

West Devon Highways and Traffic Orders Committee
21 October 2022
South Hams Highways and Traffic Orders Committee
4 November 2022

Clearbrook to Roborough Multi-Use Trail

Report of the Director of Climate Change, Environment and Transport

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Committee before taking effect.

Recommendation: It is recommended that:

- (a) approval be given to proceed with preliminary design for the preferred multi-use trail route between Clearbrook and Roborough shown on Appendix 1; and**
- (b) approval be given to progress with land acquisition by agreement and to progress a planning application for the preferred multi-use trail route between Clearbrook and Roborough shown on Appendix 1.**

1. Summary

A new multi-use trail between Clearbrook and Roborough along the A386 corridor is being developed by Devon County Council. The A386 Tavistock to Plymouth Corridor Study (2018) identified an opportunity to improve active travel along the A386 corridor and the Council's Cycling and Multi-Use Trail Strategy sets out the ambition for a new link to complete provision between Tavistock and the northern growth area of Plymouth, connecting to new development and providing improved access to Dartmoor. This new route, in combination with existing infrastructure between Yelverton and Clearbrook, will complete a missing link in the existing Multi-Use Trail Network and open up sustainable access between communities, employment, health, and leisure opportunities along the A386 corridor.

This report makes recommendations to proceed with a preferred route for the trail, identified through ongoing feasibility work in conjunction with findings from a public consultation held in Spring 2022.

2. Background

Multi-use paths are important elements of the Department for Transport's (DfT's) [Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cycling-and-walking-investment-strategy)¹ and active/sustainable travel have a key role in the [Transport Decarbonisation Plan](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transport-decarbonisation-plan)². The government has a bold vision for cycling and walking, with [Gear Change](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cycling-and-walking-plan-for-england)³ emphasising the health, economic and environmental benefits of investing in active travel. New schemes should offer an opportunity for walkers, cyclists, wheel-chair users, and others, to be active and enjoy the outdoors. The latest Local

¹<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cycling-and-walking-investment-strategy>

²<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transport-decarbonisation-plan>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cycling-and-walking-plan-for-england>

Transport Note 1/20 states that routes should be as inclusive as possible: *'infrastructure should be accessible to everyone from 8 to 80 and beyond: it should be planned and designed for everyone.'* LTN1/20 identifies five key principles: attractiveness, cohesion, directness, safety and comfort.

Aligning with national guidance, DCC's [Cycling and Multi-Use Trail Network Strategy](#)⁴ sets out the county's ambition to continue developing a segregated high-quality network of trails promoting healthy lifestyles and access for all. As detailed in the Corporate, Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee's [review of the county's Multi-Use Trail strategy \(2021\)](#)⁴, a new multi-use trail between Clearbrook and Roborough is being developed as part of this commitment. The opportunity to create a segregated route near the A386 linking with existing active travel routes in Plymouth has also been identified in the [A386 Tavistock to Plymouth Corridor Strategy](#)⁵, approved in 2018.

Promoting sustainability is one of the key transport planning principles outlined in Plymouth and South West Devon's Joint Local Plan⁷. SPT9 (4) seeks *'to reduce the impact of severance caused by transport networks, enabling more journeys by walking, cycling and public transport and providing genuine alternative ways to travel from home to work and other facilities'*.

The Dartmoor Local Plan⁶ also focuses on the sustainability of the National Park, and in particular the promotion sustainable transport (Goal 11). The plan outlines that: *'New sustainable transport networks, including infrastructure for cycling and walking, electric car charging, bus and rail, will be supported where they are consistent with the National Park's Special Qualities.'*

A386 corridor

The existing travel network between Tavistock and Plymouth primarily consists of the A386 road corridor, shown in **Error! Reference source not found..** This is a busy route with average daily traffic of 16,000-18,000 vehicles. This volume is predicted to increase as nearby housing sites allocated in the [Joint Local Plan](#)⁷ are built out, including the up to 2,000 new homes at Woolwell. Consequently, the A386 is not suited to providing a safe and accessible route for walkers, cyclists and other non-motorised users. The road does not have suitable footways and is not wide enough to allow cyclists and vehicles to share road space. Between 2016 and 2020, 35 collisions occurred on the A386 between the junction with Clearbrook Road and Roborough, and 6 of these (17%) involved pedal cycles and cars colliding in the carriageway.

