

PLANNING APPLICATION NO. 17/00703/FUL

SOUTHAMPTON COMMON THE AVENUE SOUTHAMPTON

WIDENING OF THE PATH KNOWN AS 'LOVERS WALK' THAT RUNS NORTH TO SOUTH ON THE EASTERN SIDE OF SOUTHAMPTON COMMON BETWEEN BURGESS ROAD AND WESTWOOD ROAD

RESPONSE OF THE SOUTHAMPTON COMMON FORUM 7 JUNE 2017

Background

The Southampton Common Forum ('the Forum') was established in January 2017, with the support of the City Council, to act as a focal point for discussions about the future of the Common. This was on the basis that the Common is one of the City's greatest assets but there was no existing organisation that could represent the interests of the Common without any other commitments or interests. The membership to date includes a number of residents associations and community groups, SCAPPs (the Southampton Common and Parks Protection Society), and a significant number of individuals who care about the Common. There are currently 145 subscribers to the email database.

The Forum has just launched a major public survey of views about the Common, the results of which will be available later in the year. In the first two weeks, the survey received over 500 responses from a broad demographic of Common users across the City. Details of the survey can be found on the Forum website <http://www.southamptoncommonforum.org>.

As well as with the general public, the Forum is actively engaged with a number of major 'stakeholders' in the Common, including the Council and the University of Southampton. But the views set out here are those of the Forum through its elected Management Committee.

The Forum's View

The views set out here are those of the Forum through its elected Management Committee and on the basis of feedback from an email consultation with its subscribers as well as more broadly through consultation on its Facebook page. Copies of the responses received are appended for transparency.

There is clear support for improving Lovers Walk, making it more open and welcoming, removing encroaching vegetation, enhancing the lighting, as well as for repairing the surface, parts of which have seriously deteriorated. This might involve or require some widening in places. As well as facilitating access by all categories of users, this would encourage greater use of the Common, including by making people using the path feel safer. The Forum therefore believes that the application should receive full and careful consideration by the Planning and Rights of Way Panel.

However there are also a number of concerns, some of which are reflected in the appendix. These include:

1. The proposal contains no illustration or assessment of the impact of the widened path on the appearance or landscape of the Common. The inclusion of a map is inadequate for this purpose. For example, it is not clear how much of the Common would be lost to tarmac in terms of square meterage. The Forum would be very happy to assist in developing a proper landscape assessment.
2. Even the widened path will still be too narrow to make a serious impact in reducing road traffic by cyclists.
3. So far from reducing the risk of cyclist-pedestrian conflicts, widening the path and improving the surface could actually increase them by encouraging cyclists to speed up.
4. The best solution to the conflict problem almost certainly lies in complete segregation with a dedicated route for cyclists. Further consideration should therefore be given to ways of achieving this, including (a) creating dedicated cycle routes on the Avenue with Oakmount Avenue/Westbourne Crescent/Blenheim Avenue as a temporary alternative (this would also have the advantage of slowing traffic on the Avenue), and (b) the scheme being developed that would create a separate route over land owned by the University between Burgess Road and Highfield Avenue, using the existing 7m-wide service road and linked by a ramp for the disabled and cyclists to Furzedown Road. This would of course require the University's cooperation. In the meantime the Council should explore the scope for regulating cyclist-pedestrian conflicts through appropriate surface treatments (markings, speed bumps, etc) and/or improved signage, with the new signage between the centre of Winchester and Hockley Viaduct an example of what might be achieved in this way.
5. Finally, there is a more general issue of how the interests of those who use the Common as a place of recreation can be reconciled with those who use it mainly as means of transit (where the two conflict).

For these reasons, the Forum does not consider that the application is necessarily the best solution to the need to improve Lovers Walk. It therefore opposes the application as it presently stands.

Southampton Common Forum 7 June 2017

Appendix - complete set of responses submitted to Southampton Common Forum following advertising of request for comments on the application in a member email and on our facebook page.

I would like to submit the University response to the proposal as a stakeholder and supporter of the Common Forum.

