

Tarka Trail Willingcott to Knowle Scheme - Phase 2 Buttercombe Lane to Foxhunters – Scheme Approval

Report of the Director of Climate Change, Environment and Transport

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Cabinet (and confirmation under the provisions of the Council's Constitution) before taking effect.

1) Recommendation

That the Cabinet be asked to:

- (a) approve the construction of the Buttercombe Lane to Foxhunters section of the Tarka Trail, as shown in Appendix 1, at an estimated cost of £583,100; and
- (b) give delegated authority to the Director of Climate Change, Environment and Transport in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Highway Management and the relevant Local Member to approve minor amendments to the scheme details and finalise the acquisition of land for the scheme.

2) Background / Introduction

Devon County Council has secured £930,000 funding from the fourth round of the Government's Active Travel Fund to progress the completion of the Tarka Trail between Barnstaple and Ilfracombe. There are six sections to deliver in the coming years between the settlements of Willingcott and Knowle. Two of the sections are either constructed or committed with funding approval and this report seeks approval for the phase 2 section between Buttercombe Lane and Foxhunters.

The National Cycle Network (NCN) route 27, which forms part of the Coast-to-Coast cycle route connecting Plymouth and the north coast of Devon, follows the Tarka Trail from Barnstaple to Braunton Police Station at which point it follows an on-road route to Willingcott Bridge Junction just north of Georgeham.

Completing the gaps in the Tarka Trail is identified in the North Devon and Torridge Local Plan 2011-2031 as policy ST10(1)(g) and the Devon Transport Infrastructure Plan (item ND20). The trail has very high usage with over 300 cyclists per hour in the summer at Fremington Quay. It is popular with leisure users and commuters who are able to travel safely, conveniently and enjoy the related health benefits.

Appendix 2 provides a plan showing the scheme phases of the overall route. The aspiration is for the completed section between Knowle and Willingcott to be mostly off road,

segregated from traffic, with the exception of the recently approved section of 385m length on Nethercott Road, where the alternative route options are limited. Several phases of the route between Knowle and Willingcott have progressed in recent years. Further funding will be required to construct the remaining phases, which have constraints including various structures.

- **Willingcott Holiday Village:** route currently under construction by a third party as a requirement of their planning permission;
- **Holiday Village to Buttercombe Lane (phase 1):** construction complete following approval from North Devon Highways and Traffic Orders Committee (HATOC) in June 2022 but remains closed to the public as there is no access at either end;
- **Buttercombe Lane to Foxhunters (phase 2):** planning permission secured and approval is now sought for its construction starting later this financial year.
- **Nethercott Road (phase 5):** approved for construction by North Devon HATOC in October 2023.

A 2015 economic report into three Devon cycling and walking trails, including the Tarka Trail, Exe Estuary Trail and Drake's Trail estimated £13.4m annual benefit to the local economy and supporting almost 200FTE jobs. Completing the remaining sections of the Tarka Trail to a similar standard of the rest of the route is expected to spread this expenditure further and will benefit businesses in communities beyond Barnstaple to the north coast at Ilfracombe.

3) Proposal

The scheme would see the creation of a new section of the Tarka Trail between Buttercombe Lane and Foxhunters on the alignment of the old Barnstaple to Ilfracombe rail line. The location can be seen as phase 2 in Appendix 2 in the area shown below on the map.

