

The Downs Loop

A proposal for accessible paths and traffic calming around the Downs



Developed by Cycle Sunday with Greenways & Cycleroutes Ltd
Updated June 2020



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Separately

Appendix 1 Wessex Ecological Consultancy Report May 2019



Traffic-free Cycle Sunday, 2018

Photo credits: front cover

Two men, one in wheelchair: © Katarzyna Białasiewicz/123RF.COM

Other photos: Vicki Cracknell, John Grimshaw, Johnny Wood

Footnotes from page 3:

1 City Design Group, Place Directorate (2015) Place and Movement Framework: Clifton and Durdham Downs. Available at: https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/Data/Downs%20Committee/201511231400/Agenda/1123_11.pdf

2 Bristol City Council (2012) Key Statistics about Bristol from the 2011 Census. Available at: <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/statistics-census-information/census-2011>

The Downs Loop - Summary

The 442 acre grassland plateau of the Clifton and Durdham Downs is a place of immense importance to the city of Bristol – for its beautiful and iconic landscapes, its history, its rich ecology, and as a popular place for people to come and enjoy themselves.

The Downs are widely used by the people of Bristol for recreation and fitness. The Downs Football League play here regularly, along with many other diverse sporting groups, and many leisure events take place each year including the Downs Festival.

The site is managed and conserved by the Downs Committee, who since 1861, have protected the area from development. The majority of the Downs consist of fairly level grassland crossed by avenues of trees and roads. The Downs are designated as a Site of Nature Conservation Interest. They include large areas of unimproved calcareous grassland which support a rich and diverse flora. There is also a considerable amount of scrub and tree growth mainly in the south and eastern part of the site and which supports a good variety of bird and insect species. There is a continuous programme of work to manage and control the extent of the scrub, to maintain the ecological and landscape balances. The layout of roads around the Downs has gradually developed, largely from the formalisation of desire lines during the 19th century.

The landscape and uses of the Downs are discussed in detail in The Downs Place and Movement Framework¹ commissioned by the Downs Committee in 2015. This report written by the City Design Group has formed the foundation of the current proposal for the Downs Loop.

Why new paths? The amenity value of accessible paths

Well-made paths to improve access to and movement of people on the Downs would be popular, not only with those on bikes but also with pedestrians who benefit from a flat dry surface, especially people with wheels: buggies,

mobility vehicles and wheelchairs. Since 2015, families and those less confident riding a bike have come to Cycle Sunday events to safely explore the Downs by bike. The event has demonstrated a high level of interest in cycling around the Downs.

Given the flat terrain, the Downs are ideal for walking, running and cycling. Walkers and runners have marked out a series of “desire lines” across the Downs and these have become badly eroded in places. But access for people on bikes is limited. There is one cycle path along Stoke Road but other than this, people riding bikes can only access the Downs on the roads. And as traffic levels have increased over recent decades, these roads have come to feel unsafe and a barrier for many cyclists, particularly children.

In Bristol, latest census data showed that 29% of households do not have access to a car². Visitors can reach Stoke Road by bus. A new path leading to the proposed café at the Seawalls would create a welcoming and accessible route for them. It would mean that people in wheelchairs who don't have a car could make their way safely to the Seawalls. Bike hire at Café Retreat on Stoke Road would provide an opportunity to cycle around the area.

The route

This proposal sets out a loop of 2.3 miles in length around the western area of the Downs. It would follow Rockleaze and Downleaze, Circular Road, Ladies Mile and a short part of Stoke Road. The proposal outlines the three sections of the loop:

Building a new path along Rockleaze and Downleaze along a heavily eroded “desire line” starting at Stoke Road. Once past the junction of Ivywell Road the path would cross Circular Road and continue on the existing footpath that leads to the site of the proposed new café.

Circular Road would become a 20mph zone (distinct from its current 20mph limit) with the introduction of physical traffic calming measures along its length.



The narrow, poor quality path along Ladies Mile would be reconstructed and its course adjusted in some parts.

This proposal has been developed by Cycle Sunday working with the local charity Greenways & Cyclerooutes. It has taken account of the landscape and ecology of the Downs, including guidance from an ecology survey. See Appendix 1: Wessex Ecological Consultancy Report May 2019.

The working title “Downs Loop” has been used throughout the document.

Details of the route are set out on the following pages. The colour of the computer-generated path is not indicative of the final path colour. This document is an updated version of the proposal as developed in May 2019.

The Downs Loop proposal has been paid for with funding from a charitable grant. It is not a Bristol City Council project. If planning permission is granted, we will apply to large funding bodies for the capital required to build the Downs Loop.

Footnotes 1 and 2: please see Contents page.