Analysis of 2011 Census data shows that, whilst many people commute by bike within Tavistock or within areas in northern Plymouth, numbers are low along the A386 corridor.

⁴ <https://www.devon.gov.uk/roadsandtransport/traffic-information/transport-planning/multi-use-trails/>

⁵ <https://www.devon.gov.uk/roadsandtransport/traffic-information/transport-planning/>

⁶ <https://www.dartmoor.gov.uk/living-and-working/business/planning-policy/local-plan>

⁷ <https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/planningandbuildingcontrol/planningpolicyandguidance/plymouthandsouthwestdevonjointlocalplanv>



Figure 2 Key destinations in northern Plymouth

Drake's Trail

Parallel to the A386, Drake's Trail (National Cycle Network 27) offers walking, wheeling and cycling access from Tavistock through Yelverton to Clearbrook and onwards into eastern Plymouth. This trail is suitable for a range of users of all abilities and increases accessibility to the stunning natural environment of Dartmoor National Park. Available data shows that the existing Drake's Trail is the most popular route for cyclists along the A386 corridor. Cycle counters evidence how the number of cyclists using the route has increased steadily over the last 15 years, particularly on weekends. This rise matches the overall trend in cycling numbers on similar routes across the county where cycling is becoming increasingly popular.

However, Drake's Trail currently heads east at Clearbrook Leat car park and connects into Plympton in the east of Plymouth, bypassing important employment, residential and new development areas in the north of the city including Roborough, Woolwell and Derriford, (see **Error! Reference source not found.**).

3. Proposal

To harness the potential of completing this missing link into Plymouth, options to connect Drake's Trail (NCN27) to the active travel network in Roborough have been explored and a preferred option identified (Figure 3 and Appendix 1). This preferred route begins near Clearbrook Leat car park, where the existing Drake's Trail (NCN27) turns and travels east

to Plympton. Rather than heading east, the proposed new route instead continues south for 3.5km to reach northern Plymouth.

Local analysis using the DfT's 'Propensity to Cycle Tool' has demonstrated that the introduction of safe and attractive infrastructure between Clearbrook and Roborough could bring increased cycling numbers and associated cost savings to public health. The route would provide good accessibility for users, linking to Roborough/Plymouth in the south and to Drake's Trail with connections to Tavistock in the north. The route also links to three existing car parks at Clearbrook Leat, Roborough Down Lane, and Little Down Lane for convenient access to the route.

Surfacing of the path will be decided in agreement with Dartmoor National Park but is likely to be comprised of an asphalt or a sub-base finish. It is considered the path would follow existing topography, although some earthworks would be required to provide suitable crossfalls where the path runs adjacent to existing carriageway.

The route would travel between Clearbrook and Roborough via the following stages:

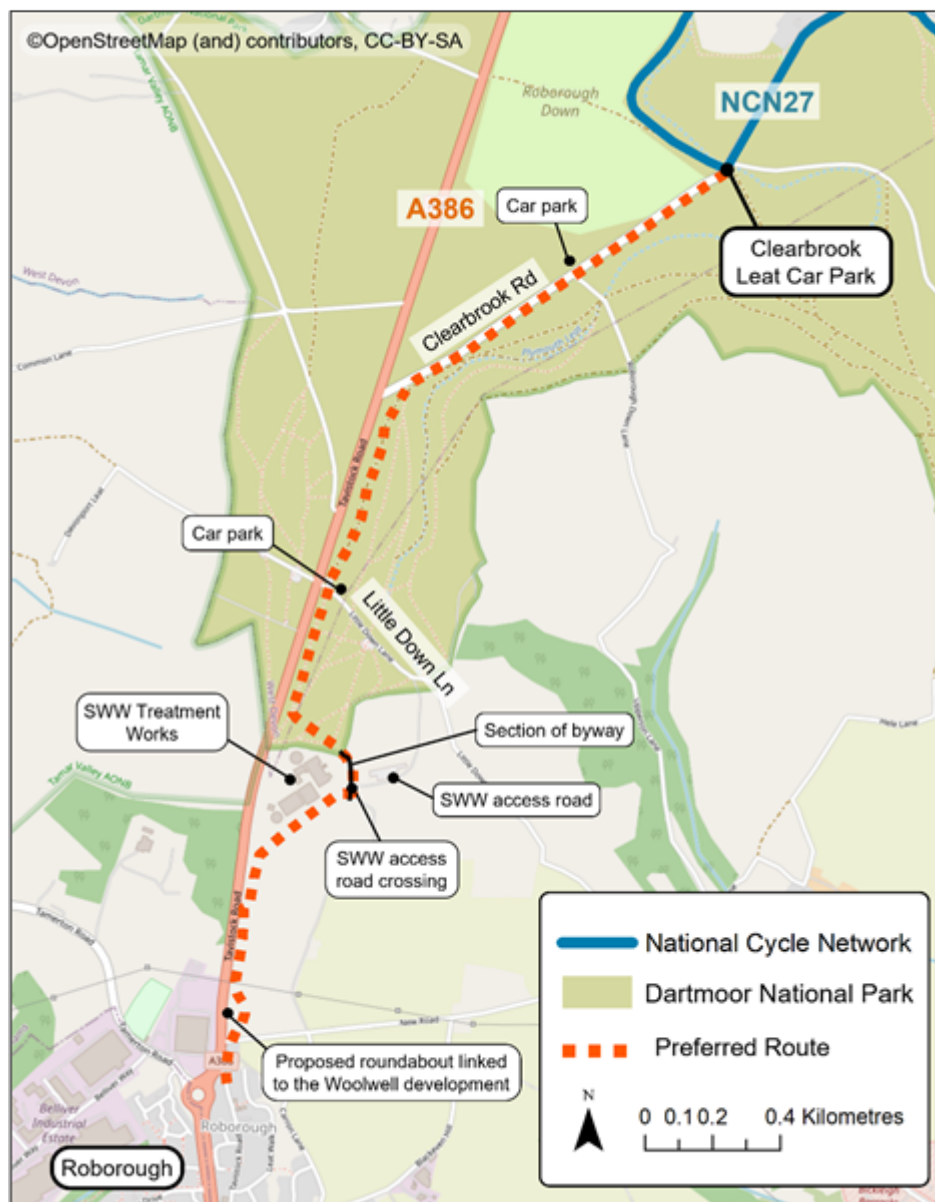


Figure 3 Preferred Route Option

Clearbrook Road

From Clearbrook Leat Car Park the route heads southwest along the southern verge of Clearbrook Road for approximately 1.1km. To achieve the 3-metre path width (as recommended by LTN 1/20) some heathland planting would need to be removed.

Clearbrook Road to South West Water (SWW) Works

Before reaching the A386 the route turns left off Clearbrook Road and heads south following an existing track and crossing Little Down Lane. After approximately 1km the route heads southeast in order to travel around the SWW Treatment Works. This section will likely require the removal of some heathland planting.

South West Water Works to Roborough

The route east of Mayflower Water Treatment Works would run along an existing track along a byway/unclassified county road. The route will cross the SWW access road before turning back towards the A386 through agricultural land for approximately 500 metre to reach Roborough. On the approach to the A386 at the southern end of the route two sections of mature hedgerow (5m length of each) will be required to be removed.