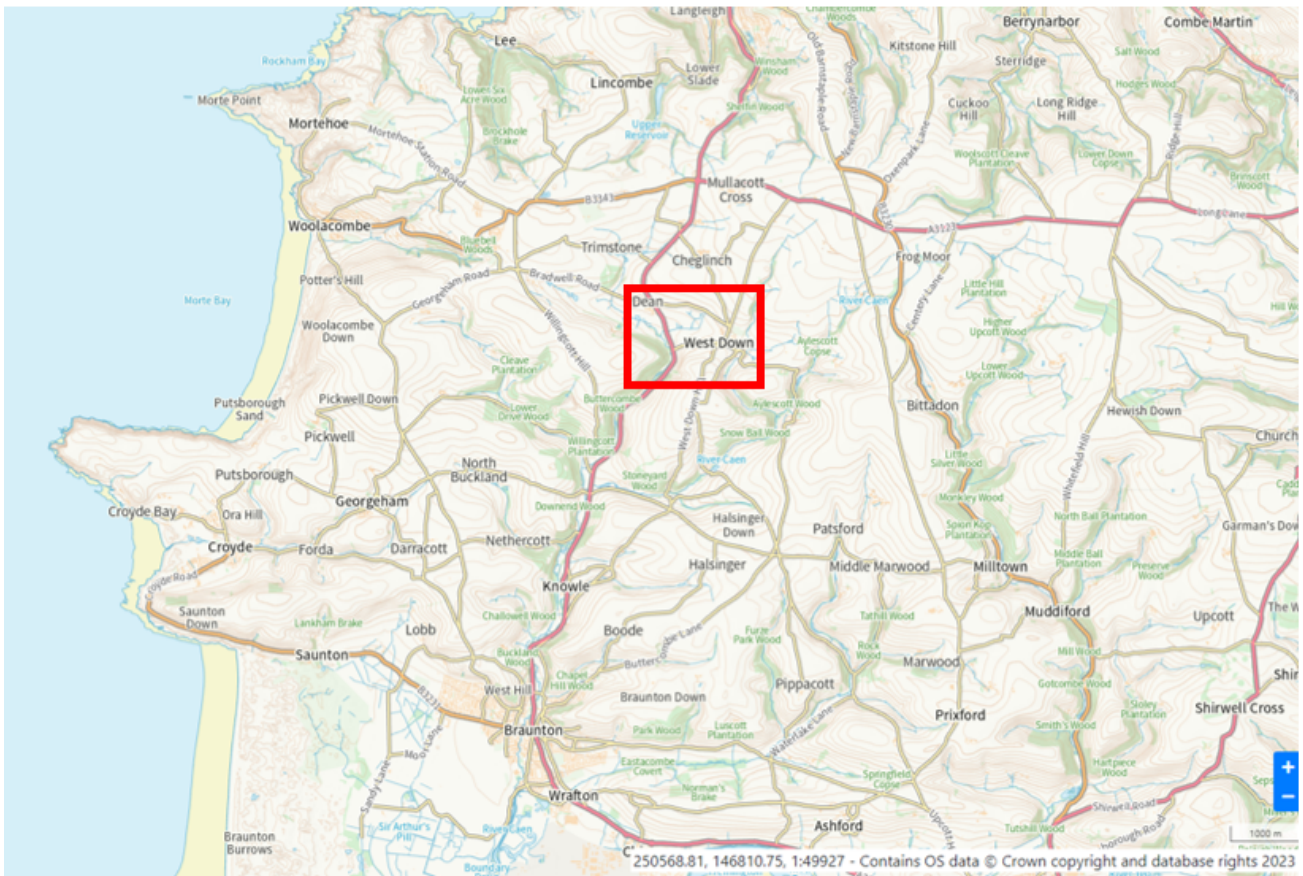


FIGURE 1 - MAP SHOWING A WIDER LOCATION OF THE PROPOSED NEW TARKA TRAIL ROUTE.