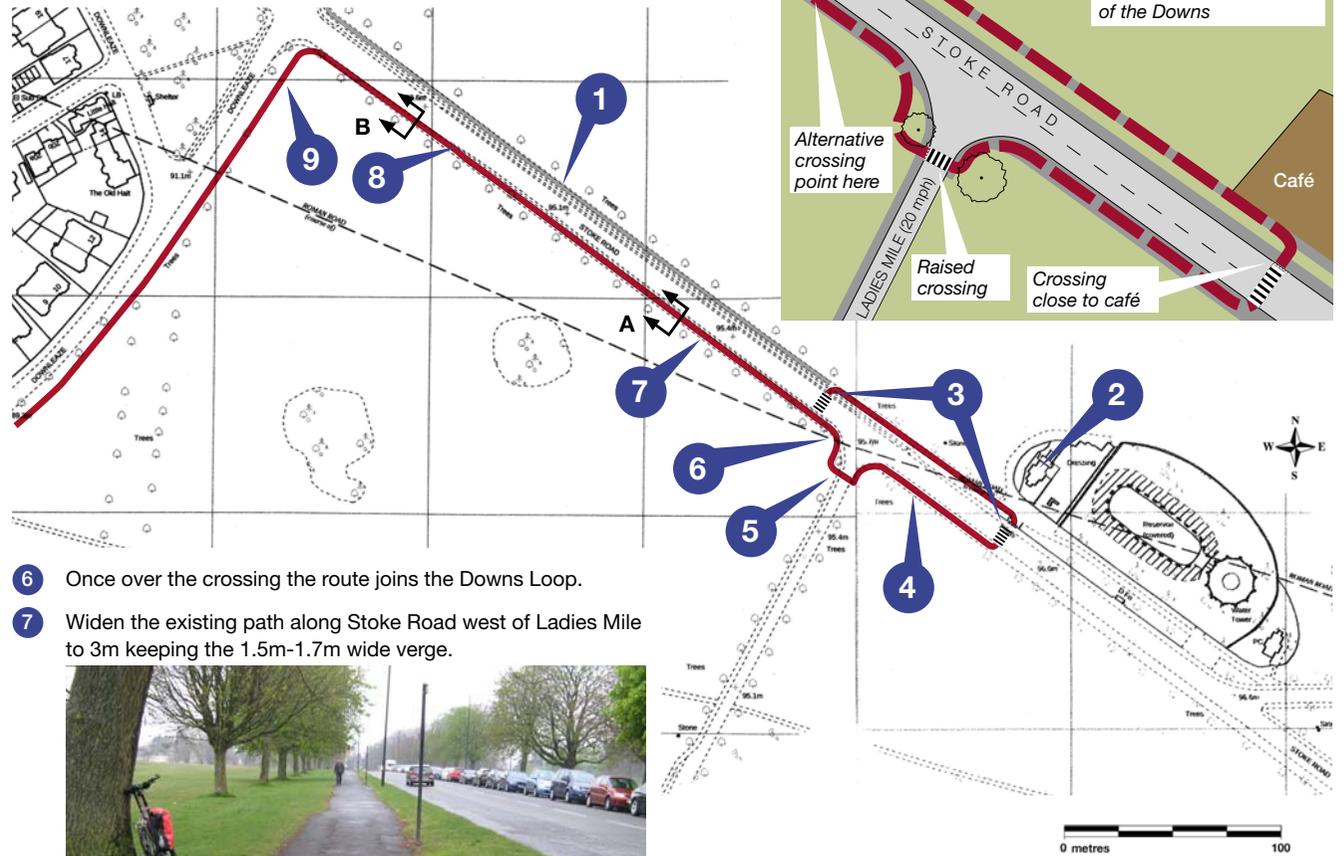
Proposal for a Downs Loop on Clifton Downs - suggested details

Stoke Road Section

- 1 There is an existing cycle path on the north side of Stoke Road, set back from the roadside footpath.
- 2 Café Retreat (next to the water tower) provides a very useful focus of routes on the Downs.
- 3 Proposed raised zebra crossing to link across Stoke Road where heavy flows of traffic in effect divide the Downs in two. A central crossing is very much needed. Its location could be either near the café or to the west of Ladies Mile. The latter location would have the advantage of avoiding the need for a secondary crossing of Ladies Mile, whilst the former might relate more naturally to the café.
- 4 Existing wide, and little used footway is suitable as part of the Loop.



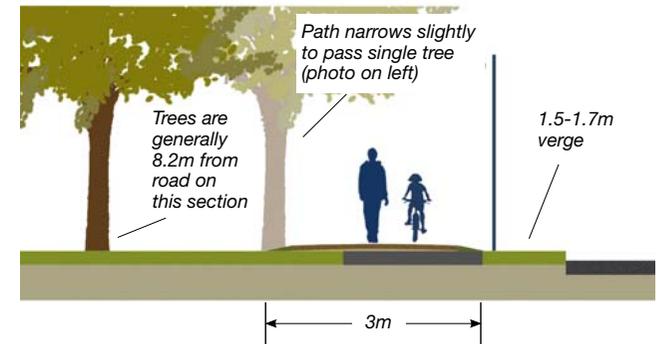
- 5 A raised accessible crossing at this location would serve to indicate to drivers that they are entering Ladies Mile, a place which is not a main road, and has a 20 mph speed limit.



- 6 Once over the crossing the route joins the Downs Loop.
- 7 Widen the existing path along Stoke Road west of Ladies Mile to 3m keeping the 1.5m-1.7m wide verge.



Cross section A: Stoke Road



Stoke Road Section

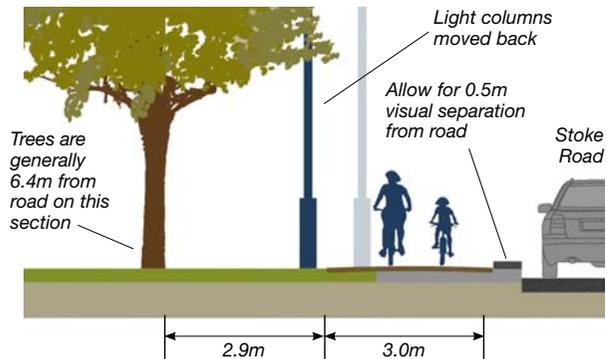
8 At this end of Stoke Road the verge is lost to road widening. The existing path needs widening to 3.5m to allow for a clear visual separation strip alongside the road. Two light columns need to be set back a further 1 metre.