The University welcomes the application being made by Southampton City Council (SCC) which we feel clearly reflects the Council's stated objectives to encourage and support walking and cycling. We feel the proposals reflect a proportionate reaction to existing levels of use, and find the suggestion that it will create a 'cycle superhighway' to be misrepresentative given the state of the route at present and the clear need for widening along its length to accommodate existing users. We are supportive of any proposals that would improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists accessing the Common and surrounding roads, and any improvements to routes that would make the Common more accessible. We would consider ourselves to be a key stakeholder, and have met with SCC Officers to discuss routes that connect with our campuses. We would of course wish to participate in ongoing discussions regarding routes, via the Southampton Common Forum, or groups that may be established by SCC.

During public consultation on SCC proposals for Lovers Walk, there was feedback from residents of Furzedown Road that they would object to a cycle route that would result in loss of their parking, and feedback from cyclists indicated that the route would not be popular as it diverts from the existing north/south desire line. We would not consider an onward route using our rear service road to be appropriate as it includes a number of delivery areas and car parks which would put pedestrians and cyclists at greater risk than if they follow the existing Lovers Walk route. It should also be noted that whilst University cyclists and pedestrians form a percentage of the users of Lovers' Walk, the University is not a destination for all users, and asking cyclists to detour through a car park and service road which includes heavy goods deliveries, instead of enjoying Southampton Common, would be inappropriate.

Regarding the southwestern access to the Highfield Campus, we are seeking to improve the existing steps rather than pursue a ramp design. A ramp has been considered and assessed, but was discounted on grounds of appropriateness (the use of the steps has been surveyed as predominantly pedestrian), as well as health & safety risks associated with steep ramp approach to a road, and the cost of delivering the project (in terms of engineering costs and the land that would be required to construct it). The issue of accessibility has been carefully considered as part of this decision, as step improvements represent an improvement for users (providing handrails and improved lighting) but will not accommodate wheelchair access. An alternative step free route is available using public footways on Chamberlain Road, Hawthorn Road and Oakhurst Road, and

I hope our position will be taken into account during the Forum's deliberations.

Many thanks

The reality is that cyclists use Lovers Walk anyway (because the signage that used to say it's not a cycle path has worn away), so making it a safer and more suitable space for pedestrians and cyclists is appropriate. I would suggest any such proposal includes painting an explicit cycle path, so there is more agreement on where to walk and cycle to be safe

Hello

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposals for a cycle path along Lovers Walk. I have a slightly separate set of concerns about the proposal from those contained in your originating email. The most important of these relate to pedestrian and cyclist safety. I live at the far southern end of the Common. Lovers walk is not lit for a significant portion of its length. Indeed the section between Highfield Road and Winn Road can be frighteningly dark at night and pedestrians cannot realistically negotiate it without a torch. This leaves me with two possible outcomes. Firstly the expected usage in the winter months in particular may much less than expected because both cyclists and pedestrians will feel insecure whilst using it. Secondly and alternatively the route does come into regular use with the outcome that there are regular accidents and mishaps at night due to poor lighting.

I also have a particular "beef" about shared use cycle and pedestrian and cycle paths in Southampton. As a pedestrian and a cyclist I am aware of the the distinct lack of appropriate signage which would encourage good discipline and etiquette in using the routes. This has been done in Winchester on the route that runs from the centre of the city to Hockley viaduct. As an occasional visitor there I would observe that these signs do have an effect on moderating the behaviour of cyclists in particular. I think that all current and proposed cycle routes on the Common should be signed in this way.

I would have no personal objection to these proposals if these concerns were addressed. However, I suspect that a lit route would add significant expense and also garner a fresh set of objections from residents whose properties abut the Common along the route of Lovers Walk.

I hope that you find these comments helpful.

We would like you to consider the following points:

1. The use of the term "cycle super-highway" is very misleading and factually incorrect. A segregated continuous cycle lane on both sides of the road from Chilworth roundabout to town could be described as such but unfortunately there is no prospect of this. What is proposed can only be described as "shared-use-paths".