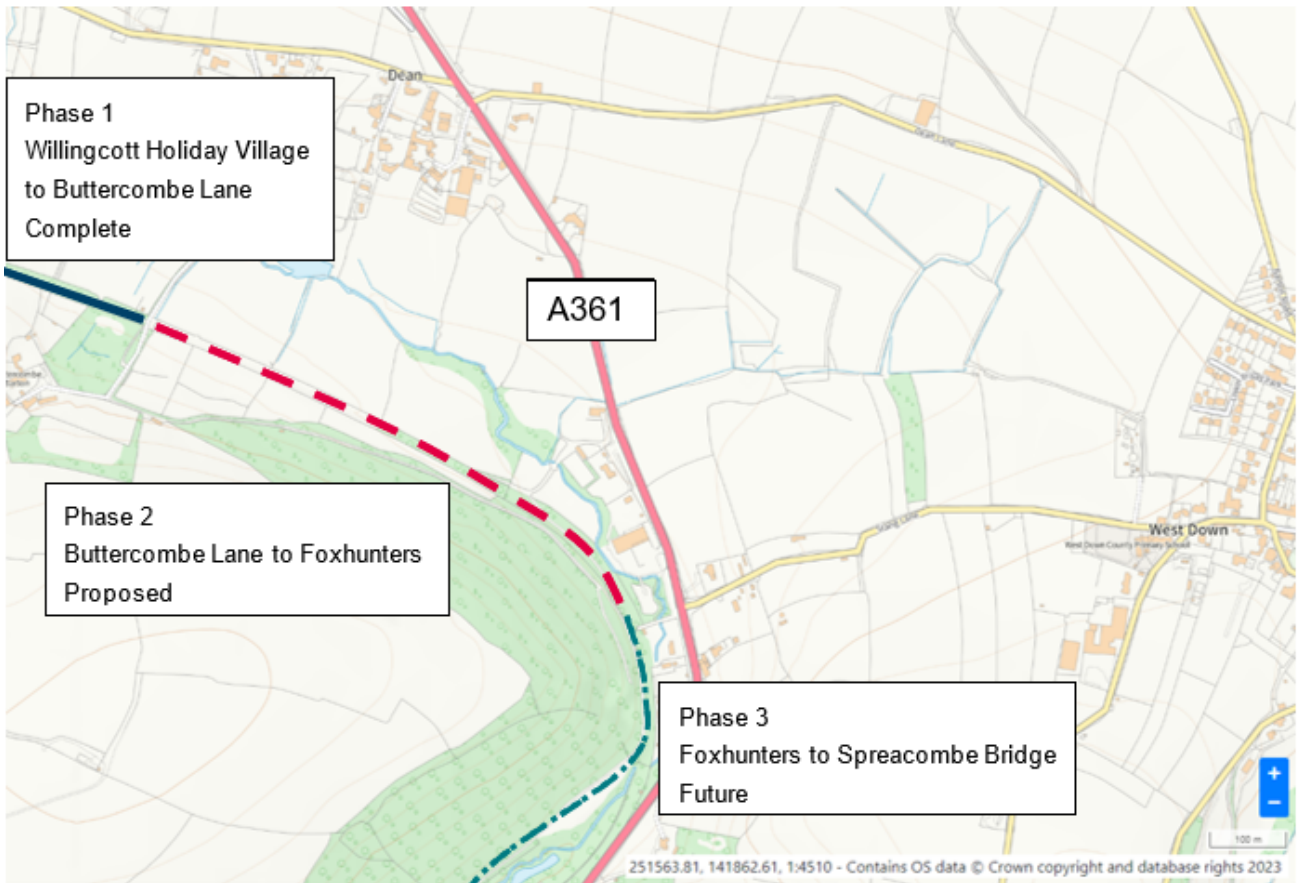


FIGURE 2 - MAP SHOWING LOCATION OF THE PROPOSED NEW TARKA TRAIL ROUTE.

The Phase 2 scheme now proposed for construction will deliver approximately 700m of new shared use path of 3.5m width and 1m wide verges alongside most of the path. New drainage culverts will be installed, vegetation cut back with rest areas of varying size, including one with a small picnic area.

The scheme has been through a 'design review' process with Active Travel England Inspectors. Through this process the rest areas have been incorporated into the design with discussions also on the lighting of the trail. The path will not be lit for consistency with the rest of the rural sections of the Tarka Trail and recognising the environmental sensitivity in this setting. Overall, the Inspector thought the scheme was generally well designed, and there are no realistic and practical ways to make it better.

The path will be a shared use path, built using traditional asphalt construction. It will be useable by all people walking, wheeling and cycling and is also suitable for horse riders. Bespoke signage will be used to inform users to 'share this space'. Although it is anticipated that there will be a low level of horse riders using the trail, 1m wide grass verges will be provided alongside the surfaced path for horses.

4) Options / Alternatives

Do Nothing

The only realistic alternative is to not build this section of the Tarka Trail, which will leave a route only suitable for more experienced, on road cyclists.

The proposed alignment is the gentlest gradient available, at 1 in 40 along the alignment of the old Barnstaple to Ilfracombe railway line, this would be considered by most people to be 'flat'. Alternative routes would be of far greater gradient, less suitable for people to walk, wheel or cycle.

5) Consultations / Representations

A planning application for this phase of the route was approved in October 2023 and formal consultation was carried out for this phase of the route through the planning process. This received only one public comment, which was from a nearby resident about the detail of bollards or a chicane gate at the end of the path with Buttercombe Lane.

As part of Devon County Council's bid for the fourth round of the Active Travel Fund, various letters of support were obtained and these are included in Appendix 3. These include support for the wider scheme from:

- the Member of Parliament for North Devon;
- the Leader of North Devon Council;
- the Chair of One Northern Devon Active Travel Forum;
- Morteohoe Parish Council;
- West Down Parish Council.

6) Strategic Plan

The Willingcott to Knowle cycle route will enable more walking, wheeling and cycling and encourage more sustainable lifestyles with health-related benefits and supporting the local economy by connecting up communities in North Devon for tourism and leisure activity. The table below summarises how the proposals align with the relevant Strategic Plan actions according to a seven-point scale, whereby -3 represents a large negative impact and +3 represents a large positive impact.

Strategic Plan Priority	Strategic Plan Action	Comment	Alignment
Respond to the Climate Emergency	Support a green recovery from COVID-19. Prioritise sustainable travel and transport. Encourage sustainable lifestyles.	Provides an almost entirely traffic free route for people to walk, wheel, cycle and ride horses on, to support active travel for commuting, education and leisure purposes.	+2 (Moderate positive)
Be Ambitious for Children and Young People	Work together to ensure all children are safe, healthy and can thrive with opportunities to fulfil their potential.	The overall route will create a safer, attractive environment for young people, increasing their independence and access to a wider range of destinations.	+1 (Small positive)
Investing in Devon's economic recovery	Secure investment in transport infrastructure. Maintain and, where necessary, improve our highway network and improve sustainable transport options.	This route will vastly improve sustainable travel choice north of Braunton by connecting isolated communities with a high quality multi use trail opening up new opportunities for tourism and increased spend in North Devon.	+2 (Moderate positive)
Tackle poverty and inequality	Make Devon a fairer place, address poverty, health and other inequalities, and ensure support for those people and families struggling most.	This route, once complete, would connect communities between Ilfracombe and Barnstaple, increasing leisure opportunities for areas of some of the worst measured indices of deprivation in the country.	+2 (Moderate positive)

Improve health and wellbeing	Help people to be healthier and more resilient, ensure everyone gets the care they need, and support people to live their lives well.	All people in the area have the potential to benefit from increased physical activity created by access to this largely traffic free multi-use trail.	+3 (Large positive)
Helping communities to be safe, connected and resilient.	Enable a range of transport options, including public transport.	The route provides a new transport choice for thousands of Devon's residents, with potential for access at various locations to public transport.	+2 (Moderate positive)

7) Financial Considerations

This phase of the Tarka Trail is estimated to cost £583,100 including contingency.