9 The view here shows the connection to the road crossing at the lights and to the Downlease leg of the loop.



Cross section B: northern end of Stoke Road



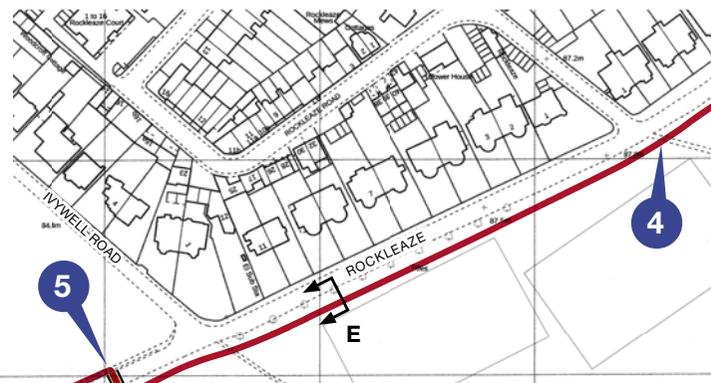
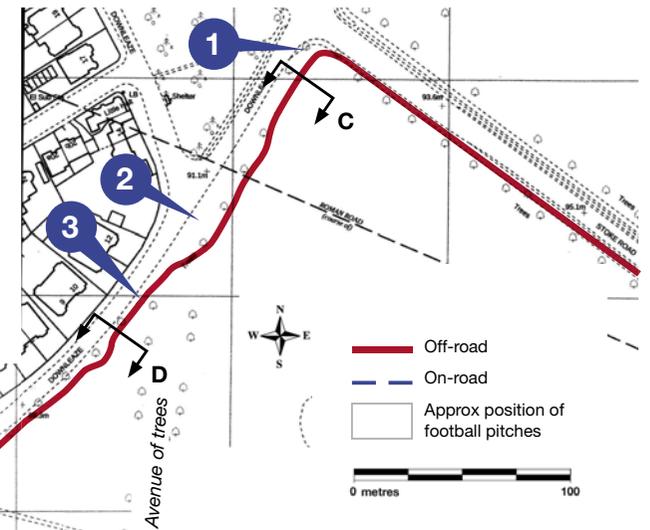
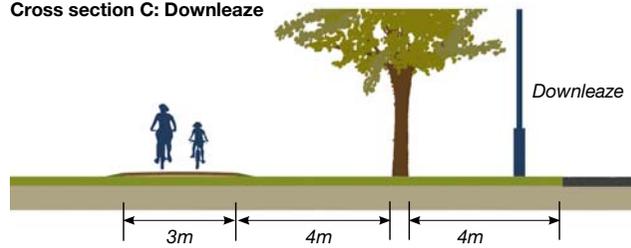
Stoke Road to Downlease, Rockleaze, Sea Walls and Circular Road

This section follows the general line of the well-trodden eroded path near the edge of Durham Downs.

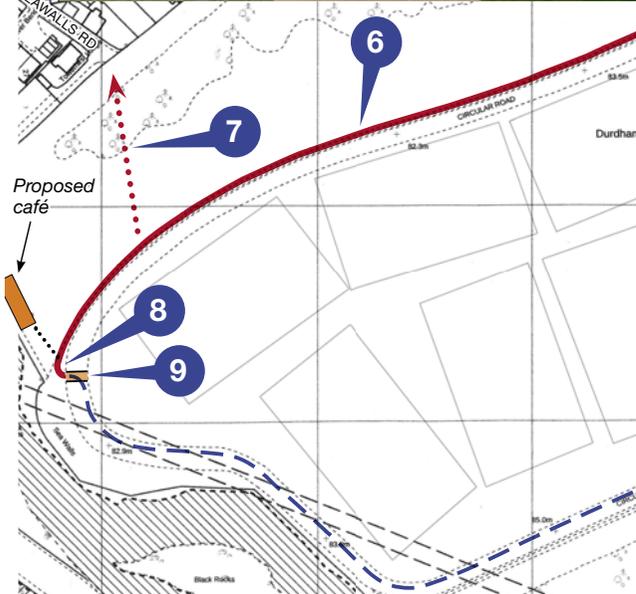
- 1 Link to existing crossing over road and the Stoke Road section of the Downs Loop. Follow existing well worn path line, keeping outside tree canopy as far as possible.



Cross section C: Downlease



- 3 Past the end of the avenue of trees (to the south) the path would meander around to give trees as wide, and equal, a berth as possible.

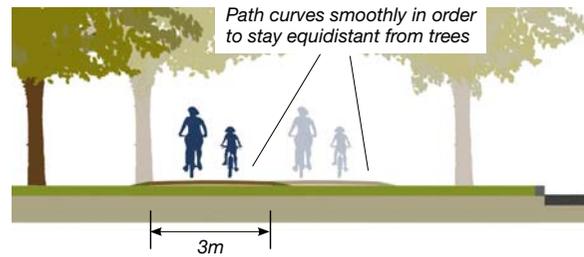


- 2 This section is particularly noticeable for the extremely thin soil covering over the limestone below and the way tree roots have to crawl along the surface of the ground to find sustenance. Here a no-dig path construction elevated above the ground level will provide these exposed tree roots with protection and respite from existing walking and running traffic. See "no dig" construction detail on page 9.



