

A4018 Westbury Road and cycling (6 November 2019)

Introduction

The A4018 project has prepared a design for a shared-use path on the Downs alongside the A4018 Westbury Road. As well as providing improvements for identified current issues, this project is focussing on the considerable increase in traffic on the route forecast as a result of the forthcoming Filton Airfield development.

This matter has been discussed with the Downs Committee Movement and Place sub-group on a number of occasions. Recent changes made as a result of these discussions have been improved crossings of Roman Road and the southern arm of Parry's Lane (where pedestrians and cyclists have priority), consideration of rolled limestone as a surface material, and the proposal to sign the path for pedestrians only with the existing shared-use pavement of Westbury Road signed for cyclists only. It is accepted that this latter aspect could not be enforced by the council but would likely be quite well self-enforcing.

At the 23 September Downs Committee meeting, a vote was taken on granting permission to the project to submit a planning application for the path. The result was a 6-6 tie, with the project asked to provide evidence that the existing shared-use pavement could not be upgraded to provide adequate facilities for walking and cycling with no Downs land required before another vote could be arranged.

The proposal was popular with respondents to the A4018 project's consultation in February-March 2019, as shown in the below extract from the consultation results report.

The new shared-use path on the Down alongside Westbury Road

Result: proposal recommended to be kept, this change will be made

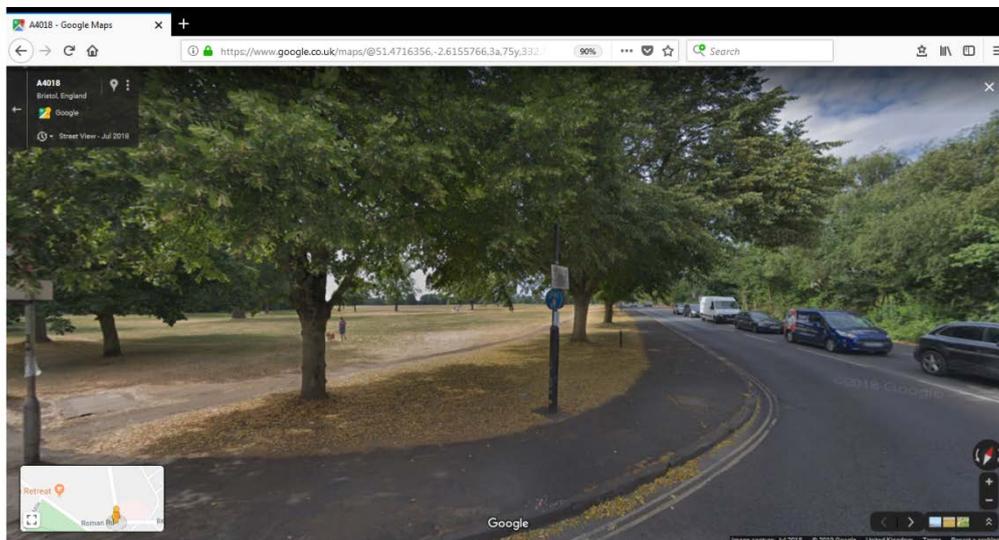
Comments in favour	Comments against
530	213

Although the level of support for this element barely surpassed half from responses to the questionnaire, a large number of people provided positive comments on it separately. For this reason, it is suggested that this element of the scheme be retained.

Agreement will also be required from the Downs Committee (whose Place and Movement sub-group support the proposal in principle as part of their aspirations for more leisure cycling routes on the Downs), which will be sought in due course. It is also the only element of the scheme that is not on public highway and will therefore require a planning application. As part of this process, detailed discussions will be held with groups representing people with disabilities, pedestrians, and cyclists to ensure the most appropriate and safest design in terms of access to the path, speeds of cycling, and whether the path is segregated, physically or by painted markings.

The existing shared-use facility on Westbury Road

For clarity, the route under consideration starts at the point shown below.



