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Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing to you to about cycling safety in Hitchin. I have lived in the town for 2.5 years, and cycling is my main mode of transport. I cycle most days, often with one or both of my small children on my bike in child seats.

Although there are many areas of the town that are pleasant to cycle through (such as Bancroft Park or Ransom's Recreation ground), there are also many roads where cyclists are at risk from motorists.

For example, on Walsworth Road, leading up to the traffic lights at the top of Hermitage Road, in order to turn right, cyclists must manoeuvre across two lanes of traffic. Car drivers are frequently more concerned with getting through the lights before they change than watching out for other road users, and consequently, cyclists are vulnerable in this manoeuvre. Similarly, on the Paynes Park one way system, in order to access the library coming up from Brand Street, cyclists must cross oncoming traffic and position themselves in the right-hand lane, while cars and heavy goods vehicles attempt to pass in both lanes. Motorists are often agitated by the well-known problems with traffic flow at this set of junctions, and consequently, fail to give cyclists the distance and time to use the road safely.

There are also places where it would make sense to create a bike lane on a one-way street permitting cyclists to use the street to access cycling routes. For example, Whinbush Road is one-way at the Walsworth Road end, but this is a major route to and from the town centre, for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists alike. Indeed, living as I do at the beginning of the one-way section, I can inform you that on average 5-10 cars come the wrong way down the one-way section per day – perversely, often performing this manoeuvre at high speeds, since they know they are breaking the law in doing so and must exit the area quickly to avoid detection.

In writing to you about this issue, I also wish to bring to your attention a recent incident on Walsworth Road. On Monday 3 February 2020, at 5.50pm, I was cycling my 5-year-old daughter to Rainbow Brownies at Walsworth Road Baptist Church, accompanied by my other daughter, aged 3. I positioned myself to turn right into Harrison Close, in order to dismount and access the church via the pavement. There was no traffic behind me when I executed this manoeuvre, but as there was traffic coming the other way, towards the town centre, I was forced to wait for a safe gap to turn.

As I was waiting, a car drove into the back of my bike, at approximately 30 mph. My children and I were thrown from the bike into the road, and my bike was shunted down the road approximately 10 meters from the force of the impact. As my children and I lay in the road, a large crowd of motorists and bystanders gathered to offer assistance. Paramedics and the police were called (log 03022020-578). I did not dare move my elder daughter from her position, as she was on the rear of the bike, where the car had struck us, and the damage to the bike was severe enough to fear a spinal injury. We were assessed by paramedics and sent to A&E in the Lister Hospital.

I sustained injuries to my right leg, right arm and left ankle; by some miracle my children received only minor bruises. We were all very badly shaken, and it has taken me a long time to get over the shock of this incident. I still experience flashbacks while walking down Walsworth Road. I have not

yet been able to cycle again as my bike was a complete write-off. The driver stopped and cooperated with the police; I am now pursuing an insurance claim against him.

Walsworth Road is a long, straight and relatively wide road where motorists feel able to increase their speed, often beyond the upper speed limit of 30mph. Traffic on this road is made up not only of the usual commuter cars – an increasing number of which are excessively large, heavy and polluting SUVs – but also abnormally large recycling lorries, and other HGVs, heading to the industrial areas outside Hitchin, or just passing through the town on this route.

The surface of this road is particularly bad the entire length of it on the Queen Mother Theatre side (i.e. from the roundabout to the Hermitage Road traffic lights). This means that cyclists heading into town are obliged either to risk being shaken from their bikes by the many craters and potholes, or to sit out further into the traffic, leaving them vulnerable to the behaviour of the motorists behind (who often become impatient when faced with a cyclist 'blocking their way').

The paths on both sides are busy at various times with crowds of schoolchildren, shoppers, residents and visitors, coming from the station into town. There are few safe places to cross the road in between the roundabout and the Hermitage Road lights. Even to reach the comparative safety of the zebra crossings at the end of Benslow Lane/Highbury Road, pedestrians must first take their chances in crossing Verulam Road or Walsworth Road itself via an island in the middle of the two lanes of traffic.

I would urge councillors to consider improving safety for all road users in Hitchin, and especially on Walsworth Road where action is needed to protect cyclists and pedestrians. Improvements here would be of great benefit to the town and would make this busy road with fast-moving traffic a much more welcoming place for all.

For example, a pedestrian crossing controlled with lights in the middle section would have the dual advantage of providing a safe crossing point for anyone using the Hillside car park, or heading to any of the schools and nurseries around Benslow Lane/Highbury Road, and also slowing down the traffic by requiring it to stop regularly for pedestrians (much like the effect of the crossing on Nightingale Road).

I look forward to hearing from you on these matters.

Yours sincerely

Dr Anna Tristram