Stoke Road to Downleaze, Rockleaze, Sea Walls and Circular Road

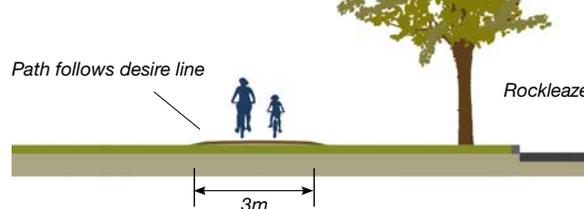
Cross section D: Downleaze



- 4 Make a careful junction with existing cross paths, with pedestrian priority signage.



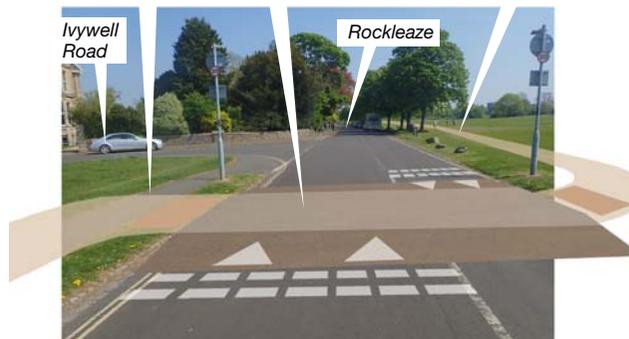
Cross section E: Rockleaze



- 5 Once past the junction with Ivywell Road, the Downs Loop would cross over Circular Road to follow a widened footway on the far side. By crossing to the other side, the route provides a continuous accessible route to the Sea Walls for those walking, in wheelchairs, pushing prams or learning to ride a bike.

The crossing should be a raised pavement set flush with the path either side. This will have the effect of acting as a 'gateway' to the open Downs and a reminder that vehicles need to travel slowly in this area for the safety of all Downs users.

Widen existing tarmac path to 3m for shared use
 Raised crossing to carry path smoothly over the road
 Planned Downs Loop following the eroded desire line down from Stoke Road

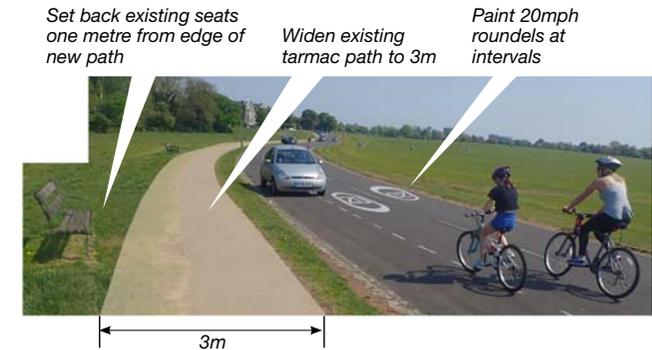


View of raised crossing of Circular Road looking towards Rockleaze



View of similar raised crossing in Richmond Park

- 6 Widen the existing tarmac path to 3m over a distance of 400 metres to the proposed café at Seawalls. Set each existing seat back from the edge of the new path. Paint 20mph roundels on the road at intervals to emphasise the speed limit here.



View of Circular Road showing widened path along the north side as far as Ivywell Road

- 7 It might be a good idea to add a path along the line of the existing desire line to the gate to Seawalls Road. This eventually leads down to the Avon Wildlife site by the Portway and could make a useful link for people arriving at the Downs from this point.
- 8 The widened path would end at the site of the proposed café. Additional cycle parking would be provided at this location.



Proposed café design (Chris Goodsall Architects)

