

SOUTHAMPTON COMMON FORUM MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE RESPONSE

PROPOSAL FOR THE AVENUE (SCN5) CYCLE CORRIDOR AND THE ASSOCIATED WIDENING OF LOVERS' WALK (REF. 20/00255/FUL).



1. Executive Summary

1. Southampton Common Forum Management Committee (SCFMC) broadly supports these proposals for The Avenue (SCN5) Cycle Corridor and the associated widening of Lovers Walk.
2. Together they form a welcome strategic and integrated approach to green travel across The Common and the City which supports the Southampton Cycle Network strategy, the Southampton Common Plan 2019-30 and the City Council's Green City Charter "*to create a cleaner, greener, healthier and more sustainable city.*"
3. They are:
 - A reasonable compromise between the interests of the affected users: pedestrians, cyclists, dog walkers and motorists as well as the green character of The Common.
 - A proportionate response (e.g. a net reduction of less than 1/1,000th of The Common's green space) to the pressing need to encourage green travel, improve the safety of users and enhance access.
 - An appropriate use of The Common in continuing its historic role of evolving to support the changing needs of a changing City for the benefit of its citizens. The proposal also encourages green travel to The Common's urban periphery away from its green interior. We recognise that The Common has never been static but is continually evolving.
 - Supported by the extensive evidence and research into green travel on The Common that SCF has undertaken in the last 3 years and by the Council since 2013.
4. These proposals will have a number of important benefits:
 - Improving the safety and experience for cyclists, pedestrians, dog walkers, green commuters and more general users of The Common.
 - Facilitating an increase of green travel to major clusters of employment in the City, helping to improve air quality, enhancing access and supporting healthier lifestyles.
 - Further progress on the northern radial corridor (SCN5) to connect with the National cycle network at Chilworth roundabout
 - A reduction of traffic on Lovers Walk (and the wider Common) by diverting some of it along the proposed Avenue cycleways.
 - A reduction in conflicts between pedestrians and cyclists, especially on Lovers Walk.

5. We suggest some detailed enhancements to the proposed designs (section 5) which we wish to be considered at the planning stage.
6. After seven years of extensive consideration and consultation by SCC it is now urgent, in the wider public interest, to resolve these matters and move on. We look forward to working with the Council as these proposals are implemented.

2. Overview & Background

1. SCFMC broadly supports these proposals for The Avenue (SCN5) Cycle Corridor and the associated widening of Lovers Walk.
2. The proposed works contribute towards the strategic need for the City in the 21st century to radically reduce its carbon footprint as well as addressing the well documented safety concerns of Common users. In addition, a strategic approach reflects the highly interconnected nature of green travel across and around The Common and beyond into the wider City.
3. Southampton Common Forum (SCF) is a community group established in 2017 which has an ethos and track record of working constructively and creatively with SCC and as wide a range of interested partners and stakeholders as possible to improve The Common for everyone in the City.
4. SCF has been heavily involved in the consideration of these issues in the past few years. This reflects in particular the strategic importance of The Common to the City and the role of the Forum in bringing the various parties together with the City Council to try to tackle the major issues The Common faces, of which green travel and “conflicts” between users are amongst the most critical.
5. This involvement has been undertaken in active and ongoing partnership with SCC. It primarily consists of:
 - [Southampton Common Survey 2017](#). The first major survey of users of The Common for 40 years. This attracted 2,190 respondents from across the City and reflected the City’s ethnic and cultural diversity and demographics.
 - [Southampton Common Commuter Survey 2019](#). The first survey of commuter views about The Common. It attracted 621 respondents.
 - A [survey of the numbers of pedestrians and cyclists](#) at key locations on The Common (Q1 2019) to provide quantitative information about traffic volumes, directions and densities.
 - [Video interviews with users of Lovers Walk](#) published on YouTube.
 - Establishing a Green Travel and Safety Working Group which published a [report](#) on its work including lessons from best practice elsewhere. It is also available as a [presentation](#).
 - A [green travel workshop](#) in April 2019 to discuss the results of the above evidence-gathering and research.