Tie-in

At this early stage of design, details of how the route will tie into infrastructure in Plymouth is yet to be determined. The ambition is for the route to provide a smooth transition into Plymouth's active travel network linking well with both the existing infrastructure in Roborough, and with any active travel facilities provided as part of the Woolwell development (such as the proposed roundabout north of Roborough).

4. Consultations

Members Briefing

An initial briefing was held in early January 2022 with County and District councillors surrounding the proposed route, including local members from Yelverton Rural and Bickleigh and Wembury.

Consultation Arrangements

Between 11 March 2022 and 6 May 2022, a virtual public consultation was held on proposals for a route from the NCN27 at Clearbrook to Roborough. Initial feasibility work had identified two initial high-level options for the route which were both presented to the public for comment. These options are summarised below, with a map of these routes provided in Figure 4.

- **Route A** followed Clearbrook Road southwest from Clearbrook Leat car park, crossed the A386 and headed south along the western verge of the A386 to reach Roborough (approximately 3.36km in length).
- **Route B** followed Clearbrook Road southwest from Clearbrook Leat car park to the existing footpath adjacent to Plymouth Leat. It then headed south along Plymouth Leat and then around the SWW Treatment Works to reach Roborough (approx. 3.58km).

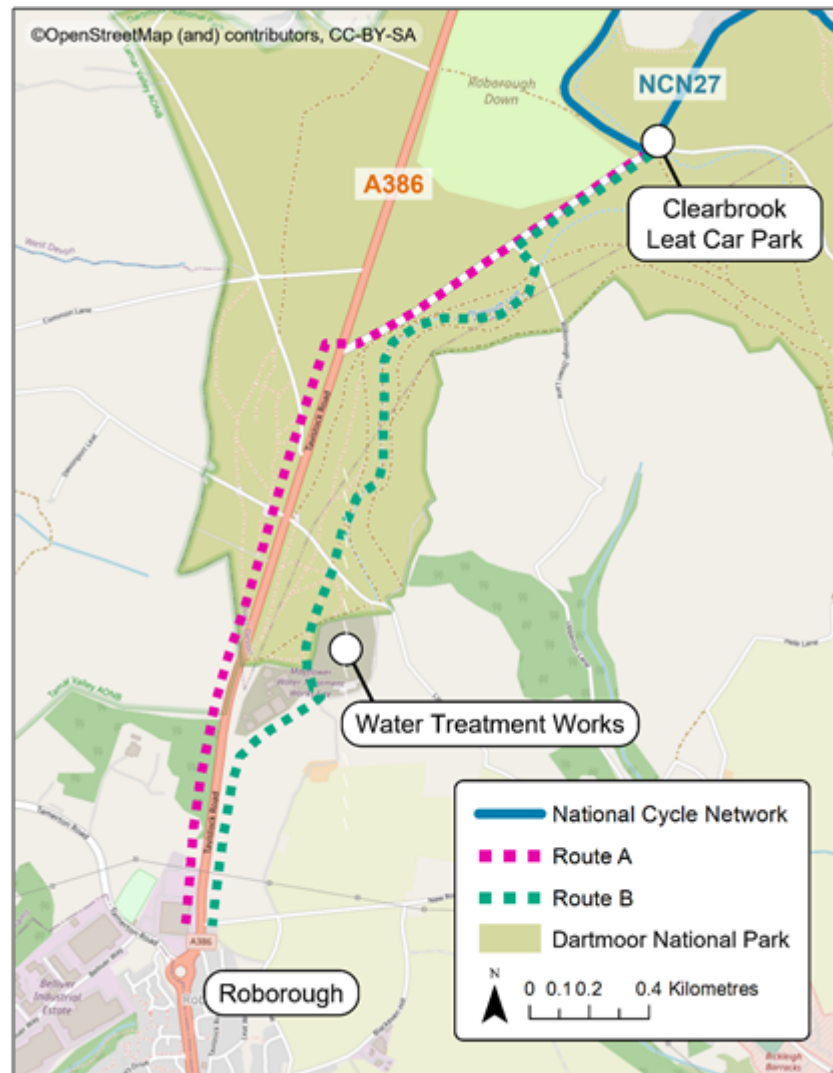


Figure 4 Routes presented at public consultation Spring 2022

The consultation was advertised through press releases, social media, adverts in the local press and by posters in community hubs. Respondents could have their say by attending the webinar events, or by completing a questionnaire available on the consultation webpage or on paper. A total of 906 questionnaires, 8 emails and 5 written stakeholder responses were submitted.

The two virtual webinars were held on the 18 and 31 March 2022 and during these events the public and local stakeholders could speak directly with members of the project team. These were attended by 22 people including members of local cycling groups and a representative from the walking and cycling charity, Sustrans.

Consultation Findings

A full public consultation report can be found on the project webpage⁸, this was published in September 2022. Key findings from this document are below:

- 80% of respondents were unsatisfied with the existing walking and wheeling provisions between Yelverton and Roborough, with the lack of an off-road route for the whole journey and traffic on the A386 the key barriers to uptake.

⁸ devon.cc/clearbrooktoroborough

- The majority (89%, 809) of respondents supported the principle of a new multi-use trail, the main reason for this being the unsafe existing provision. Other reasons included boosting active travel and tackling climate change.
- 76% of respondents reported that Route B (slightly inland route) would serve them best, while 24% preferred Route A (adjacent to A386).