To consider this issue, a meeting was convened with the Bristol Cycling Campaign, Bristol Walking Alliance, and the BCC Walking and Cycling officer. It was considered that the current shared-use pavement alongside Westbury Road is not an acceptable facility to be upgraded for the following reasons:

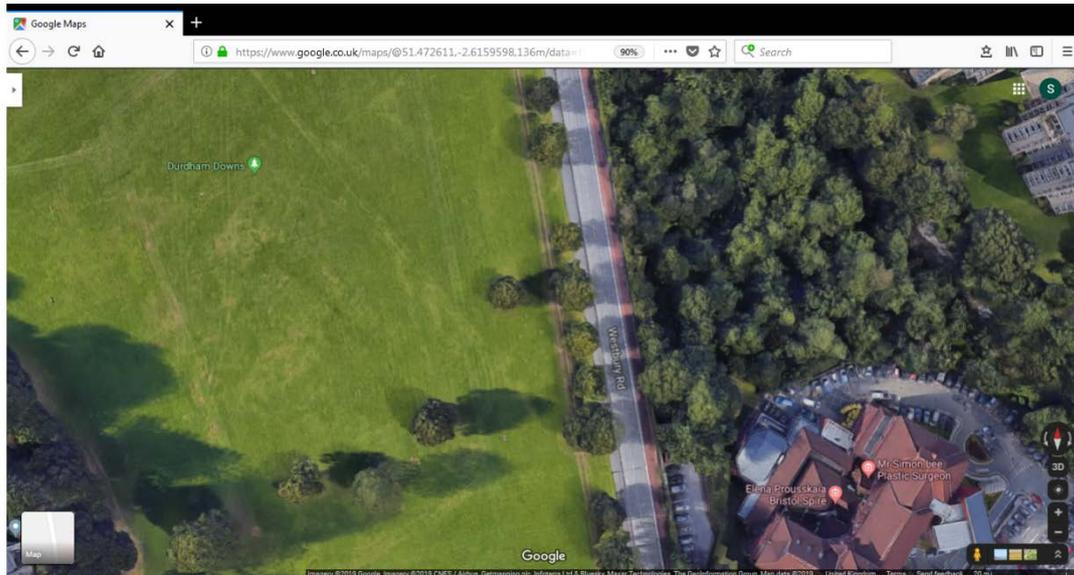
- There is no dropped kerb to access the route when travelling north from Whiteladies Road (or leave it when travelling in the opposite direction)
- Shared-use is not appropriate provision on an arterial route, and best practice both nationally and locally would be to provide segregated pedestrian and cycle provision.
- The width is inadequate for a shared pedestrian and cycle route and includes a number of obstacles such as roads signs, street lights, and bus stop boarding areas.
- There is no continuous provision for cycles (or pedestrians) at side roads or junctions, which reduces its utility and safety.

In June 2016, a series of traffic counts was undertaken to provide data for modelling traffic impact on the route. In the 12-hour measurement period of 7am to 7pm, a total of 262 cyclists were recorded travelling on the A4018 Westbury Road carriageway just south of White Tree roundabout. At the same time, only 42 cyclists were present off the carriageway (either on the shared-use pavement or adjacent grass).

This is evidence that many cyclists consider the current provision to be inadequate, choosing to use the busy and unpleasant road. Using the July 2019 results of the introduction of good quality segregated cycle paths in the city centre (such as Baldwin Street and Prince Street), there is likely to be a high level of suppressed demand that will become evident when improved provision is in place. If this were to be proved the case, there could be a significant reduction in the number of cyclists using the carriageway, raised as a matter of annoyance by many respondents to the consultation.

Related issues

In terms of visual impact on the Downs, provision of a naturally-coloured path the other side of the trees from Westbury Road would make little difference from the current situation. As illustrated on the picture in the section above, and shown more clearly below, there is such a desire line to walk and run on the Downs along Westbury Road that an informal track has already been worn.



It has been confirmed by the Downs Grounds Supervisor that this erosion leads to very muddy conditions for large parts of the year, illustrated below, which would be considerably ameliorated.