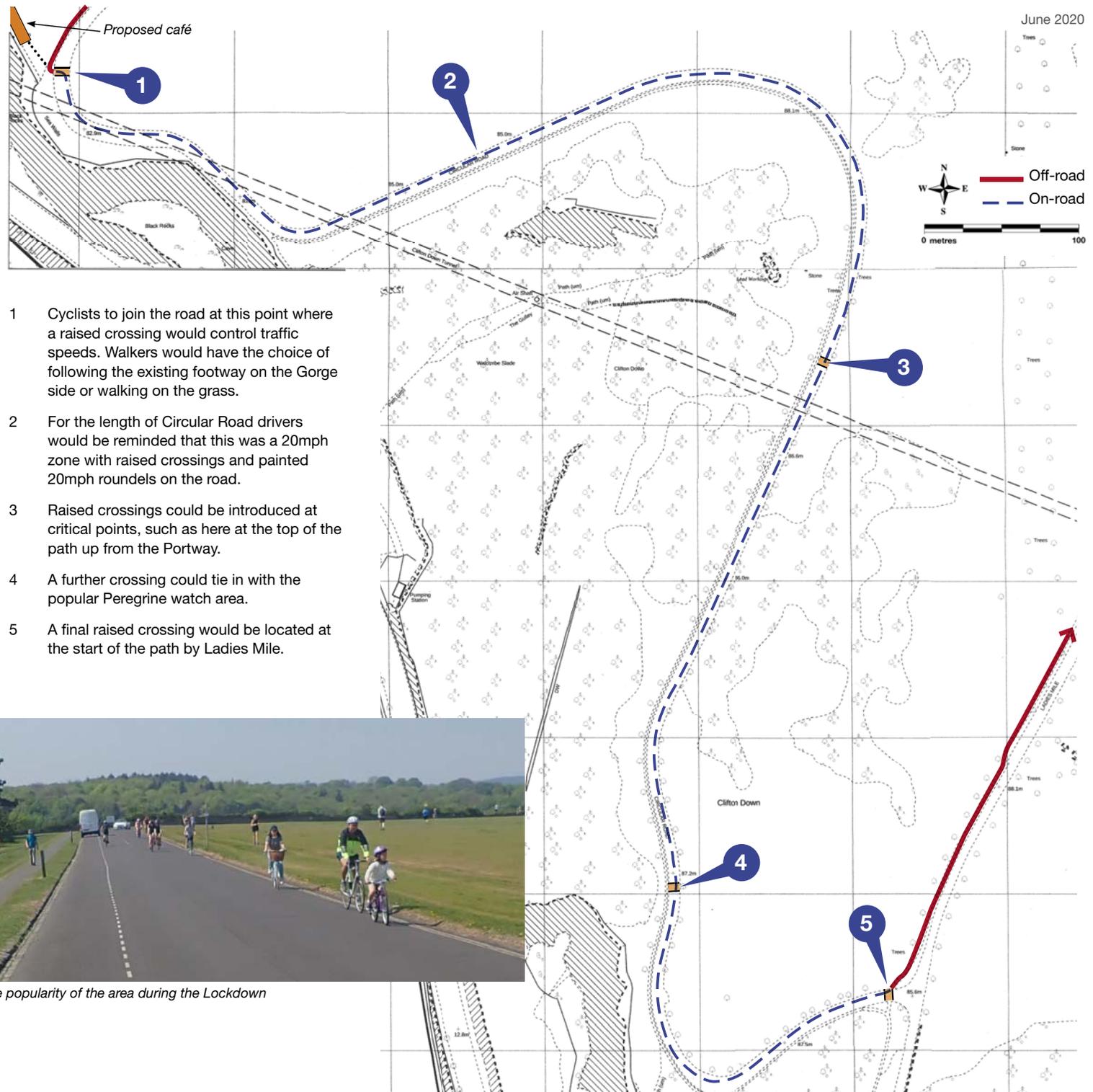
- 9 A second raised crossing at the Seawalls would enable pedestrians to safely cross to the main grass area and cyclists to re-join the carriageway to continue along Circular Road. Pedestrians can also continue along the existing tarmac footpath here, on the Avon Gorge side.

Circular Road Section

Physical traffic calming on Circular Road would be an effective way of actually reducing speeds to 20mph, therefore making the road safer for all. The whole road would be changed from having a 20mph speed *limit*, to become a 20mph *zone*. As a 20mph zone, there would be regularly spaced speed tables interspersed with painted 20mph roundels. The speed tables could be designed as continuous raised crossings, therefore creating additional safer places for pedestrians to cross Circular Road. These would not need street lighting and would therefore comply with the Downs' Dark Sky Status.

These changes come from the principle that Circular Road should provide access to the Downs for all users rather than being a through route for motorists. Pedestrians and those on bikes would feel more relaxed and safer in the knowledge that cars are passing them slowly. This approach is used elsewhere, for example the approach roads in Ashton Court, which have regular speed bumps to slow cars on arrival in the park.

The new 20mph zone with physical traffic calming would also mitigate the dangerous problem of some motorists using Circular Road as a racetrack at night.



- 1 Cyclists to join the road at this point where a raised crossing would control traffic speeds. Walkers would have the choice of following the existing footway on the Gorge side or walking on the grass.
- 2 For the length of Circular Road drivers would be reminded that this was a 20mph zone with raised crossings and painted 20mph roundels on the road.
- 3 Raised crossings could be introduced at critical points, such as here at the top of the path up from the Portway.
- 4 A further crossing could tie in with the popular Peregrine watch area.
- 5 A final raised crossing would be located at the start of the path by Ladies Mile.



View of Circular Road looking towards Seawalls showing the popularity of the area during the Lockdown

Typical construction details proposed for paths on the Downs

Any paths need to be sympathetic and appropriate for the Downs. Paths need to have a durable surface as they will take heavy levels of public use, and they need to be well constructed so that they last for many years with only modest amounts of maintenance. Paths should not feel urban, so no kerbs will be used and the grass verges will be allowed to grow in slightly to give a soft edge. The exact line of the paths, to be agreed on site, will avoid straight sections but will move around a little in response to the presence of trees or other natural details. There will be no street lighting. The overall ambience should be one of having enjoyed walking or cycling along the paths. A local example of this kind of path can be seen at the bottom end of Ashton Court, where Greenways and Cyclerroutes have recently completed the Ashton Park Link.