- A higher proportion (94%) of respondents would feel confident using Route B, compared to Route A (62%).
- Exercise and leisure would be the most popular reasons for using either route. 24% of respondents would use the more direct Route A for commuting, yet 23% of respondents would still use Route B to travel to work.
- Reasons for preferring Route B included its scenery and distance from traffic, however, some respondents did not think this route was direct enough.
- Route A was preferred by some as it more closely follows the desire line of the A386 corridor, however others raised concerns over safety and delays caused by the A386 crossing.
- Some respondents suggested alternative routes, including a more direct route along the east side of the A386.

Consultation Outcomes

The high level of public support for a multi-use trail between Clearbrook and Roborough supports Devon County Council's continued commitment to deliver an active travel improvement along the A386 corridor. The consultation findings have helped to evolve the route design and to develop the preferred option:

- As a result of the A386 crossing being perceived a potential deterrent for users, this aspect of design has been removed and the preferred route instead remains on the east side of the road.
- To address comments over the indirectness of Route B, the preferred route option now more closely follows the desire line of the A386 road corridor; however, it is sufficiently removed from vehicular traffic (average buffer of 40 metres, minimum 30m) to maintain the segregated benefits of Route B and still enable users to enjoy a scenic route through the National Park.

5. Options/Alternatives

Do Nothing

To keep the status quo would be to maintain traffic dominance and an unattractive environment for active travel users of the A386 road corridor. Levels of traffic will increase as development allocated in the Local Plan is built out with current issues exacerbated. This would continue to deter less confident cyclists and limit active travel access between Dartmoor, West Devon and the important destinations in northern Plymouth.

Route A

This option has been discounted due to the perceived danger of the A386 road crossing and the poorer cycling environment for users due to the proximity of the trail to traffic (21% of consultation respondents would lack confidence using Route A). Route A passes through an area of deciduous woodland adjacent to the A386 near to Roborough, the disturbance of which would have a large impact on species and habitats as a result of the required tree and vegetation clearance. This route is also considered to have the highest associated construction costs.

Route B

This option as presented at consultation has been adapted into the preferred route. Adaptation was required largely because of Route B's impact on the sensitive local environment, as it would require more vegetation and tree clearance than for the new preferred route. Route B would also likely require earthworks and changes to the existing landscape adjacent to the historic Plymouth Leat. The construction costs of this option are less than Route A but greater than for the preferred route option.