6. It has been supplemented with open meetings attended by a wide range of stakeholders.
7. This extensive effort is reflected in the Council's documentation. It builds on the Council's own work since 2013 in regard to Lovers Walk which has involved three planning applications (those submitted in 2015 and 2017 were withdrawn). During this time the Council has extensively researched the proposal and consulted with stakeholders. An option to route the cycleway along Furzedown Road was thoroughly investigated and rejected.
8. The proposal is also supported by recent research ([Bike Life 2019](#), Sustrans) which shows high levels of public support for cycling and increasing cycling infrastructure in the Southampton City Region.
9. In all of these discussions the Forum has advocated an objective, data-and user-driven approach, which tries to take a strategic and holistic view of the various issues involved. The City Council's documentation for these consultations also takes this approach and for that reason alone SCFMC welcomes it as a way forward.
10. Our research shows that The Common is regularly accessed by the majority (63%, c. 163,000 residents) of Southampton residents from up to 3.5km away. Of those using it for green travel, 90% of cyclists live up to 6.4km away from their destination and 90% of pedestrians live up to 3.4km away. Thus these proposals have a much wider significance to the City far beyond the immediate vicinity of The Common; the stakeholders of this proposal are not limited to the neighbourhoods immediately adjacent to it. This is an important point that the Council should bear in mind when assessing responses to these proposals and the associated planning application.
11. Improving these travel routes will support the City's economic development. Our research shows they are used in large part (88% of users surveyed) by employees of major clusters of employment: the City Centre, the SGH hospital complex, and the University of Southampton.
12. The Forum's consideration of these issues including, in particular, our scrutiny of how they have been handled elsewhere, indicates that there is no perfect solution to the evidenced "triangle of conflict" between pedestrians, dog walkers and cyclists. There will always be a trade-offs between the various considerations, not only user convenience but also the amenity and character of The Common as an urban green space.
13. This points to the need for compromise on behalf of each of the interests involved. We believe this is generally achieved in this set of proposals and this is another reason for SCFMC supporting them.

14. As the Council's documentation recognises, it is important that the proposed physical improvements are accompanied by the promotion of more appropriate behaviour between all user groups to ensure a better experience of all Common users in the long term. The Forum is very ready to play its part in this.
15. The Council's proposals would, if adopted, both improve cycle commuting across this part of the City and enhance the experience of other users of The Common, all this at the cost of a very marginal loss of "low value" green space which can be mitigated by commensurate improvements elsewhere on The Common. The Forum Management Committee welcomes and supports the proposal and looks forward to being involved in its implementation in due course.
16. In the meantime, and as a further contribution to taking these matters forward, SCF is currently undertaking a survey to identify any pockets of non-amenity hard standing on The Common, some of which will be of no functional or heritage significance and the removal of which would help to further mitigate the negligible loss of green space.
17. SCFMC welcomes the future proposal to improve the link to Hill Lane at the Bellemoor Road entrance. Our research shows very high traffic volumes at this very restricted entrance being the confluence of four paths two of which are major green travel routes across The Common. The pavement at the north end of Lovers Walk adjacent to Burgess Road is also a bottleneck and a safety risk to users.
18. We now make more detailed comments on the proposals.

3. Lovers Walk - Specific Comments

1. The proposed widening works are the same as the previous planning application which lacked a biodiversity assessment. The current proposal seeks to address this through an ecological impact assessment (2018) and a compensation plan (2018) alongside Lovers Walk (neither included in previous applications).
2. In addition, we understand that the proposal to fence the boating lake included in the previous planning application is not included in the current proposal. (We understand from the responsible officer, Mr Greg Churcher, Senior Transport Planner - Major Projects, that its indication in drawing number 15/AL/M/010/050 is an error and it is not in fact part of this proposal. For the avoidance of error we request that the Case Officer's report makes this clear.)
3. The proposal is a modest and proportionate response to the overarching strategic need to reduce the City's carbon footprint consistent with the character of the urban fringe of The Common where Lovers Walk is located.

