

Langport Cycleway Report (Executive Decision)

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Purpose of the Report

To update members on the current position of the Langport Cycleway, to ask for financial support towards the access licence fees for 2017/2018.

Public Interest

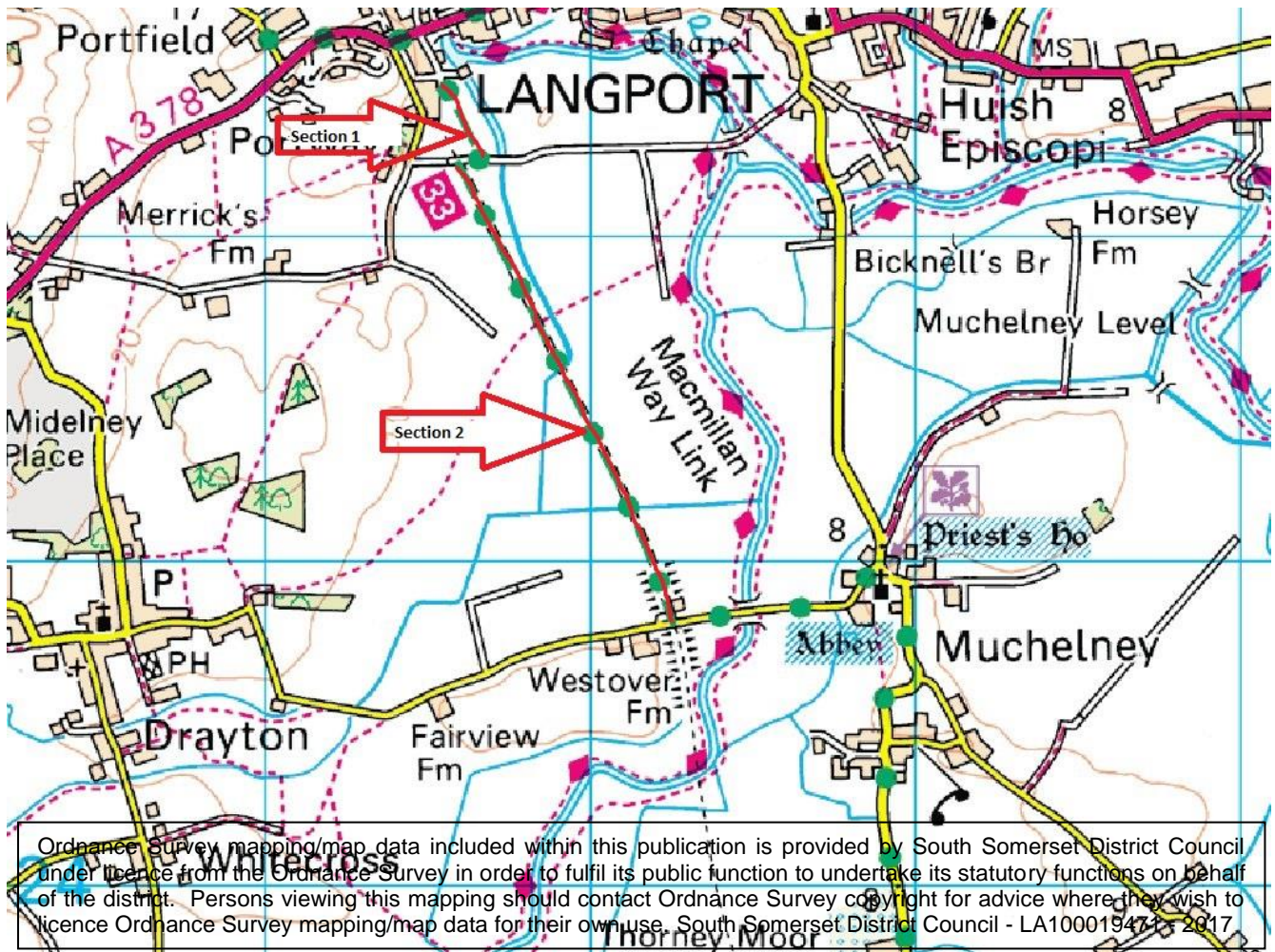
This report explains the current financial and public access position of the 2.5 km long accessible cycleway that runs from Westover in the Parish of Huish Episcopi, through the Parish of Drayton on a former railway line, enabling cyclists to ride from Langport to Muchelney. This route is known as the Langport Cycleway. It asks for financial support to keep the route open for a further year to allow officers to investigate the management options available and opportunities for future community involvement.