Route from Yelverton to Roborough

There is already a section of Drake's Trail between Yelverton and Clearbrook which makes up a high proportion of the total distance (3.2km) to Roborough. Making use of this existing infrastructure has several advantages:

- minimising cost and improving value for money
- minimising timescales
- reducing the impact of construction in the National Park.

For these reasons the focus to date has been on improving provision between Clearbrook and Roborough, however this does not preclude a future extension of the multi-use trail to Yelverton.

6. Strategic Plan

Proposals are well-aligned with a range of Strategic Plan priorities and actions. The scheme seeks to promote and create more opportunities for active travel, encouraging sustainable lifestyles. The table below summarises how the proposals would impact achievement of 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 | Alignment |
|--|---|------------------------|
| Responding to the climate emergency | Support a green recovery from COVID-19. | +2 (Moderate positive) |
| | Prioritise sustainable travel and transport. | +3 (Large positive) |
| | Encourage sustainable lifestyles. | +3 (Large positive) |
| Investing in Devon's economic recovery | Maintain and, where necessary, improve our highway network and improve sustainable transport options. | +2 (Moderate positive) |
| Improving health and wellbeing | Give people greater opportunities for walking and cycling to increase their physical activity. | +3 (Large positive) |
| Helping communities to be safe, connected and resilient | Enable a range of transport options, including public transport. | +2 (Moderate positive) |

7. Financial Considerations

The [report](#)^{Error! Bookmark not defined.} presented to the Corporate, Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee in 2021 provided a review and update of the county's Multi-Use Trail Strategy. A new multi-use trail between Clearbrook and Roborough was identified as one of the priorities for delivery.

A detailed cost estimate has not been provided at this early stage of design however it is considered that the preferred option has the lowest construction costs out of the route options identified. Funding for this project is yet to be secured. Potential sources of funding are expected to be reliant on a successful bid to a suitable Department for Transport fund and/or secured through local developer contributions.

We are working on developing an LTN1/20 compliant design with a strong evidence base and value for money business case in order to attract such investment. If a future bid is successful, a proposed funding package will be confirmed as part of a scheme approval report presented at a future meeting. Funding for the ongoing design work will be from Local Transport Plan Integrated Block, as allocated in the approved capital programme. Future financial years will rely on further allocations to support work continuing, unless external funding sources are secured.

8. Legal Considerations

For the sections of route crossing open land, permitted development rights for works adjoining an existing highway would not apply. A planning application will therefore be required, with Dartmoor National Park Authority (DNPA) as the determining planning authority. Common Land Consent is also likely to be required from the Planning Inspectorate on behalf of the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural.

The route east of the SWW Treatment Works would run along an existing track/byway which is an unsurfaced unclassified county road (DCC HMPE). This is a public road but falls into the lowest maintenance category and it is recommended that investigation is undertaken to confirm its existing status.

There are several landowners who would be impacted along the route and third-party consents and land would also be required so discussions will need to continue throughout the design process. A further issue to be resolved is the crossing of the SWW access road.

9. Environmental Impact Considerations (Including Climate Change)

The scheme is expected to reduce carbon emissions through encouraging greater levels of commuting and other short trips by active travel rather than by motorised vehicle. Emission reductions will also result from leisure trips using the route that would otherwise involve a car journey elsewhere. There are clear benefits enabling local people to access green infrastructure, the new multi-use-trail would open up access to Dartmoor for a wider range of groups who may not be able to physically access current active travel facilities, such as Drake's Trail. More people, particularly younger age groups, will have greater access to employment/training opportunities without incurring the costs of driving or public transport.

A stage 1 Desktop Environmental Review and an ecological site walkover of the site has been undertaken.