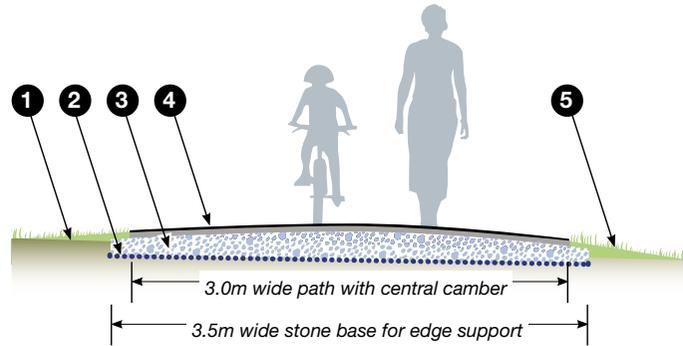
The width will be generally 3.0 metres so as to be suitable for shared use although a slight narrowing at pinch points is acceptable provided visibility is good.

There will be two basic types of construction, depending upon whether or not the path is running past trees. In the first case the layer of base stone can be placed direct on the ground, whilst in the second case a cellular 'mattress' minimises compaction and root damage whilst at the same time providing voids for the root system to flourish.

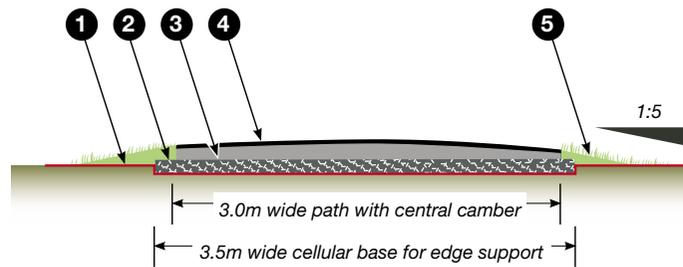
Below and right: construction of Ashton Park Link, Greenways & Cyclerroutes 2020



Standard path arrangement on open ground



Standard path arrangement near trees



Standard path arrangement on open ground

- 1 Excavate a thin layer of soil, or down to the rocky base, and set this to one side to be used to build up the shoulders at the end of the work.
- 2 If there are any sections of poor soils then lay a layer of polypropylene filter fabric to secure the base.
- 3 Construct a sound stone base 150mm thick and 3.5 metres wide. This extra width is needed to secure the sides of the finished path instead of using kerbs.
- 4 Lay the finished surface layer 3.0 metres wide. The final wearing layer for new sections of path can be stone aggregate (for example, 3-6mm to dust grade) which, when laid and rolled, provides a natural self-binding surface. This style of path finish is similar to that of the Ashton Park Link.

As an alternative, when the existing tarmac paths are being re-made as part of the Downs Loop, they could be surfaced with a 60mm layer of bituminous macadam (arranged with a central camber). This would then be finished with a limestone dust brushed in to give a natural look and a colour that fits within the landscape.

- 5 Build up soil verges either side to reach the edge of the surface layer. These should slope away from the path at 1:5 so as to allow for easy mowing. At the end of all this work the path will run on a slight 'causeway' some 150mm above the general ground level.

Standard path arrangement near trees

- 1 Remove the barest minimum of soil, just sufficient to level the ground. This is known as 'no dig'.
- 2 Lay a layer of Geoweb Tree Root Protection mattress, or similar. This will have cells between 75mm and 100mm deep, filled with a single size stone so as to ensure that there are numerous voids above the tree root zone.
- 3 Lay a thin layer of base stone of up to 100mm thick.
- 4 Finish with appropriate wearing layer as outlined in point 4 above.
- 5 Build up soil verges either side to reach the edge of the surface layer. These should slope away from the path at a 1:5 gradient.

Note that where the path coincides with an existing path, then that path will be dug up, and its excavated materials used as part of the new work, unless agreed otherwise. Any sections of path no longer needed will be carefully dug up and then the ground soiled and either seeded or turfed to restore the area to grassland.

Crossing for heavy plant

If the path crosses the line of any maintenance or event construction traffic, then a pad of fibre reinforced concrete can be integrated into the path construction.