Recommendations

- 1) That members approve £2,706 of funding from Area North Reserves to pay the access licence fees for 2017/2018 to allow for a period of investigation by officers.
- 2) That members note and comment on the future options available for the route.
- 3) That members agree to a further report being brought at the end of 2017 to discuss and progress the future management arrangements for the route.

Background

The Langport Cycleway is a 2.5km stretch of gravel surfaced amenity route (for walkers, cyclists and horse riders) that starts in Westover in the Parish of Huish Episcopi and runs southwards, crossing Huish Drove to join the former railway line. The route is in two parts; the first section is 500m adjacent to a ditch leading south from Westover. The route then crosses Huish Drove before heading southwards along the former railway line for 2km. Both sections cross privately owned land and are not designated Public Rights of Way (RoW). Access agreements were originally set up in 1998 with the land owners to allow for public access on foot, bicycle and horseback. Annual license fees are paid to the landowners, with an increase every three years linked to the Retail Price Index.



Section 1, 500m, £700 per annum, current license ends March 2018
 Section 2, 2km, £2,006 per annum, current license ends December 2018.

Each license has a six month notice period.

The route was originally negotiated as part of the River Parrett Trail (RPT) project when SSSC owned and operated (through a business tenant) the RPT Visitor Centre, linked to the regional RPT. Although the RPT is still negotiable on the ground, it is not currently actively promoted. The RPT is maintained by Somerset County Council (SCC) to the same standard as other RoW as part of SCC's standard Public RoW maintenance programme. Most of the RPT follows public footpaths, with only small bridleway sections, and so is not available for cycle use.

The RPT Visitor Centre closed in 2012. The cycle business that had operated from the building was established to include cycle hire for use along the licensed route and was a key part of the business.

Current use is mainly local walkers, with some cyclists and occasional local horse riders. Recently a new cycle hire business has been established in Langport and future tourism proposals include recreational access to the water; all forming part of the tourism offer for Langport.

The Langport Cycleway section features in the National Cycleway Network as part of route NCR339 (previously NCR30).

The Langport Cycleway is currently paid for and maintained by the SSDC Countryside Service. Rangers attend four times a year to cut vegetation, repair gate furniture and carry out tree safety surveys and associated works. The annual license fees are charged to the Countryside budget. This budget historically covered the RoW team who transferred to SCC in April 2010. When SSDC ended the 1974 RoW Maintenance Agency this budget was removed. The final year of an unavoidable budget pressure that covers only the cost of the licence fees ends in March 2017. From 2017/2018 there is no budget for the route and as the Countryside Service seek to make further budget savings it is appropriate to look at the route and ascertain its level of use, costs and whether it is a local or strategic resource.

The Langport Cycleway does not require conservation management by the ranger team; however it would still require an annual maintenance programme to maintain access.

Officers propose to look at current use, future potential for maintenance and the long term sustainability of the route. This work would include:

- Consultation with Sustrans over the National Cycle Network
- User feedback to gauge current use
- Consultation with local tourism businesses
- Consultation with relevant officers at SCC
- Consultation with the Parish and Town Councils, and relevant fora e.g. Transition Langport
- Negotiation with the land owners over license fees and any license transfer that may be required.
- Building a maintenance costs schedule to include annual maintenance programmes and capital refurbishment of the route. Funding to be assessed as part of this process
- Consideration of the Local Plan, and the wider green transport network and provision of cycleways locally.

Financial Implications

There is £16,600 unallocated in the Area North Revenue Reserve. If the recommended grant of £2,706 is awarded, £13,894 will remain unallocated.

Council Plan Implications

- Economy - Capitalise on our high quality culture, leisure and tourism opportunities to bring people to South Somerset.
- Health and Communities - Help people to live well by enabling quality cultural, leisure, play, sport & healthy lifestyle facilities & activities.

Carbon Emissions & Adapting to Climate Change Implications

As an off road walking and cycling route the Langport Cycleway offers a safe route for green leisure and commuters to Langport and Huish Episcopi, helping to reduce carbon emissions.

Equality and Diversity Implications

The access to the Langport Cycleway includes gateways that can be opened by a radar key enabling all mobility vehicles to make use of the route. Gateway's were tested at installation with a range of specialist bicycles and mobility vehicles to ensure the route was accessible for everyone.
