

CET/23/76

North Devon Highways and Traffic Orders Committee

13 October 2023

Tarka Trail - Willingcott to Knowle – Nethercott Road (phase 5) and Phased Strategy

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.

1) Recommendation

It is recommended that:

- (a) **the committee notes the proposed strategy for delivery of the Tarka Trail route between Willingcott and Knowle; and**
- (b) **approval is given for construction of the Nethercott Road section of the Tarka Trail between Willingcott and Knowle as shown in Appendix 1 at an estimated cost of £200,000; and**
- (c) **the Director of Climate Change, Environment and Transport be given delegated powers, in consultation with the Chair of HATOC and the local member, to make minor amendments to the scheme details.**

2) Background and Introduction

This report sets out the overall strategy and phased approach for the development and delivery of the remaining sections of the Tarka Trail between Willingcott and Knowle, which would complete the multi-use trail between Barnstaple and Ilfracombe. There are six phases that Devon County Council seeks to deliver in the coming years, subject to the availability of funding.

Devon County Council has secured significant Government funding from the fourth round of the Government's Active Travel Fund to progress designs for the route and construct sections between Willingcott Holiday Village and Foxhunters (phases 1 and 2), as well as Nethercott Road (phase 5). The phase through the holiday village is currently under construction by a 3rd party. This report also seeks approval for the phase 5 scheme.

3) Phased Strategy for Willingcott to Knowle

The current 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 to Braunton Police Station at which point it follows an on-road route to

Willingcott Bridge Junction just north of Georgeham. NCN route 278 spurs off this through Georgeham and Woolacombe.

This section of the NCN north of Braunton is steep, and although on quiet roads, has the potential for cyclists coming into conflict with vehicles. It is a lower standard of route than the rest of the Tarka Trail, which is mainly shared use paths with segregation from vehicles.

Completing the gaps in the Tarka Trail is a high priority and 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, 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. The aspiration is for the completed section between Knowle and Willingcott to be mostly off road, segregated from traffic, with the exception of the proposed section of 385m length on Nethercott Road, where the alternative route options are limited.

Devon County Council has been awarded £820,000 from the fourth Active Travel Fund to construct three sections of the route, and £110,000 to develop designs for the remaining three phases. There is an expectation for this funding to be committed this financial year, or there is a risk that it will need to be paid back. Further funding will be required to construct the remaining phases, which has constraints include various structures.

The route through the Willingcott Holiday village is currently under construction by a third party as a requirement of their planning permission.

The section from the Holiday Village to Buttercombe Lane (phase 1) has been constructed following approval from this committee but remains closed to the public as there is no access at either end.

The section from Buttercombe Lane to Foxhunters (phase 2) is currently subject to a planning application, and approval to construct this section starting this financial year will be sought from Cabinet later this year.

Section 3 of this report provides details for the construction of the Nethercott Road section of the Tarka Trail multi use trail between Willingcott and Knowle (phase 5 as shown in the phasing plan in Appendix 2).

The above sections (phases 1, 2 and 5 on Appendix 2) are the planned construction schemes for this financial year. In the interim time between these phases and the rest of the route being completed, it is proposed to use the A361 for a short section. This is due to be considered for a 50mph limit and average speed cameras under a separate scheme being progressed by the Road Safety Team. This will make this section of the A361 more suitable for cycling in the short time that the entire route is not complete.

. Devon County Council aims to construct the remaining sections and complete the Tarka Trail as soon as practically possible but will be dependent on external grant funding. Using Active Travel Fund grant monies to progress design for the remaining phases 3, 4 and 6 means that we can get the schemes delivery-ready and with best chance of securing funding.

Of the remaining sections, Phase 6 (Knowle to Nethercott Road) would be the next priority followed by Phase 4 (Spreacombe junction to Nethercott Road), which would reduce the length of the A361 needing to be used. These proposals will also be subject to further public consultation and there may be alternative route options for phase 4, for instance reducing the number of crossings of the river Caen.

Finally, phase 3 (Spreacombe junction to Foxhunters) and Willingcott Bridge Junction are likely to be the last phases due to the length of the section and constraints due to the number of large structures needed to complete it and the associated costs involved.