4. As the documentation acknowledges, and as is evidenced by our research, Lovers Walk is overloaded (especially at peak times) resulting in environmental degradation of The Common in places. It is proposed to make a modest increase in its width at carefully chosen points to support the traffic volume and make it safer for both cyclists and pedestrians as well as ameliorate the environmental degradation. This will bring the width of the wider parts of Lovers Walk into line with other major paths on The Common.
5. The traffic on Lovers Walk is intimately linked to the other main paths on The Common. These paths have widths between 3m and 4m to accommodate the volume. In contrast, currently Lovers Walk, despite having a greater peak traffic load (as evidenced by our data), is actually narrower with widths between 1.3m and 1.9m.
6. The proposed widths reflect the different volumes of traffic along its length that we have recorded in our research: a maximum of 3.5m north of Highfield Avenue to Salisbury Avenue; 2.5m maximum south of Highfield Road to Blenheim Avenue; retaining the current 2.2 m width between Blenheim Avenue and The Avenue where the path just needs to be resurfaced. The widest sections of 4.0m are confined to its major busy junctions with Burgess Road, the University Steps and Salisbury Road.
7. Our research indicates that the proposed cycleway along the Avenue will help reduce the cycle traffic on Lovers Walk but not to the extent that it will obviate the need for Lovers Walk to be widened as proposed. This is because:
 - The Avenue cycleway will have a positive impact on pedestrians who are the largest users of Lovers Walk (comprising c. 75% of users).
 - The major users of Lovers Walk are staff and students of the University and are mainly responsible for the very high peak loads. Cyclists will need to travel on some section of Lovers Walk to reach their destination, irrespective of whether they use the new Avenue cycleway or not.
 - A major feed into Lovers Walk is the east-west path from the Bellemoor Entrance via the underpass. This cycle traffic will not be diverted by the new Avenue cycleway.
 - The Avenue cycleway will be primarily used by confident fast cyclists and those with destinations other than the university campuses. Many cyclists heading for the university campuses will not use the new cycle-way – preferring to enjoy the tranquillity of The Common away from the noise and pollution of the traffic on The Avenue.
8. The proposed net increase in tarmac on The Common of 1,265m² is less than 1/1,000th of its area; this is a negligible loss of low value green space (largely compacted earth) in order to support a pressing need for the residents of Southampton. In addition, the proposed works will directly address concerns of its users; safety concerns due to overloading because of the narrowness of the path; as well as the continuing degradation of the land adjacent to the path.

9. The proposed works will have minimal impact on the character of Lovers Walk which follows the eastern boundary of The Common at its transition between the more natural green space of The Common and the adjacent residential/urban area. The works in fact have the potential to enhance it by stopping erosion, compaction and trampling of verges.
10. The proposed ecological compensation plan of 3,602 m² alongside Lovers Walk (over three times the net loss of green space) will further enhance the natural character of this part of The Common.
11. The proposal includes an ecological method statement (2018) to ensure minimisation of damage, especially to trees, during the works.
12. We welcome the omission from the proposal of the iron fencing to the Boating Lake (see above 3.2).
13. The pavement at the north end of Lovers Walk adjacent to Burgess Road is a bottleneck and a safety risk to users. We welcome the Council's intent to consider how this could be improved under separate works.
14. We believe there are a number of ways that the design of the proposals could be improved (see section 5 below) and ask that they be considered at the planning stage.
15. We note the continued absence of proposals for lighting on the southern section of Lovers Walk. Our research shows demand for improved lighting on the southern section of Lovers Walk because of understandable safety concerns at night of its users, especially during the winter months (pedestrians are often dressed in dark clothes, distracted by mobile phones or wearing earphones).
16. No lighting provision on the southern section was a major ground for objection to the previous two applications (2015 and 2017). The addition of lighting had strong support from the Police – (see detailed objection by Official Consultee Simon Bottom, Crime Prevention Design Advisor, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner Hampshire to both previous applications 15/02327/R3CFL and 17/00703/FUL. He sums up as follows "... appropriate lighting along the whole route is imperative ...")
17. The continued failure to address the issue of lighting is regrettable. We urge reconsideration and imposition of a condition on the application that lighting, or at minimum, the installation of the necessary electrical infrastructure, be included in any approved scheme.
18. The data from extensive scientific research, conducted by SCF and the University of Southampton over summer 2019, into the effects of artificial lighting on the Common's bats, will be available to guide lighting type and suitability before the works commence, if the Planning Application is approved.

