the scheme; however it notes that no finance has been committed towards such proposals, and further roll out of ‘intelligent’ traffic signals (beyond the Valley Gardens scheme), is under some doubt.

The vital part buses play in maintaining the city’s economy, and keeping the city moving needs to be recognised (including providing a viable alternative to using a car). This is currently partly reflected in the area having the highest bus usage (pro-rata), outside London.

We feel the current proposal risks considerably undermining the current positive bus message. And could potentially be very damaging to bus services.

**By making relatively simple changes, our proposals offer a** **substantial improvements over the current proposal.**  Buses are important.

We would welcome your support! *Written by* *Peter Elvidge (Secretary).*

**The main ‘March 2018’ (Do minimal) proposal in greater detail. Appendix A**

Hopefully, we have shown why retaining bus lanes – both northbound and southbound from Trafalgar Street, is vital. However, questions arise whether it is possible for the suggested enforcement proposals to work, without forcing significant traffic flows, to turn left (or right) up Trafalgar Street. This road is narrow and unsuitable for heavy traffic flows; therefore, we have assumed this will be unacceptable. So, to retain effective bus priority enforcement, this means an alternative access route would need to be found.

The new access route: Our suggestion for retaining the essential bus lanes, yet maintain very local access, is to reopen the east-west crossing point, south of St. Peter’s Church.

This new crossing would be very low traffic route, designed as a mixed priority/shared space, similar to New Road (or an official ‘pedestrian zone’), so pedestrians and cyclist will still feel they have priority over traffic. The unity of the park would remain undiminished.

In fact, traffic would be so light, people may have to wait nearly three minutes, if they wanted to see an eastbound bus (plus a few taxis), and so it could hardly be called a major traffic route.

Westbound traffic should prove to be equally almost no existent. Because this westbound ‘access’ traffic, would need to turn left, then double back on itself, it means only traffic that genuinely requires access to properties would want to use the route. In any given hour, this level of traffic could be close to zero. In short, most cyclists and pedestrians would hardly know this is a traffic route (see Appendix D- extra fine detail- for more details of the proposal).

Recapping/elaborating on the many of the advantages of this proposal:

1. Starting from the Church Street/ Marlborough Place junction, a useful northbound bus lane it would be created. Beyond the St. Peter’s crossover, this would effectively be retained northbound towards the London Road shops. Helping bus towards exiting this area unimpeded.
2. It would create a southbound bus lane, from the London Road, past St. Peter’s Church, to the St. Peter’s crossover; so preventing through traffic delaying buses in a southbound direction (this will be particularly advantageous under busy traffic conditions, when this road could otherwise suffer considerable unwanted ingress, causing substantial delays to buses).
3. It would provide Lewes/University buses with a much faster northbound route (potentially saving 5 minutes, compared with the current longer/more complex route, and the expected problems at the St. Peter’s bus stops). This would be helped by the new northbound bus lane, on the east side of St. Peter’s Church.
4. It would relieve unnecessary extra pressure in the London Road/St. Peter’s junction, as northbound Lewes/University buses would be removed from the junction. This would also help relieve issues at the St. Peter’s bus stops.
5. As buses are no longer forced to turn right, and head eastbound along St. Peter’s Place, it means this road space can be better utilised, by providing a westbound bus lane in St. Peter’s Place, so accelerating southbound bus journey times for Lewes and University services (particularly useful under very busy traffic conditions, when this area could otherwise become congested).
6. A new eastbound bus lane should also be created- from near the Pavilion gates, towards the Edward Street ‘bus’ exit.
7. At the Church Street/ Marlborough Place junction, there would obviously be traffic restriction signs for northbound traffic; and only buses/taxis/cycles would be permitted to turn-left out of North Road, into the northbound bus lane.
8. While not essential- for safety reasons, a seven-metre bi-directional bus-lane (rather than 6.5 metres wide) is recommended throughout.
9. General access would be maintained to all properties- *see Appendix D*.

*Appendix A continued*

St. Peter’s bus stops. With a combination of problems, reinforcing each other; we are concerned the current design of the St. Peter’s bus stops, risks causing significant problems to bus services. So much so, to avoid this, we could lose most bus services from these bus stops. These bus stops are important, not just because they are a major interchange point; but because for many bus services, they are the closest bus stops to Brighton Station (we believe in integrated public transport).