This will be funded from the £783,100 of capital funding received from the fourth round of the Active Travel Fund, which is also contributing towards the section of the trail on Nethercott Road (approved by North Devon HATOC for construction up to £200,000).

This budget is included in the 2023/24 and 2024/25 capital programme.

In terms of future maintenance costs, the route forms part of the existing off-road multi-use Tarka Trail network, which is inspected annually by the Public Rights of Way wardens. This includes inspection of gates, signage, surface condition, drainage and vegetation with seasonal vegetation cutting and drainage. Multi-use trails do not deteriorate to the same extent as trafficked highway and a small extension to the route is expected to be managed within existing budgets.

8) Legal Considerations

Planning permission for the works has been obtained (application DCC/4363/2023). Commencement of the works will be subject to the acquisition of the land required for the scheme. The majority of the land has been purchased and the acquisition of the majority of the remainder is expected to complete shortly.

9) Environmental Impact Considerations (Including Climate Change, Sustainability and Socio-economic)

The overall scheme promotes and facilitates walking, cycling and wheeling for low-carbon leisure pursuits, commuting and travel to education and has potential to reduce car-based trips on the A361 and further afield, helping to reduce Devon's carbon emissions.

The County Ecologist has visited the site with the scheme designers and appropriate mitigation of environmental impacts of the works have been agreed, including:

- Production of a Biodiversity Net Gain Plan with details of how 2.36 units of appropriate compensation will be provided and ongoing management/maintenance.
- Arranging a repeat survey for the presence of badgers on site by an ecologist prior to the start of the works. To be arranged for early 2024 prior to site clearance work.
- Providing a Construction Ecological Management Plan prior to the start of the works.
- Carrying out no vegetation clearance between 1st March and 31st August.

The lack of lighting was noted by Active Travel England Inspectors. However, the path will not be lit due to the consistency of lighting along the rest of the Tarka Trail, its likely cost and Local Plan policies regarding dark sky areas and sensitivity in a rural setting.

10) Equality Considerations

Where relevant, in coming to a decision the Equality Act 2010 Public Sector Equality Duty requires decision makers to give due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct;
- advance equality by encouraging participation, removing disadvantage, taking account of disabilities and meeting people's needs; and
- foster good relations between people by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding

in relation to the protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership (for employment), pregnancy and maternity, race/ethnicity, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation).

A decision maker may also consider other relevant factors such as caring responsibilities, rural isolation or socio-economic disadvantage.

In progressing this particular scheme / proposal, an Impact Assessment has been prepared which has been circulated separately to Cabinet Members and also is available on the Council's website at <https://www.devon.gov.uk/impact/published> (Tarka Trail - Willingcott to Knowle - Impact Assessment (devon.gov.uk))

Members will need to consider the Impact Assessment for the purposes of this item / meeting.

11) Risk Management Considerations

The scheme has been subject to a stage 2 road safety audit. This raised four minor problems, which have all been considered by the designer and the design has been amended where appropriate. These problems were in relation to chicane gates/bollards, the height of fencing adjacent to the path, junction visibility with a minor private road and existing potholes on the road surface.

The scheme has undergone a 'Design Review' with Active Travel England, which has resulted in a variety of additional rest areas along the route being provided.

The scheme will be subject to further stages of the road safety audit process at the appropriate time.

12) Summary / Conclusions / Reasons for Recommendations

This report seeks approval for phase 2 of the multi-use trail section of the Tarka Trail between Buttercombe Lane and Foxhunters as part of a longer term route to connect Barnstaple to Ilfracombe.

The cost of up to £583,100 will be funded by capital received from the fourth round of the Active Travel Fund.

Meg Booth

Director Climate Change, Environment and Transport

Electoral Divisions: Combe Martin Rural

Cabinet Member for Highway Management: Councillor Stuart Hughes

Local Government Act 1972: List of background papers

Nil

Contact for enquiries:

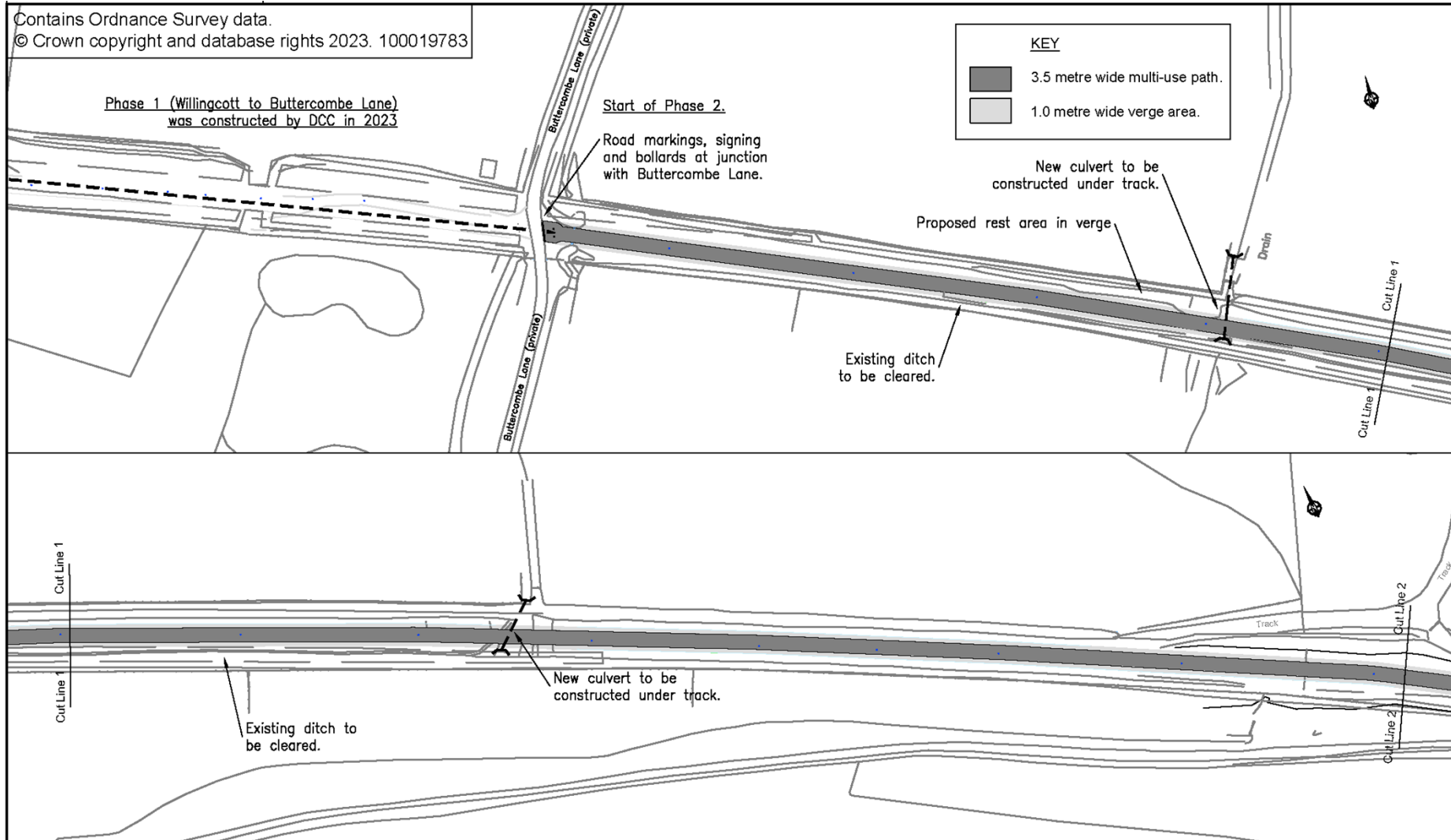
Name: Matt Collins

Telephone: 01392 388510

Address: Taw View, North Walk, Barnstaple EX31 1EE

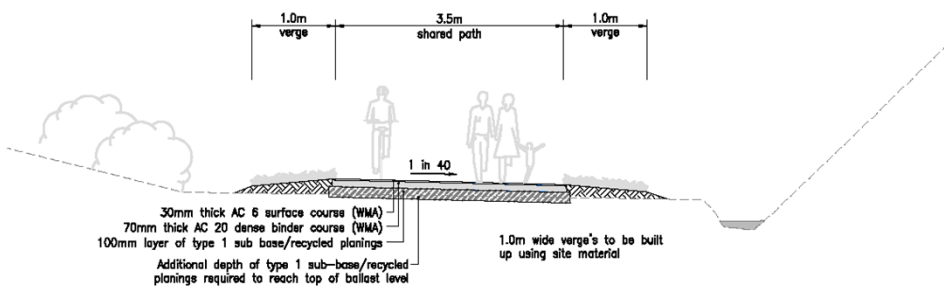
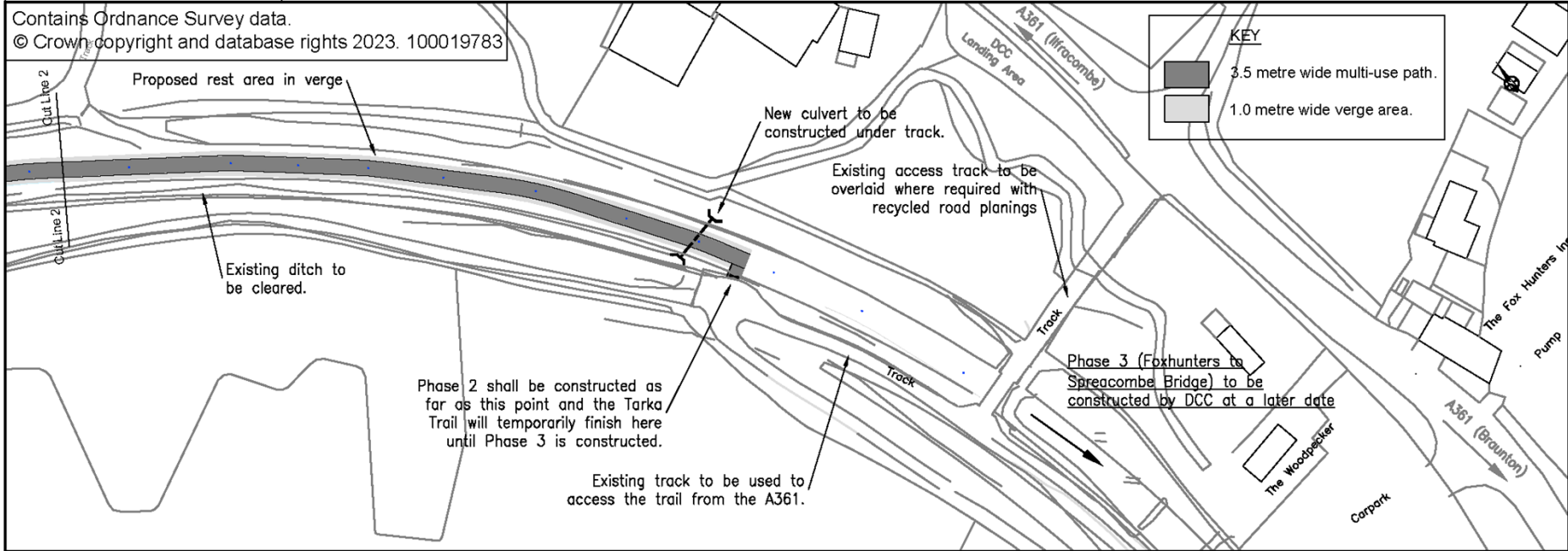
Tarka Trail Willingcott to Knowle Scheme - Phase 2 Buttercombe Lane to Foxhunters – Scheme Approval – Final

Appendix 1 to CET/23/103



	Engineering Design Group Taw View, Barnstaple, EX31 1EB Tel. 0345 155 1004 customer@devon.gov.uk www.devon.gov.uk	JOB/TITLE TARKA TRAIL - PHASE 2 BUTTERCOMBE LANE TO FOXHUNTERS COMMITTEE PLAN (1 of 2)	Rev 0	Date 12-10-23	Drawn JRM	Revisions Original issue.	