The Ladies Mile Section

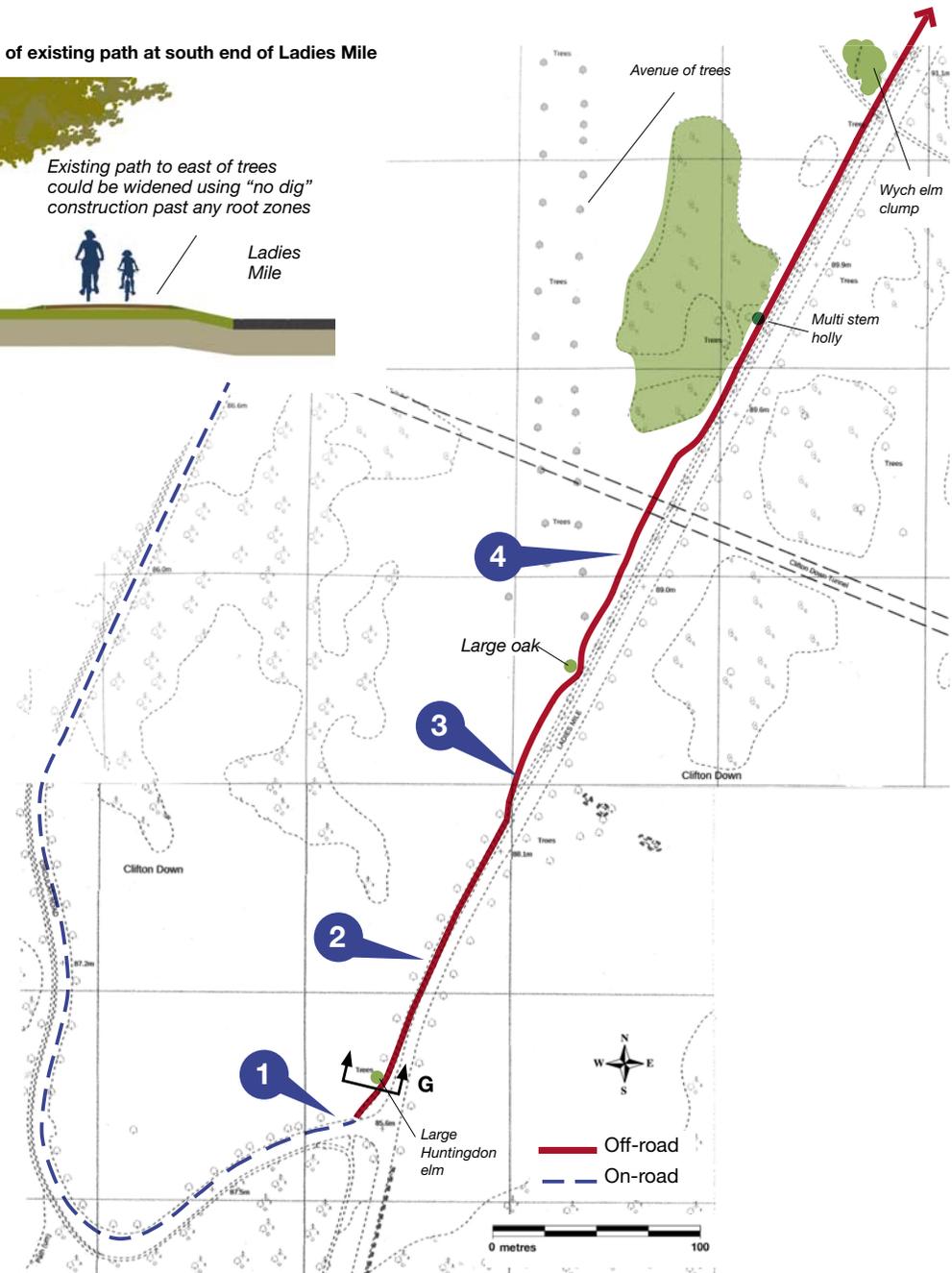
An existing tarmac footpath runs along the whole length of Ladies Mile. The path is narrow, only 1.5m wide on average, and is badly broken up in places, especially past trees. It also has heavily eroded sections next to it which are muddy in the winter months (see points 3 and 5). The new path would incorporate these. Our general proposal is to construct a new path, taking this up and replacing it with a newly constructed wider path. For much of its length, the new path could be set a little further back from the roadside trees. Careful removal of the existing path and resoiling and returfing would provide better conditions for existing trees.

See the typical cross section sketch on page 11.

- 1 The Downs Loop path should leave Circular Road on the line of the existing footpath, the exact line of the path carefully avoiding disturbance to grassland here.



Cross section G: Follow the line of existing path at south end of Ladies Mile

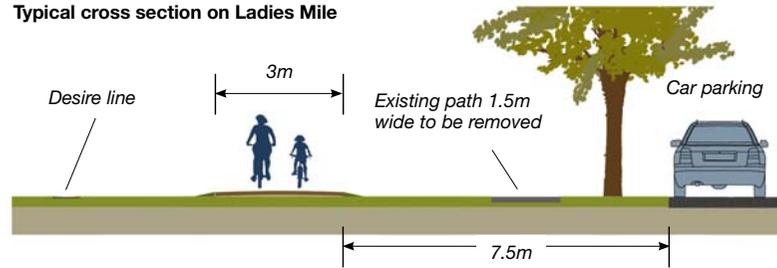


The Ladies Mile Section

- 2 This first section runs along the line of the existing footpath, between the line of the trees and the roadway. The existing desire impinges on the valuable meadow area to the west of Ladies Mile.



Typical cross section on Ladies Mile



Over the section adjacent to parked cars, the proposed path will generally be new built beside the existing, which will then be carefully removed and turfed over. The exact position of the path to be decided on site depending on whether it would be better to be beyond the root zone or not.

- 3 For the next section, alongside the parked cars, the Downs Loop should be generally set to the west of the existing path. On occasion it will need to veer towards the road and pick up the existing path to take account of standing trees.



- 4 An open section where the Downs Loop can move away from the existing path. It would be interesting to mark the line of Clifton Down Tunnel below in some way.