The route crosses a Strategic Nature Area (SNA) – Upland Heath (Devon Biodiversity Record Centre) and grassland/heathland areas, in addition to being located within Dartmoor National Park. The potential impact on the environment has been reduced by opting for the preferred route which largely follows existing walked pathways/tracks across Dartmoor, resulting in much less dense vegetation removal in areas which currently do not offer many opportunities for protected species. Woodland clearance has also been minimised by the preferred route which only passes through one small group of trees. The main impacts to be considered are:

- The removal of some heathland and lowland dry acid grassland priority habitats, and the loss of some trees,
- The removal of two sections of mature hedgerow (5m length of each) at the southern end of the scheme on the approach to the A386.

Landscape/ecological mitigation would be required to replace this loss of heathland habitat, hedgerows and trees. Measures would include replacement planting/habitats and include 10% biodiversity net gain. Due to the sensitive environmental nature of Dartmoor National Park, it is likely that an Environmental Impact Assessment will be required as part of the planning application. Archaeological and landscape surveys will also be required. Further environmental surveys will be required to confirm presence of protected species/habitat and to assess the impact of removing heathland habitat, hedgerows and trees. The preferred route does not cross any areas at risk of flooding from surface water.

10. Equality Considerations

‘Where relevant to the 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.

taking account of age, disability, race/ethnicity (includes Gypsies and Travellers), gender and gender identity, religion and belief, sexual orientation, pregnant women/new and breastfeeding mothers, marriage/civil partnership status in coming to a decision, a decision maker may also consider other relevant factors such as caring responsibilities, rural isolation or socio-economic disadvantage. In progressing this proposal, an Impact Assessment has been prepared and is available to view at:

<https://www.devon.gov.uk/impact/>.

11. Risk Management Considerations

The principal risks are the numerous constraints in the process of securing a planning consent and obtaining land. As the scheme falls within Dartmoor National Park, an environmentally sensitive area with high levels of protection, proposals will be subject to Dartmoor National Park's planning approval process which includes going before a Planning Inspectorate. This will contribute to a degree of uncertainty over timescales and cost. However, Devon County Council does have a long track record of working with the National Park Authority to deliver successful multi-use trails. Recent projects include the 2020 completion of the Wray Valley Trail linking Bovey Tracey to Moretonhampstead and the 2013-2015 'Granite and Gears' programme, which included the Clearbrook Ramp project and trails near Princetown.

Funding for this project is also yet to be secured and so presents a risk to its future implementation.

12. Public Health Impact

The scheme would be expected to generate public health benefits by further encouraging the growing culture of walking and cycling in Devon. Experience in Exeter and elsewhere in Devon has shown that introducing people to walking and cycling through leisure routes and improved facilities in their local area encourages take up for more regular utility type trips including journeys for work, education and shopping. This is particularly the case with cycling where it incentivises the purchase of new or improved equipment including bikes.

The main health benefits accrue through greater physical activity reducing levels of obesity and improving general fitness levels allied with reduced levels of mental illness through new activities and greater physical activity levels.

13. Reasons for Recommendations

The recommendations in this report will enable proposals for a new multi-use trail between Clearbrook to Roborough to progress to preliminary design and to planning. This path would complete a missing link in the existing Multi-Use Trail Network opening access between destinations in the major growth area on the northern edge of Plymouth and Dartmoor for communities along the A386 corridor, fulfilling commitments set out in DCC's Multi-Use Trail Strategy. The existing A386 is unsuitable for non-motorised users, and high volumes of traffic deters all but the most confident cyclists, walkers and wheelers. A new multi-use trail would instead encourage sustainable lifestyles by providing a new high quality off-road active travel link for leisure and commuting activities in the area.

Ongoing feasibility work and the findings from the public consultation have led to the development of a preferred route for the multi-use trail. This preferred option best meets the criteria set out by the DfT in LTN1/20, providing a facility which benefits all user groups whilst also minimising disturbance to Dartmoor National Park.

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Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

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| Background Paper | Date | File Reference |
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Preferred Route Option