Chk JRM	Do not scale from this drawing in either hard or electronic format. No responsibility is accepted where this drawing is used in circumstances other than that for which it was originally prepared and issued.
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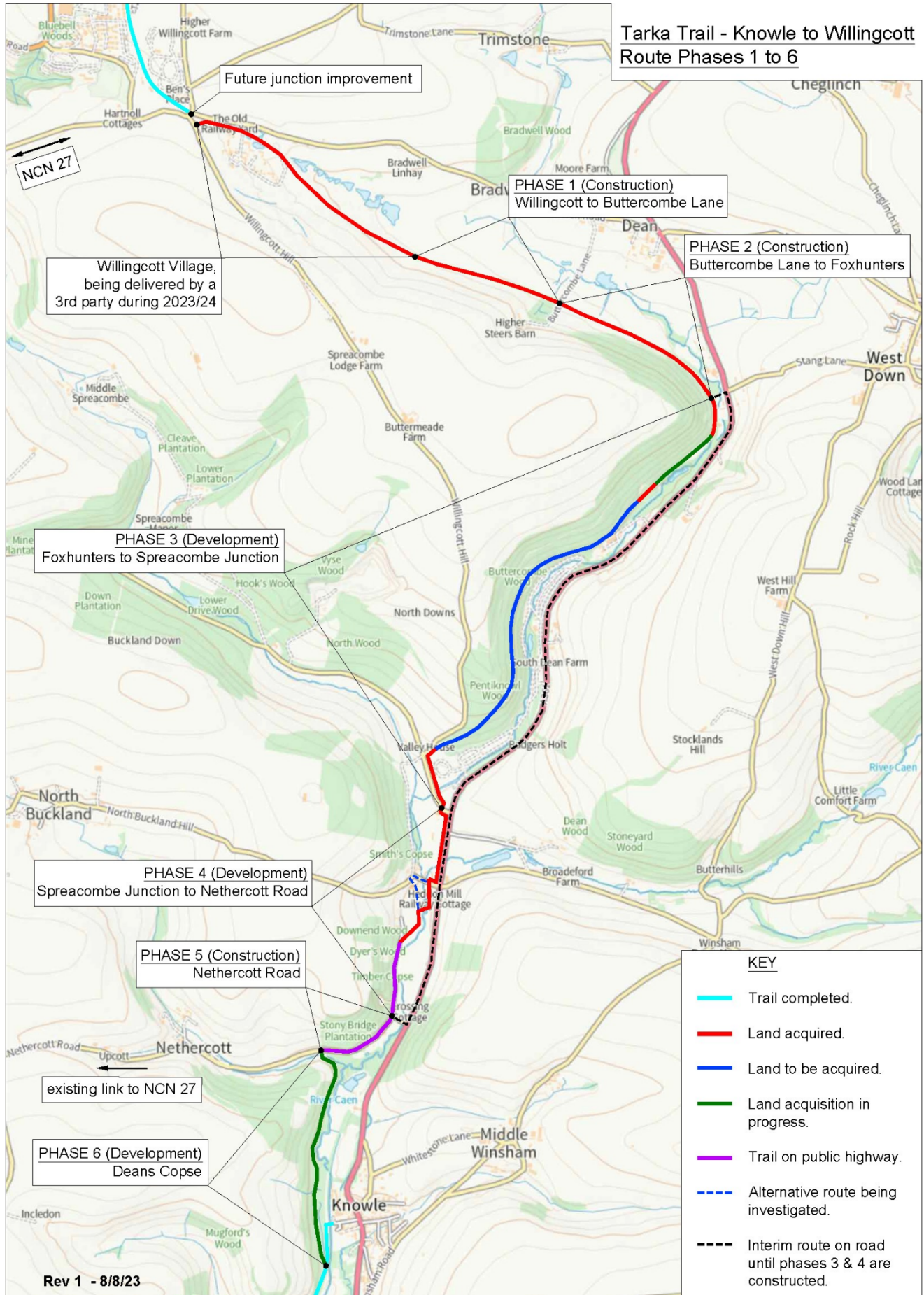
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TYPICAL SECTION
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Appendix 2 to CET/23/103