To help solve this problem: we are proposing the provision of bus stop lay-bys, on each side of the road. These would not encroach on pre-existing pavements on either side, and would avoid any potential taxi/bus conflict.

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**The Grand Parade/Church Street improvement\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Appendix B**

While the issues just covered are arguably the most important, the usefulness of the second proposal (as shown on the Grand Parade/Church Street diagram), should not be undervalued.

This aims to reduce problems at the Grand Parade/Church Street junction, and help buses turn right- out of the ‘bus exit road’ towards the Edward Street junction.

While this junction could be referred to as the Grand Parade/Marlborough Place junction; to improve visualisation, we refer to this - as the ‘Grand Parade/Church Street’ junction.

Grand Parade improved bus lane exit:

Looking to the future, it has been suggested there could be a southbound bus lane- between the Grand Parade / Church Street junction, and Edward Street, if phase 3 of the Valley Gardens scheme goes ahead.

However, this is not absolutely certain. In the meantime- we believe the current design could make it quite difficult for buses to turn right out of this ‘bus’ road, especially when the area becomes more congested- as is more likely to occur, when the seafront/West Street (Shelter Hall) roadworks are completed.

This Bus User alternative (as shown on the diagram), would create a genuinely useful short bus lane, which gives sufficient manoeuvring space for buses to be able to turn right out of the ‘bus road’, then merge easily with general traffic, even without any bus lane during stage 3. This would require only minimal extra road width.

The bus lane has been designed so that it could be easily extended, utilising the pre-existing kerb line toward Edward Street, if phase 3 goes ahead.

However, this idea would work far more effectively, if the proposed eastbound section of road- between the Pavilion Gate and Grand Parade was restricted to bus (etc.) only. Otherwise, this important right-turn is likely to be swamped by general traffic.

Even a small amount of general traffic would cause considerable difficulties to buses turning right. To start understanding the issues, just imagine the problems caused by a similar number of cars using the existing southbound bus lane, heading towards Edward Street!

**The Grand Parade (southbound)/Church Street junction problem**

It has been suggested, that the traffic models show this junction to be free-flowing. This is likely to prove to be- far from the case, even utilising quieter autumnal traffic flow data.

If proven, this problem is likely to have occurred, because the modelling assumes that there are two southbound ‘ahead’ through traffic lanes (this assumption was reinforced by the previous road markings). The problem with this assumption- is that Church Street right-turn, is a major traffic movement. Originally, if just one vehicle wanted to turn-right, it would have brought the whole offside lane to a standstill. Potentially halving southbound traffic flow, at a junction which is said to running close to 100% of capacity.

While the council should be praised for tacitly acknowledging the problem, by introducing a mini right-turn lane. However, this still only has the capacity to store perhaps two cars. Once more than two cars want to turn right, it will still bring traffic in the offside lane to a standstill, and so still dramatically reducing southbound capacity- which is likely to cause long southbound traffic queues. On many weekends, and at busier times of year; this risks causing significant delays to buses, as these traffic queues extend well beyond the bus lanes.

This was reinforced by traffic counts made by a member of the group on an ordinary summer Saturday. This showed the junction to be fully at capacity, even with two through lanes open, and this is before the time absorbing- extra signal phases are added to the junction. Equally important, traffic observations indicated far more drivers turning right at the junction at weekends, than they do on an autumnal mid-weekday peak (possibly heading towards the car-parks). This means the offside lane will come to a standstill much quicker at the weekend, than as modelled; adding to problems at the junction.

While the council has suggested that *if t*his junction suffers from severe congestion problems, traffic could be banned from turning right into Church Street, leaving traffic to do a ‘U’-turn at the Old Steine. However this will be problematic, when traffic in the area slows to a near standstill; and it would be far better to find an alternative solution, at the design stage.

**Our modest improvement proposal:** To partly alleviate this problem; running alongside our improved Grand Parade/Church Street bus lane exit, our design includes a marginally more generous road layout, just north of the junction.

This will increase the storage space for vehicles wanting to turn right into Church Street, to perhaps five cars. So traffic in the offside lane would continue to flow freely for significantly longer, before grinding to a standstill. While it should be a substantial improvement over the current proposal, it would be wrong to suggest this will be a total solution.

*All our proposals are recommended!*

A new **‘Intermediate Alternative’** is also likely. This answers many more questions, without being saddled with the potentially controversial northbound overflow lane.