2. There is no realistic prospect of the University allowing their land to be used as a official city cycle route.
3. The existence of the Common causes traffic to be funnelled creating road conditions which are more dangerous for cyclists.
4. There is photographic evidence showing that Lover's Lane, more recently described as Lover's Walk used to be wider.
5. The more recent narrow tarmac paths have given rise to dangerous stepped edges.
6. The worn ground either side of the paths has been degraded mainly by footfall.
7. In contrast with cyclists traversing the Common, pedestrians, especially those using it for leisure, can use any part or path they wish.
8. The speed of cyclists on a shared-use path is naturally governed by the number of people using it, not the width.
9. If the application is refused the current overcrowding of these paths and degradation of the Common will continue and worsen.
10. Where are cyclists meant to go? Without these very valuable long standing cycle routes commuting cyclists will be forced out onto dangerous busy roads or fall back to using their cars to everybody's detriment.

We wish to see the proposal supported for the wider community who wish to walk and cycle on the Common for reasons of health, safety, pleasure and wider environmental benefits. It would make a significant contribution to increasing sustainable transport and road safety in the city.

Hi;

As set out as a group our aim is to open up the common to all, however this should not include widening this route. If we allow this to happen what's next, widening the Avenue. As primarily a pedestrian route, the council if they have an issue should look at controlling access, for pedestrian use only. Cyclists to the university can use Highfield Lane / Church Rd or the cycle route in place around the Avenue to Burgess Road.

Hi,

I would support widening of Lover's Walk to accommodate safer cycling/walking.

I currently use this to get to and from university and it isn't pleasant for either cyclists or pedestrians having to dodge each other on a poorly made up and too narrow path.

Hi I am a local guide dog owner and "free tin" my dog on the common often. Shared cycle and pedestrian routes are a real risk to me do I would support separate routes. Thank you

I agree that segregated cycle and pedestrian routes would be the best option, as someone who both cycles and walks these routes I find that shared paths are frustrating for both parties!

Good Afternoon, In response to this Planning Application I would like to register my objection.

Firstly as it is obviously designed as a commuter route and mainly for the University benefit it does not in any way whatsoever fit in with the legal description of The Common which is for citizens to take air and relaxation and leisure. The main clue is in the title itself -Proposal for Lovers WALK (FOOTPATH).

Notwithstanding that the proposed design is far to wide, takes to much of the Common for tarmac and lighting, the proposed areas of "swop" land have no ecological or leisure value being so close to Highways and Lights and are in fact already part of Southampton Common.

I trust that The Forum will protect The Common from this and future developments as if this is allowed then it is the small end of the wedge- We will see application to permit cycling on the present No Cycling Paths. the Path rom Cemetery Rd to Bellemoor already has a "blind eye turned on it for cyclists it is a non -cycling path -clearly signed. then widening of local roads or even the Avenue- which has been mooted quite recently. Will we see The Cowherds wish to extend their car park again

Many Thanks

Reference the above-I agree that we should oppose the application, people should try to have respect for one another and proceed slowly. An elderly lady fell and was injured when a cyclist came rushing along a no cycling path in the other part of the common.

I favour the segregation of pedestrians from cyclists where possible.

I oppose more tarmac upon The Common, especially where there is no compensation de-tarmacng.

I support in principle the Simon Hill proposals. I support a cycleway on the existing footway along The Avenue going north to Highfield Road.

I support the closure of the steps on to the University campus. And the grassing over of the path on The Common leading to them.

I support the making of a segregated way for pedestrians and cyclists through ! Oakhurst Road, belonging to the University, for the benefit of the University.

I support the use of Furzedown Road for cyclists.

I support the use of the University service road running along the western boundary of the University for cyclists.

I support the segregation of pedestrians and cyclists from Salisbury Road to Glen Eyre Road by providing a separate cycleway.

Fully support your objection.

It is a walk solely for pedestrians.

Many residents are becoming increasingly annoyed st the way the council has allowed so many pavements within the city to be used by cyclists at the expense of pedestrians.

Most cyclists seem to think they have right of way and are a menace to older people, young children and mothers with prams etc.