Appendix 3 to CET/23/103



one northern devon

15th February 2023

Dear Active Travel England,

One Northern Devon strongly supports Devon County Council's bid to improve northern Devon's infrastructure and encourage the take up of a choice of active travel modes.

Our partnership of local organisations focuses on improving the wider determinants of health and wellbeing. We have a well established 'Active Travel forum' that has representation from the NHS (Royal Devon University Healthcare Trust, PCNs, our National Hospital Programme and NHS Devon's Integrated Care Board) as well as North Devon Cycling Campaign, Active Devon, Torridge and North Devon District councils, Parish councils, Devon Net Zero campaign and a range of representatives from communities across Northern Devon.

We are in support of the completion of the Tarka Trail to join Braunton and Ilfracombe. It will strengthen and improve a much used and valued rural cycleway and walking trail network. This off-road active travel route completion is seen as a key health equity objective by our partnership, as it links one of the most deprived communities in North Devon (Ilfracombe) to its nearest centre of employment. This route will increase cycle to work opportunities and promote a safer leisure cycling route for locals and tourists. The Tarka Trail is highly valued locally as a safe walking route to school and work and connects rural and isolated households with leisure and shopping amenities. It also encourages inclusive connection with the north Devon UNESCO biosphere.

Another key priority agreed by our Active Travel forum is to promote choice in getting to work and recreation in active ways in our rural area. There is a great need for improved interchanges and links between our local district hospital, as a major employer in the area, to the town centre of Barnstaple, and its train and bus stations. Our engagement work on health inequalities with our communities has shown that poor transport infrastructure, poverty and geographical remoteness and rurality are some of the biggest challenges people are facing today. By helping more people choose active travel as an affordable and healthy way to get around we are directly addressing and reducing inequalities for our local communities.

I hope this letter of support has enabled an understanding of how this transport infrastructure bid will not only support better health and wellbeing but also economic prosperity and social mobility in a community which was identified as a significantly deprived rural coastal community in the Chief Medical Officer's 2021 report. In Northern Devon the mature partnership between communities, statutory and private sector bodies can also give greater confidence of the impact of this investment.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Kay Brennan, OND Active Travel Forum Chair

NHS Devon Locality Clinical Advisor, GP and Sports and Exercise Medicine Physician.



Selaine Saxby MP
Member of Parliament for North Devon



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Jesse Norman MP
Minister for Decarbonisation and Technology
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

14 February 2023

Our Ref: SS29613

Dear Jesse

Re: Active Travel Fund

I wholeheartedly support Devon County Council's positive bid and vision for the cycling and walking network here in North Devon.

As the Co Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Cycling and Walking I have constantly been raising the issues of rural connections. The 'missing link' on the Tarka Trail, the second highest priority for Devon County Council, is such a huge local priority and it was disappointing that in the previous round we missed out.

The fact that rurality is a factor in the criteria of funding for this round is incredibly encouraging and I am delighted after the disappointment of the previous round and having brought the then minister for cycling and walking to North Devon that this change has been made.

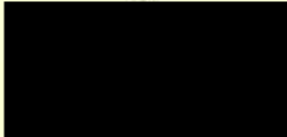
The Tarka Trail just by its existence, draws people into cycling for recreation and moves people forward towards cycling to work. It is a huge tourism draw and this investment works on so many levels. In the 2021 census over 1000 people in North Devon said that they cycled to work and while 2.4% may not seem that high, for a predominantly rural area this figure is quite encouraging. There are parts of Barnstaple that have a quite reasonable cycling and walking network and it shows that if you build it and if you provide something that people can embrace, that it will be used. The 'missing link' in the Tarka Trail to Ilfracombe is an issue, as is the Longbridge that links the two sides of the Taw. It separates the Tarka Trail and separates the train station from both the bus station, the high street and indeed onward to North Devon District Hospital.