The Ladies Mile Section

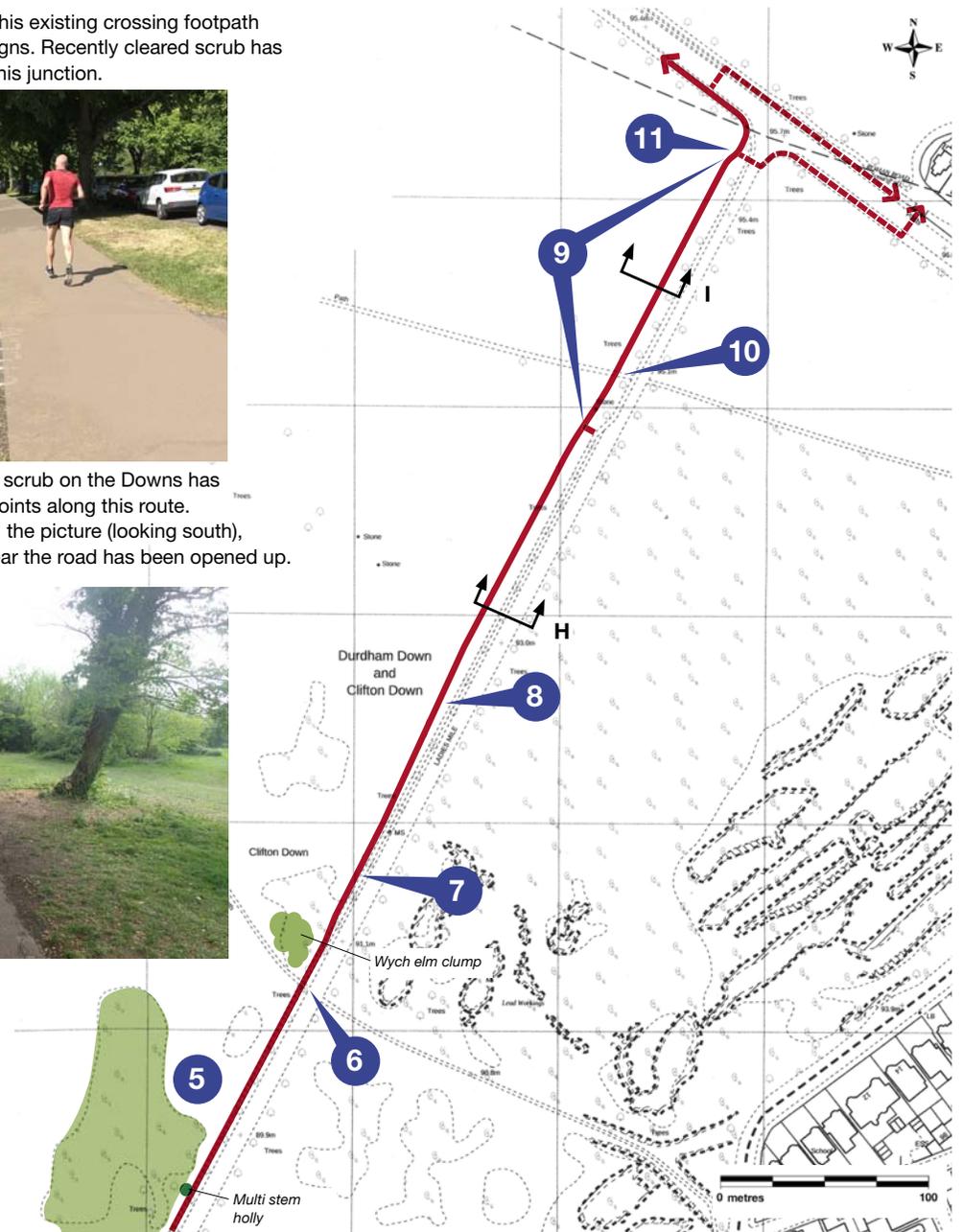
- 5 Here the path passes between the road and this large wooded copse: one multistemmed holly is to be cleared to allow good space.



- 6 Make a careful junction with this existing crossing footpath and add pedestrian priority signs. Recently cleared scrub has greatly improved visibility at this junction.



- 7 Recent work in clearing away scrub on the Downs has removed some of the pinch points along this route. This clearance can be seen in the picture (looking south), which shows how the area near the road has been opened up.

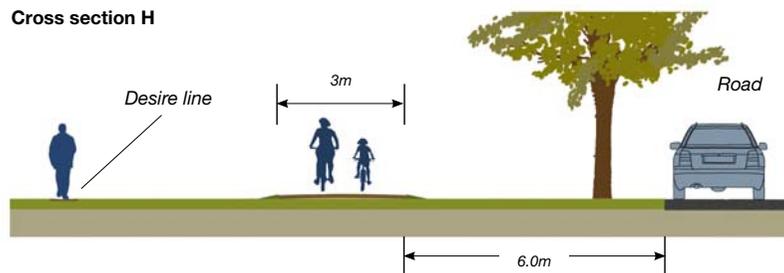


The Ladies Mile Section

- 8 Again move the path away from the tree roots and restore the ground occupied by the present path.



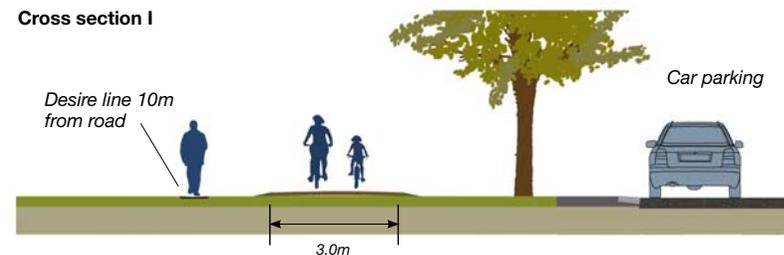
Cross section H



- 9 Over this last section the parking stops and the existing narrow footway returns right beside the road. We propose to retain this section of footway, making a short link from its southern end to connect with a new Downs Loop path running just beyond the tree canopy, inside the general desire line.



Cross section I



- 10 Make a careful junction with the existing crossing footpath, and add pedestrian priority signs.
- 11 Join to the Stoke Road path and to a crossing of Ladies Mile towards the Café.