**Cycling & walking:** **Appendix C**

It should be emphasised that under all our options, we are proposing to retain (or replace) all the council’s planned cycling and pedestrian facilities -including crossings.

**Non-bus proposals**: To show we do not just care just about bus services. We have also suggested two totally optional non-bus proposals.

(1) The first would be a great new pedestrian/Toucan crossing linking the Pavilion Gardens to the main part of Valley Gardens (usefully also serving the south side of Church Street). The substantial number of pedestrians expected to make use of the crossing, are likely to appreciate the single direct crossing, instead of needing to use two ‘dog-legged’ crossings.

(2) The second idea is to improve the cycle/pedestrian facilities across St. Peter’s Place (Waterloo Place junction). By separating the northbound and ahead signal phases (in Waterloo Place); and by reducing the stagger of the crossing (creating a slight diagonal), it would be possible for cyclists and pedestrians- to cross the junction in a single movement, at off-peak times. Cyclists in particular, are likely to appreciate this improvement.

**Some extra fine details:** **Appendix D**

This appendix contains some extra fine details- not covered elsewhere; but is less important.

**Maintaining access to properties (from Appendix A):** While maintaining access to properties (especially delivery access) is important, this must not be at the expense of undermining bus services, by risking the withdrawal of the important bus lanes.

All these proposals will maintain access to all properties, while retaining the vital bus lanes.

The few vehicles requiring access to Gloucester Place, Gloucester Street and Marlborough Place, would gain access by turning left, across the reopened St. Peter’s crossover, and turn left again. As traffic would be turning back on itself, it would basically mean only very local access would want to use the route, and as a by-product would substantially reduce unwanted traffic on the west side of the valley.

Access to York Place, and a tiny section of Trafalgar Street is more difficult. And so three sub-ideas are suggested. The first sub-option (shown) is to allow delivery traffic access to this area during a very restricted time period (e.g. 9.30 to 11.30am)- using the St. Peter’s crossover. The time chosen, is likely to be least advantageous to unauthorised traffic. It is suggested special vehicle permits would also be available, for essential access at other times. Additional general enforcement is suggested.

The second option would be to allow southbound delivery traffic to turn left into York Place, then this very limited southbound traffic would turn right up Trafalgar Street. This would maintain access, yet provide a full bus lane northbound towards the London Road (and southbound from Trafalgar Street). With the exception of close to Trafalgar Street junction, there are no shops between Trafalgar Street and Gloucester Street, requiring access. Under all options, it is suggested the proposed loading bay is relocated further north.

The third option (and least likely) is more complex (too complex for details to be included here). Basically this would allow delivery access to York Place, via Trafalgar Street (eastbound). However, to prevent through traffic using the route, major changes would need to be made to Trafalgar Street. Obviously, the cycle contraflow would be retained.

**The Gloucester Street pedestrian crossing (from Appendix A**)**:**

The design assumes that the main pedestrian crossing near Gloucester Street, is moved further north. This has several advantages:- (1) It provides much more convenient access to the St. Peter’s bus stops from the Albion Hill/Richmond Parade area (2) It is a similar walking distance between Richmond Parade and Gloucester Street, as current plans, so would not inconvenience pedestrians. (3) By utilising the existing southern kerb-line (whenever possible), it should be quicker and easier to build the proposed mixed priority crossover. The core section of this crossover is expected to be at the same level, as surrounding pavements; with the route differentiated by different surface treatment. (4) If desired, in future- a short new cycle lane could be created between the new zebra crossing, and Gloucester Street (dotted line on diagram); so creating an enhanced cycling route between the Lewes Road/Albion Hill area, and parts of the North Laine.

If moving the crossing is unacceptable, there are other alternatives.

***Further aspect of the* Marlborough Place/Church Street *junction (Appendix B****)*: At the Church Street/ Marlborough Place junction, there would obviously be traffic restriction signs for northbound traffic.

If it was thought the right-turn lane facilities, for traffic turning right from Marlborough Place into Church Street, were insufficient; we have also created a more substantial right-turn design (not enclosed). However with traffic also likely to be banned from turning right out of North Road, into Marlborough Place; this is currently not thought to be necessary.

*Buses are vital to the city, so the Valley Gardens scheme should reflect this.*

*However as one executive member pointed out, maintaining a relatively low congestion route for emergency vehicles, could be even more important!*