We have an opportunity to help our tourism economy, to help ease congestion on our roads and help the health of many of my constituents.



I cannot overstate how welcome this investment would be.

Yours sincerely



Selaine Saxby
MP for North Devon

Our ref: letter of support
Please ask for: Cllr David Worden
Tel: 01271 388288
Email:
david.worden@northdevon.gov.uk
Date: 23 February 2023



Dear Active Travel England,

LETTER OF SUPPORT: ACTIVE TRAVEL BID – DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL

I am writing to you in strong support of Devon County Council's bid to improve North Devon's infrastructure and encourage the take up of a choice of active travel modes. This directly supports one of our 4 corporate objectives; to cherish and protect our environment as well as responding directly to the Climate emergency, which both Councils have declared.

The completion of the Tarka Trail joining Braunton and Ilfracombe will help support the accessibility and opportunities into Ilfracombe. Ilfracombe is the largest of our coastal areas in North Devon, and is the service centre for most of the surrounding coastal communities.


Ilfracombe central ward is the most deprived neighbourhood in Devon and is within the most deprived decile in England (IMD 2019). Furthermore, Ilfracombe residents have the lowest life expectancy in the County with an average of 75 years, 15 years lower than the best performing area in Devon. This extension to the Tarka Trail will help provide greater leisure opportunities to the community, providing an accessible and safe means of exercise. It will also link Ilfracombe better with Braunton and Barnstaple, opening up commuter routes to support the key employers in the town and provide a safe, sustainable route to the main Further Education College in Barnstaple, opening up options for the younger population of the town.

Furthermore, Braunton is the only area in North Devon within an Air Quality Management Area, necessary because it exceeded air quality for an identified pollutant and 90% of this was attributable to traffic sources. This scheme to promote alternative modes of transport will help address this.

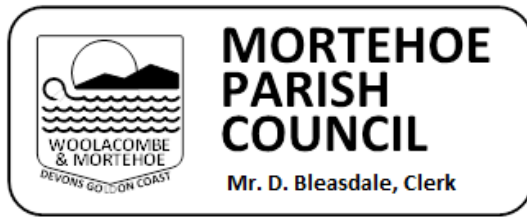
The proposed improvements to the Longbridge in Barnstaple will further promote walking and cycling in our sub regional centre. Unnecessary car trips will be removed, easing congestion in the peak hours and the scheme will provide safe, sustainable alternatives for all, including commuters and school children. The promotion of active travel provides an affordable and healthy option helping to address and reduce inequalities across our communities.

This transport bid focuses on supporting our two largest communities in North Devon. It will help provide safe, healthy and accessible options for active travel supporting our local economies and communities and I sincerely hope it can be supported.



Yours sincerely


Councillor David Worden
Leader
North Devon Council

PO Box 379, Barnstaple, EX32 2GR
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Parish Council Office,
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Woolacombe,
North Devon, EX34 7DN.

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 mortehoeparish@gmail.com

14th February 2023

Dear Active Travel England,

The Parish council very much supports the Tarka Trail cycle path, we believe it is crucial to enhancing the quality of life for the area as a whole, and it has very strong support from many residents, business owners, and community leaders.

As well as for recreational use Bicycling and walking are practical and legitimate means for family to travel and commute to and from work and school.

The completion of this cycle trail will be of massive benefit to the area and we want this to happen sooner rather than later.

Yours Sincerely

Daniel Bleasdale
Clerk to Mortehoe Parish Council

WEST DOWN PARISH COUNCIL

Parish Clerk: Mrs Val Ford



Email:- clerk@westdownparishcouncil.org.uk

Telephone: [REDACTED]

Councillor Andrea Davis,
Devon County Council,
County Hall,
Topsham Road,
Exeter,
Devon, EX2 4QD.

16 February 2023

Dear Councillor Davis,

re: **Tarka Trail, North Devon**

West Down Parish Council support Devon County Council's bid to improve North Devon's infrastructure and the completion of the Tarka Trail to join Braunton and Ilfracombe. The benefits to our community are as follows:-

- The eventual completion of the Tarka Trail could benefit hospitality businesses in the West Down area and, in particular, will probably attract more cyclist visitors as National Cycle Route 27 (Devon coast to coast) will join up with it.
- It will also give the local population access points within our parish without the need to drive and park somewhere first.
- There are many documented health and wellbeing benefits of regular exercise from cycling and walking and this completed trail link would offer a tremendous and safer opportunity to do more.
- It is more than likely that some North Devon residents would also use the trail to commute to work from anywhere along the link up from Ilfracombe to Braunton and Barnstaple.

I hope these points will assist in your bid to complete this valuable asset to the community.

Yours sincerely,

Sue Ayre
Chair West Down Parish Council