For safety reasons, it would be vastly preferable for the path to be lit. Although parts of the Downs have Dark Sky Status, that is restricted to the area around Circular Road and is not relevant alongside the A4018. The road and pavement are already lit, so the attachment to

the existing columns of additional lanterns facing in the opposite direction could light the new path with minimal impact.

The final point to be borne in mind is where users of the new path go at the northern end. The current design shows the path stopping by an existing informal crossing point just north of Henleaze Road. While this allows for movements to the east, there is limited space to cater well for the north-south demand.

With Local Growth Fund money, the A4018 project will start constructing a segregated bi-directional cycle path on the eastern side of the road from Crow Lane to Greystoke Avenue in 2020 (bid to be decided January 2020). Once this is underway, design work will be undertaken to continue provision of a similarly high-quality cycling route further south, initially as far as the Falcondale Road-Westbury Road junction. The final stage at this point would be to join this location to the Downs, for which space would be easily available if some of the parking along Westbury Road by Badminton School (greatly underused outside school drop-off and pick-up times) were removed.

Because the path on the Downs would be constructed using Section 106 contributions from the developers of the Filton Airfield site, and requires a planning application, it is unlikely that construction could commence before 2022. By this time, the cycling provision to link the northern end of the path to continuous segregated cycling facilities almost as far as the Bristol-South Gloucestershire border would be fully designed and potentially under construction (also using the s106 funding).

The planning application for this route could also incorporate the extension of the path to run alongside Parry's Lane and Saville Road. This – if funded by another source – would link to the existing path alongside Stoke Road to create the Seven Sisters Loop, part of the Downs Committee Movement and Place Framework.

Conclusions

Consultation with the Bristol Cycling Campaign and Bristol Walking Alliance has shown that the current shared-use pavement on Westbury Road is unsuitable for upgrading given the many negative points it displays. The forecast increase in demand for journeys on the A4018 as a result of the Filton Airfield development, and the council's desire to provide high-quality sustainable transport options for them, makes it increasingly important to upgrade the facilities in this area. The current use of the proposed new path location, and the damage this causes to the Downs, indicates a high level of demand for which the path would cater while mitigating the erosion.

It is requested that the Movement and Place sub-group recommends to the Downs Committee that a new vote is taken at the meeting of 18 November 2019.

If this new information allows the sub-group to give their support to the Downs Committee vote, that would be most helpful.

Addendum (15 January 2020)

The existing shared-use facility on Westbury Road

In September 2019, the Downs Committee asked for consideration of whether the existing shared-use pavement could be upgraded to be the only shared-use facility in this location, so as not to require the use of any Downs land as proposed by the A4018 project. In order to consider this, the meeting described above was convened and the results are discussed in a neutral manner in the opening four pages of this paper.

Separate cycle and pedestrian routes

The meeting of the A4018 project with the Bristol Cycling Campaign, Bristol Walking Alliance, and the BCC Walking and Cycling officer provided the response required as to why the existing shared-use path could not be upgraded.

However, during the meeting, the possibility was discussed of there being two paths to provide separate routes for pedestrians and cyclists. This situation would be the preferred position of the Bristol Cycling Campaign, mirroring the new provision under preparation for the northern end of the A4018 and recent installations in the city centre. A possible solution could include:

- A lowered pavement surface to provide a kerb-segregated bi-directional cycle route between the Henleaze Road area and Blackboy Hill (exact northern and southern termini to be determined)
- Priority at side road crossings (already proposed)
- A buff coloured path (possibly rolled limestone, which is not good for cycling and would therefore aid self-enforcement) on Downs land for non-cycling use only
- Additional lighting, potentially mounted on existing columns, to light the new footpath
- Pedestrian routes between the trees and across the cycle path to access existing facilities such as bus stops and pedestrian crossings

Conclusions

This would provide a high-quality solution that would significantly reduce the possibility of cyclists using Downs land and would fit well with the previously-approved Place and Movement Framework. However, it must be noted that there has been no feasibility or design work carried out on this proposal and it would clearly cost significantly more than the forecast cost for the shared-use solution currently proposed.