4) Phase 5: Nethercott Road Scheme

Approval is sought for the construction to begin on the Nethercott Road section of the Tarka Trail between Willingcott and Knowle.

As shown in Appendix 1 this includes eight coloured/written road markings and the creation of five passing places, adjacent to the existing highway with gabion basket retaining walls and timber fences above.

Based on traffic counts from August 2015, this road is considered acceptable for people to use as part of the Tarka Trail as it is very lightly trafficked and traffic speeds are low. With limited development in the area since 2015, traffic volumes are not expected to have increased significantly, with most traffic likely to be making use of the main roads. The highest level of traffic recorded on Nethercott Road during a survey of just over a week, was a total of 130 vehicles in one day, with a maximum of 17 in one hour. This equates to no more than one vehicle every three minutes averaged across the busiest hour.

Traffic speeds were recorded at an 85th percentile speed of 23.5mph, with only nine vehicles recorded in eight days travelling over 30mph, and none over 40mph.

The proposed signage and markings will act to reduce speeds further and make drivers more aware of the possibility of people in the road.

The proposed five passing places will help to reduce conflict if vehicles and people walking/cycling do meet oncoming vehicles. There are examples of such on-road sections also on the Wray Valley Trail between Newton Abbot and Moretonhampstead where traffic volumes are low on rural lanes and there have been no known instances of collisions between vehicles and cyclists or pedestrians.

5) Options/Alternatives

Nethercott Road

There are no realistic alternatives to this section of the Willingcott to Knowle route.

Widening of the entire road could result in higher vehicle speeds and be far more expensive and would have a greater negative impact on the environment. It would also likely result in more traffic using this road as perceptions for drivers would change as a more suitable route due to its increased width.

Overall route -Willingcott to Knowle

The current Tarka Trail ends south of Knowle, with a link to NCN 27 on a rough track through Deans Copse and via on road routes near to Georgeham.

There are no realistic alternatives to the route to the proposed phases as these have been considered in depth in terms of seeking a route following the best available gradient, desire line and considering land availability and planning requirements. Using the existing route of NCN 27 and not progressing the scheme is the only realistic alternative.

There are some specific alternatives/options to consider in the future sections as the detailed design progresses, such as materials to be used, the exact width and specification of the path, and the location and number of rest areas etc.

There are some possible changes to the alignment of the route between Nethercott Road and Spreacombe, which could have fewer crossings of the River Caen. These are still being investigated and future consultation will occur on these options.

The alternative to the interim use of the A361 would be to complete the sections due for construction this financial year but not open them to the public. This would mean that the new asset is completed, and subject to maintenance and weathering offering no public benefit until the remainder of the route is funded. This is not considered the best approach; however, the safety implications will be fully considered prior to any decision on the opening of the scheme.

6) Consultations

No formal consultation has been carried out for the Nethercott Road section of the route but there is public support for completion of the gaps in the Tarka Trail between Knowle and Willingcott and the proposed on-road scheme involves minimal changes to the existing highway.

Consultations for individual sections requiring planning permission will be carried out as part of the planning process.

As part of the 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 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

7) Strategic Plan

The Willingcott to Knowle cycle route is well aligned with a range of the Strategic Plan priorities by improving the environment to enable more walking, wheeling and cycling and encourage more sustainable lifestyles. The table below summarises how each of the proposals would impact 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, for commuting, education and leisure purposes	+3 (Large 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 provide a safe environment for all people of ages.	+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 joining various isolated communities with a high quality multi use trail funded largely from the fourth round of the Active Travel Fund.	+3 (Large positive)
Tackle poverty and inequality			

Strategic Plan Priority	Strategic Plan Action	Comment	Alignment
	Make Devon a fairer place, address poverty, health and other inequalities, and ensure support for those people and families struggling most.	This route would join Ilfracombe to Barnstaple, two towns with 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 would benefit from better access to this largely traffic free multi-use trail.	+2 (Moderate 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 and will link at various locations to public transport.	+3 (Large positive)

8) Financial Considerations

The proposed section on Nethercott Road is estimated to cost £164,852, with an additional £16,538 of contingency. Approval is sought for the scheme up to £200,000 to include additional contingency.

