

Beech Road Safety Working Group - Report to Parish Council August 2022

On-road Footways - Application for EHDC Strategic CIL Funding

On 28 July EHDC approved Beech Parish Council's application for £14,000 of Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds to provide about 62% of the funds required for the construction of on-road footways in the village centre and on Kings Hill. The fact that funding is available has been advised to HCC, for whom Ian Janes (Safety Engineer) is designing the on-road footways this summer.

Importantly, the funding approval confirmed that the construction of Beech footways is a piece of infrastructure provision that meets the qualifying criteria for Strategic CIL funding. EHDC is fully expecting us to apply for further funding in Q1 2023 to help pay for new off-road footways, and we can now be confident of a successful application, provided that the parish council commits sufficient of its own funds alongside Strategic CIL money (which seems to have a ceiling of covering up to 80% of project costs).

New Off-Road Footways – HCC Feasibility Study

Under its standard procedures, HCC must carry out a preliminary feasibility study as a first step towards constructing new off-road footways on its land. HCC has now confirmed that its final offer is for the feasibility study to cost £12,500 plus VAT, to cover the three stretches of off-road footway originally specified by us. This is a significant reduction from the £20,000 plus VAT originally quoted.

The Road Safety Working Group recommends accepting this offer from HCC. Whilst having a formal feasibility study seems unnecessarily bureaucratic, it is unfortunately an unavoidable part of HCC's process, and we must go through that process (with HCC as our partners) to make any progress. Only after completing this study will we have credible project cost estimates that can be used for planning the future direction of the footways project, and to support a further bid for Strategic CIL funding. It is envisaged that the £12,500 fee will be paid from the balance of the £22,800 Neighbourhood Portion CIL money recently received from EHDC.

A more positive view is that spending this £12,500 (the parish council can reclaim the VAT) should unlock for us between £80,000 and £100,000 of Strategic CIL funding from EHDC in 2023 – i.e. up to 80% of an off-road footways project on the reasonable assumption that the parish council will be able to contribute £20,000 to £25,000 of its own funds to the project.

The three sections of Medstead Road originally specified in February for the feasibility study were:

- Section 1: 510m alongside Forestry England land east of the Bushy Leaze Wood entrance;
- Section 2: 137m alongside Forestry England land west of the Bushy Leaze Wood entrance; and
- Section 3: 406m running west from the A339 (upgrade/replacement of existing path).

Since then, the parish council has had the existing path down to the A339 comprehensively maintained and cleared. Although it is not as wide as it might ideally be, the path is now functioning well and the Working Group now considers further work on this section as being lower priority.

HCC has now confirmed that, instead, the parish council may (if it wishes) substitute a new Section 3 – c.405m of upper Kings Hill running from the western end of the planned on-road footway (at 70/72 Kings Hill) up to Alton Abbey, at no extra cost for the study. Councillors may recall that there was 79% support for this off-road footway extension, along a stretch of road particularly hazardous for

pedestrians, from respondents to the consultation held in Q4 2021. The Working Group believes that using HCC's offered study to assess the viability of a footway at upper Kings Hill is a better use of funds, at this time, than looking at an upgrade of the path to the A339.

Therefore the Working Group asks the parish council to approve entering into an agreement with HCC for a feasibility study costing £12,500 plus VAT to cover off-road footways at:

- Sections 1 & 2: Medstead Road, alongside Forestry England land (c.650 metres); and
- Section 3: Upper Kings Hill (c.405 metres) or, if the parish council prefers, at lower Medstead Road running west from the A339 (c.405 metres).

To be clear, HCC expects the feasibility study to cost £12,500. They will not allow their costs to exceed £12,500 without prior permission from the parish council. Should a cost overrun be threatened, the parish council may wish to eliminate or truncate the work on Section 3, rather than incur an additional cost. It seems unlikely that a Strategic CIL funds application in 2023 will be sufficient to cover expenditure on Section 3; progress on Section 3 will likely have to wait until a later date.

The Working Group recommends taking the decision at this time because the feasibility study, once commissioned, will take 3 months to be issued to us in draft. Kicking off the study in early September should result in a completed draft study before Christmas. This is essential if we are to be absolutely sure of completing our next Strategic CIL application by the likely mid March 2023 deadline, allowing for any unforeseen delays at HCC and achieving formal parish council approval.

'Bushy Leaze West'

On 2 August the Working Group (Messrs Cockburn and Webb) met with residents of the houses fronting the 137m of Medstead Road opposite the Forestry England land west of the Bushy Leaze entrance, to address the concerns they originally made in their responses to the consultation in Q4 2021. Their two principal points are as follows.

1. The residents consider the proposed off-road footway opposite their houses, and the existing off-road path in the private woodland to the west, to be inferior to an on-road footway in that off-road paths do not cater for all pedestrians at all times. In particular, off-road paths may not be fully accessible to some users such as pushchair or wheelchair users. And many pedestrians may not wish to use the off-road footways, especially where screened from the road, in hours of darkness due to concerns about security. They also believe that a white-line on-road footway, similar to that east of the Bushy Leaze entrance, would assist with slowing traffic due to a perceived narrowing of the road.

In response, the Working Group's view is that pedestrians on a road like Medstead Road will, in general, be more comfortable on an off-road footway rather than on-road, wherever one can be provided. In our view, off-road footways between the Bushy Leaze entrance and the Kings Hill bend are likely to be preferred by most walkers. We do, however, recognise that off-road footways may not be suitable for everyone, and so we propose to engage with HCC at the appropriate time to pursue a simple and cheap white-lining from the Bushy Leaze entrance up to the Kings Hill bend, to complement off-road footways and as an extension of the existing white-line footway east of the Bushy Leaze entrance (which we should retain). There is, however, no guarantee of success with HCC on this topic.

2. The residents are concerned that an off-road footway opposite their houses could be a development that has a negative effect on their privacy and outlook, which would be unreasonable without mitigating measures.

In response, the Working Group pointed out that the parish council has demonstrated that it is willing to try to take mitigating measures where material adverse impacts occur, as demonstrated by the planned additional screening to the footpath in the private woodland. The most appropriate way to incorporate measures, such as screening and greening, opposite the houses in question will be to feed such requirements into the proposed feasibility study and later footway design stages. Indeed, it is essential that the feasibility study on this section of road is carried out, in order to establish likely issues and any appropriate mitigations.

One of the affected residents may join the Working Group.