19. Better lighting of paths on The Common is a core commitment in the Southampton Common Plan 2018-2020.

4. The Avenue (SCN5) – Specific Comments

1. This proposal carefully balances the needs of cyclists and motorists on the Avenue. Specifically, it ensures capacity for queuing of traffic on the Avenue north of the underpass which represents a pragmatic compromise between the needs of cyclists and motorists.
2. It is commendable that it requires no common land to be used by being wholly located on The Avenue carriageway.
3. The enhanced cycle crossing facilities at Burgess Road are designed to minimise the impact on traffic congestion. In particular, the introduction of a cyclist-only crossing on the eastern arm of Burgess Road will minimise the delay to traffic by having a very short crossing time.
4. These enhancements will facilitate the travel of cyclists north of The Common in line with the Southampton Cycle Network strategy as well as improving general access to The Common.
5. Our research indicates that there are some cyclists who wish to travel speedily to their destination and would prefer to use a dedicated Avenue cycleway if it was available. This will reduce the faster moving cycle traffic from Lovers Walk and other major footpaths in the heart of The Common, thereby providing improving all users' safety and experience.
6. Our research also established that such users would prefer a cycleway physically separated from both pedestrians and traffic. The proposal, while not completely separating cyclists along the whole length of The Avenue, provides a reasonable compromise between the needs of cyclists and motorists.
7. The proposed Toucan crossing opposite Winn Road will have two important benefits. It will provide better and safer access to The Common (especially to users of the new play area, the Hawthorns and the Cowherds) and it will help to calm traffic on the Avenue.

5. Further Enhancements for Consideration in the Planning Process

1. We believe there are a number of points that would improve the proposals further that we ask to be taken into consideration:
 - a. Small variations to the Lovers Walk route to improve sightlines and natural lighting.
 - b. Thinning of dense stands and trimming back of trees immediately adjacent to Lovers Walk to improve natural lighting.
 - c. Improve the proposed species mix by including native wildflowers on the verge of Lovers Walk and the Avenue. (The proposed mitigation plan proposes a species-poor grass mix).
 - d. Improve the layout at the junction with University Steps to eliminate desire lines.
 - e. Provision of seating along Lovers Walk to assist less mobile users.
 - f. Use of porous tarmac to avoid water puddling and ice patches.
 - g. Ensure that any soil imported to create levelling borders alongside a raised Lovers Walk is of a suitable quality.

2. Finally, there has been significant encroachment of The Common onto the tarmac paths up the sides of The Avenue, so the available width may be wider than is currently perceived. This might allow for further refinement of the design of the Avenue cycle path. SCF volunteers are available to survey and reclaim the pavements.

6. SCF Future Involvement

SCF MC will continue to work closely with SCC and other stakeholders to:

- Develop and promote communications to encourage better behaviours of cyclists, pedestrians and dog walkers.
- Continue our work with SCC on non-amenity hard standing that could be removed to further reduce the small loss of green space that these proposals require.
- Identify the full extent of encroachment onto pavements alongside The Avenue and help to recover them.
- If necessary, conduct further experiments on artificial lighting and bats on the unlit section of Lovers Walk.

Southampton Common Forum Management Committee, March 2020

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