

ITEM: 06-WINDSOR ABC BICYCLE GREENWAY / NCN422

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1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 To inform the Cycle Forum about proposals for leisure and utility cycle routes between Windsor, Ascot, Bracknell and Crowthorne.

2. Background

- 2.1 The south of the borough has very few cycle routes. The area has a dense network of heavily-trafficked A and B roads, many of which are constrained by historic road layouts with narrow carriageways and footways. This makes for unpleasant and potentially hazardous cycling conditions and means that it is impossible to make provision for cyclists within the public highway. As such, cycling levels are very low and cars are being used unnecessarily for local journeys that could readily be made on foot or by bike.
- 2.2 There is a strong demand for improving cycle routes to and through the area. The Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale Neighbourhood Plan identifies the need to 'establish or enhance cycle routes that link all the villages in our area and beyond, avoiding heavily trafficked routes where possible'. A Neighbourhood Plan Working Group has been formed to identify and progress cycle routes in the area.
- 2.3 Charters School is the largest secondary school in the borough, with more than 1,500 pupils. They attract pupils from a wide catchment, including many pupils from Bracknell, as well as pupils from the Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale area. There are currently no safe cycling routes to the school and pupils have launched a petition on the '38 Degrees' website (<https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/windsor-abc-bicycle-greenway>), asking the Crown Estate for assistance with progressing local cycle routes as the biggest landowner in the area.
- 2.4 A workshop was organised in December 2013 to discuss cycle routes in the Windsor Area, with local residents, cycling groups and other stakeholders. Improving links between Windsor and the south of the borough was identified as one of the top priorities. The current routes through Windsor Great Park are indirect and they are also not available after dark, since Crown Estate locks the gates. This makes them unsuitable as winter commuter routes. The alternative road links are not considered to be suitable for cycling with several cycling casualties having occurred in the last five years, including a fatality on Sheet Street Road.
- 2.5 Also, LEGOLAND® is supportive of achieving a cycle route between their site and the south of the borough. Many of their seasonal staff are young people on low salaries, who may not be able to afford to own or run a car – improving cycle access to the site would provide employment opportunities to young people living in the south of the borough and would help to reduce the number of car based trips to the site.

3. Proposed Routes

Windsor ABC Bicycle Greenway

- 3.1 The Neighbourhood Plan Group has identified a number of potential off-road routes that would link Windsor, Ascot, Bracknell (via The Lookout, which is an important local

cycling destination) and Crowthorne (which has 3 bicycle shops). These routes are shown in Appendix 1 and are collectively known as the 'Windsor ABC Bicycle Greenway' linking Windsor – Ascot – Bracknell – Crowthorne.

- 3.2 The proposed route would use existing permitted cycle paths through Windsor Great Park between Windsor and Cheapside and an existing signed quiet route to Ascot. The section between Ascot and South Ascot is within the Council's control and it is proposed to carry out surfacing improvements to Wells Lane and St George's Lane in the 2015/16 financial year to make the route suitable for cycling.
- 3.3 A key focus for the Windsor ABC Group is the off-road route between South Ascot and The Lookout, which passes from Swinley East across Swinley Road into Swinley West, which relies upon the support of the Crown Estate (as the main landowner) who currently ban cycling in these areas. The Windsor ABC Group has been inspired by Bicycle Greenways in The Pyrenees. These are signposted and fenced with holes to allow free passage of wildlife. The fences would discourage cyclists from entering the adjacent land, thereby addressing some concerns of The Crown Estates.
- 3.4 James Evans, as former Chair of the Cycle Forum met with the Deputy Ranger in January 2015 to discuss options for progressing routes through the Great Park and Swinley Forest, which had been agreed with the Cycle Forum and the Neighbourhood Plan Group. The proposals were rejected by the Deputy Ranger on the following grounds:
 - The effect of routeing cyclists through areas such as Buttersteep Hill that are covered by environmental designations.
 - The routes are sometimes used by farm vehicles, which churn up the surface, making them unsuitable for cycling.
 - Security and privacy concerns associated with cyclists passing close to sensitive residential properties such as Tower Hill.
 - Health and safety implications of routeing cyclists through a working forest where tree-felling operations may be taking place.
 - The likelihood of attracting additional cyclists to Windsor Great Park and the Lookout, which are already over-crowded at weekends, with frequent conflicts between cyclists and other park users.
- 3.5 The Neighbourhood Plan Group has responded by suggesting alternative options that help to mitigate some of these concerns, such as routeing cyclists away from the Tower Hill property and providing two alternative routes between the A332 Swinley Road and the A322 Bagshot Road, which means that if one route is closed for forestry purposes, then the other route can be kept open.
- 3.6 The proposed routes are for the most part already open to walkers and / or horse riders and there is already evidence of a significant amount of unauthorised cycling usage, so formalising cycling usage of these paths would have little additional impact. Some of the routes are already surfaced, so minimal works would be required to make the paths suitable for cycling. Providing safe cycling routes to The Lookout would help to reduce pressure on car parking at the site, which is currently operating at capacity. The new routes would also help to spread cyclists across a wider area rather than focusing them on the Lookout and the Great Park.
- 3.7 The Neighbourhood Plan Group has aspirations to link the Windsor ABC route to a local cycle route network that would connect the various settlements in the south of the borough and Charters School, thus catering for a wide variety of recreational and utility

cycling journeys. They are actively progressing discussions with various local landowners and developers to secure new off-road cycle routes to Charters School. These routes are highlighted on the map in Appendix 1.

NCN 422

- 3.8 The Windsor ABC Bicycle Greenway is primarily intended as a recreational off-road cycle route suitable for local families. Although some members of the Windsor ABC Group are keen cyclists, the group wants to encourage non-cyclists onto bikes without fear of interacting with road traffic.
- 3.9 In order to cater for utility / commuter cycle, a parallel route is being progressed. This would connect Newbury – Reading – Wokingham – Bracknell – North Ascot – Windsor. The proposed route is shown in Appendix 2. As well as serving the main urban areas, it would also serve LEGOLAND®, which is a major employer in the area. This route would link into the National Cycle Network (NCN) at Newbury, Reading and Windsor. It has the support of Sustrans and has provisionally been given the designation NCN 422.
- 3.10 The section of route between North Ascot and Windsor mostly utilises quiet roads, surfaced public rights of way and highway verges. However, there is a section along Winkfield Road where some Crown Estate Land may be required. This route was discussed with Crown Estate at the meeting in January 2015 and was the only option between Ascot and Windsor that they were willing to consider. It still has a number of challenges associated with topography, drainage, street lighting, planning and environmental designations that would need to be overcome.
- 3.11 The route is actively being progressed by the five affected local authorities, and the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership has given approval to part-fund the scheme, subject to preparation of a satisfactory business case. Consultants have been appointed to prepare the business case. The section between North Ascot and Windsor is the most challenging and consultants have been appointed to undertake a feasibility study and outline design for this element.

4. Recommendations

4.1 It is recommended that members of the Cycle Forum:

- **Endorse the aims of the petition created by Charters School**
- **Support the Neighbourhood Plan Group in working with the Crown Estate and the Neighbourhood Plan Group to overcome any remaining objections / barriers to the Windsor ABC Bicycle Greenway and NCN 422.**