This will be funded from the £820,000 received from the fourth round of the Active Travel Fund, which is also contributing towards the section of the trail between Buttercombe Lane and Foxhunters.

An additional £110,000 has been received as part of the Active Travel Fund to develop designs for the future sections of the route.

9) Legal Considerations

It has been confirmed by the Planning Development Manager that planning permission is not required for the works on Nethercott Road, as they are adjacent to existing public highway and fall under the permitted development rights provided by Class A (development by highways authorities) of Part 9 of Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015.

10) Environmental Impact Considerations (Including Climate Change)

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 area into which the road is being widened is low quality woodland, scrub and rocky outcrop.

A site visit was undertaken with the County Ecologist in May 2023, which concluded that no further works were required for ecological reasons on Nethercott Road. For any woody vegetation being removed, ecological supervision was recommended; however, if this was not required, works purely involving removal of soil was not deemed an issue. On this advice, ecological supervision will be carried out during the works where required.

Progression of individual future sections will consider ecological, arboricultural and climate change impacts relevant to each phase.

11) 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.

Prior to consideration by HATOC, an Impact Assessment has been prepared and published at: <https://www.devon.gov.uk/impact/>.

12) Risk Management Considerations

Risks to delivery will be assessed as part of the design process for individual sections of the scheme.

For the Nethercott Road section, this has been subject to stage 1 and 2 road safety audits. From the stage 1 audit the road surfacing and refuge areas were raised and addressed in the detailed design. No issues were raised in the stage 2 audit.

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

13) Public Health Impact

Increased levels of walking, cycling and wheeling will have a positive impact on public health. The letter of support for the ATF4 funding bid from Dr Brennan, chair of One Northern Devon Travel Forum, stated:

‘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.’

14) Summary

This report notes the phased approach to completing the remaining sections of the Knowle to Willingcott section of the multi-use Tarka Trail (Appendix 2). It also seeks approval for phase 5, which is a short on-road section including construction of passing places and road markings/signage along Nethercott Road as shown in Appendix 1.

Meg Booth

Director of Climate Change, Environment and Transport

Electoral Division: Braunton Rural

Local Government Act 1972: List of background papers

Background Paper Nil

Contact for enquiries:

Name: Matt Collins

Telephone: 01271 388510

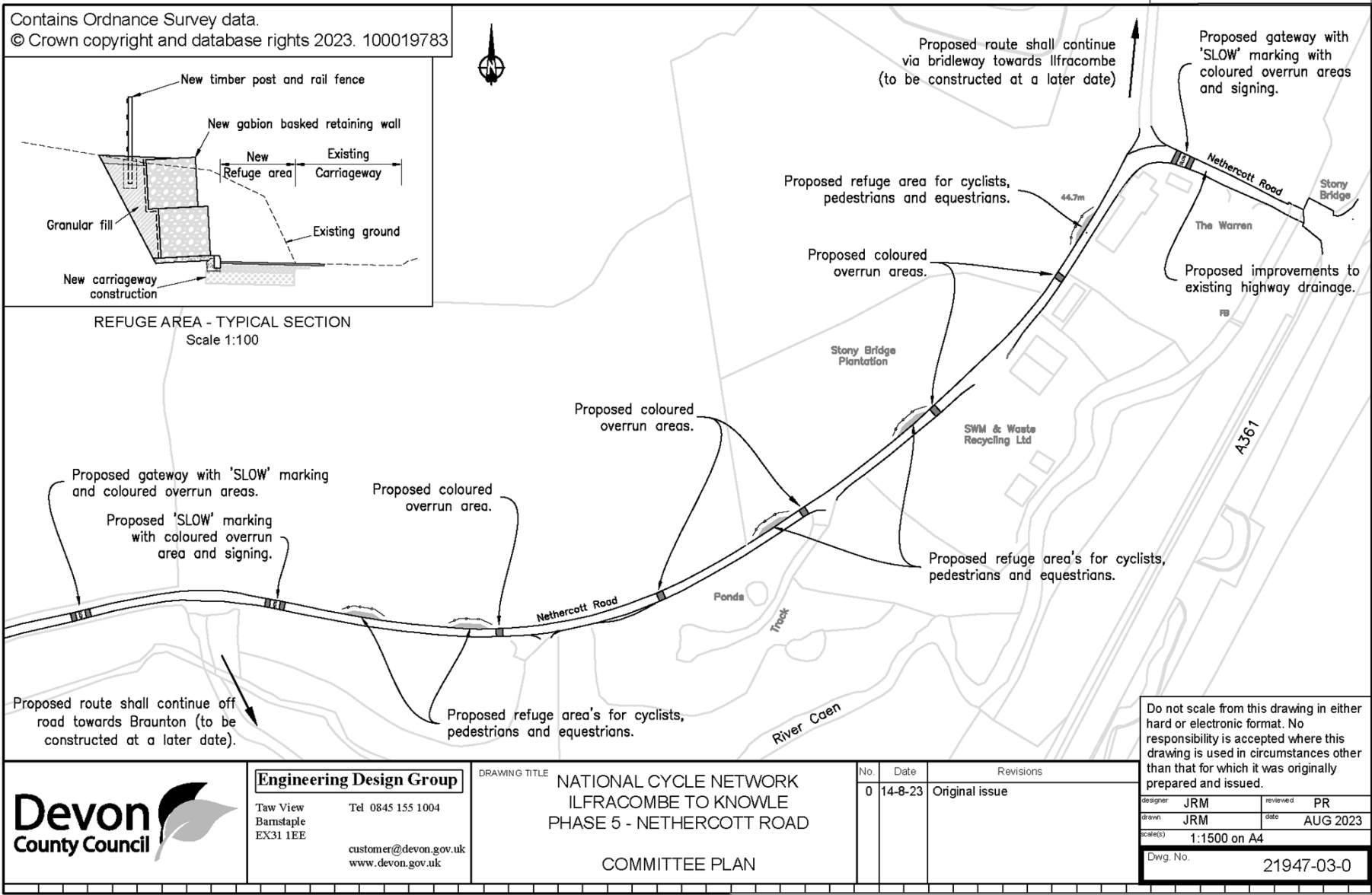
Address: Taw View, Barnstaple

mc010923ndh

sc/cr/Tarka Trail Willingcott to Knowle Phase 5 Nethercott Road

02 0310923

Appendix 1 to CET/23/76



Engineering Design Group
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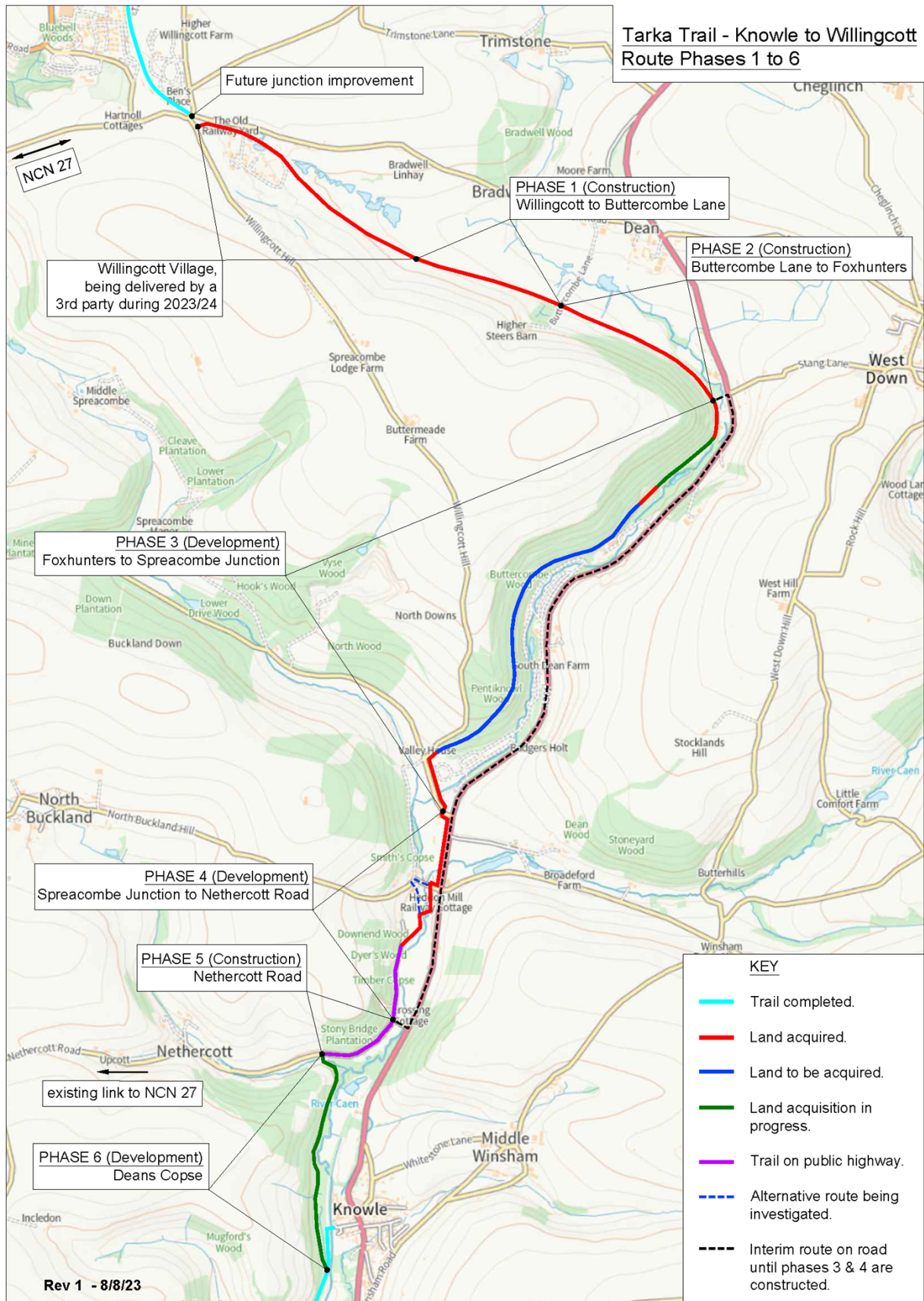
DRAWING TITLE
**NATIONAL CYCLE NETWORK
 ILFRACOMBE TO KNOWLE
 PHASE 5 - NETHERCOTT ROAD**
 COMMITTEE PLAN

No.	Date	Revisions
0	14-8-23	Original issue

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.

designer	JRM	reviewed	PR
drawn	JRM	date	AUG 2023
scale(s)	1:1500 on A4		
Dwg. No.	21947-03-0		

Appendix 2 to CET/23/76



Appendix 3 to CET/23/76



one northern devon

15th February 2023

Dear Active Travel England,

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

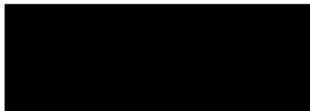
Our partnership of local organisations focuses on improving the wider determinants of health and wellbeing. We have a well established 'Active Travel forum' that has representation from the NHS (Royal Devon University Healthcare Trust, PCNs, our National Hospital Programme and NHS Devon's Integrated Care Board) as well as North Devon Cycling Campaign, Active Devon, Torrington 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.

Constituency Office: 01271 327 990 Parliamentary Office: 020 7219 5952
Email: selaine.saxby.mp@parliament.uk



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.

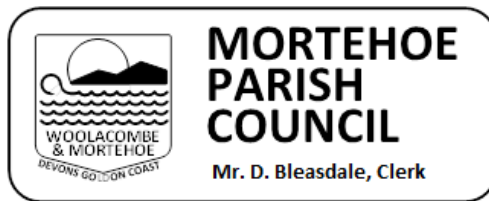
This transport bid focuses on supporting our two largest communities in North Devon. It will help provide safe, healthy and accessible options for active travel supporting our local economies and communities and I sincerely hope it can be supported.

Yours sincerely

A black rectangular box redacting the signature of Councillor David Worden.

Councillor David Worden
Leader
North Devon Council

PO Box 379, Barnstaple, EX32 2GR
www.northdevon.gov.uk



Mortehoe Parish Council
Parish Council Office,
The Esplanade,
Woolacombe,
North Devon, EX34 7DN.



(01271) 870247

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: 07852 627967

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