

To: Tonbridge & Malling Joint Transportation Board

By: KCC Highways and Transportation

Date: 18th September 2023

Subject: Petition –Cycle Path along the A26 from Tonbridge to Hadlow

Classification: Information Only

Summary: This information report provides an update regarding the petition received requesting an off-road cycle path along the A26 Hadlow Road East / Tonbridge Road from Tonbridge to Hadlow.

1.0 Context

1.1 On 17th November 2022 a petition was received which set out a vision of trying to implement a new cycle route along the A26 which would join Hadlow & Tonbridge to provide designated off-road cycle route facility for both commuting and leisure. The aim is for an off-road provision to be in place to connect Hadlow village and Hadlow College Campus to the existing footways and cycle routes in Tonbridge along the route shown in the aerial image and a map shown in appendix A of this report.

1.2 This petition was created to request a safer route for cyclists and pedestrians using this section of highway as it has been marked as a high accident rate location and considered a high risk to cyclists. Previously part of the A26 (west of Ashes Lane) appeared on the crash remedial measures (CRM) programme due to a cluster of crashes resulting in injury recorded between 2018 and 2021. A scheme was installed in 2022 which included amendments to the speed limits, enhanced bend signage and 2 new safety (speed) cameras.

1.3 In an initial 4-week period the petition managed to obtain over 1000 signatures from a mixture of local residents and businesses including schools, Hadlow College and some health organisations. In total there were approximately 1,050 signatures at the point the petition was closed.

1.4 KCC officers have been in liaison with the County Members for both Tonbridge (Mark Hood & Paul Stepto) and Malling Rural East (Sarah Hudson) to make them aware of findings and investigations to date. All three county members are supportive of the concept of this route. TMBC ward Cllr Steve Crisp has also been liaising with KCC and the lead petitioner about the potential for a cycle route here.

1.5 Hadlow Parish Council are also aware of the scheme, and it is detailed as a priority on their Highway Improvement Plan.

2.0 The proposal

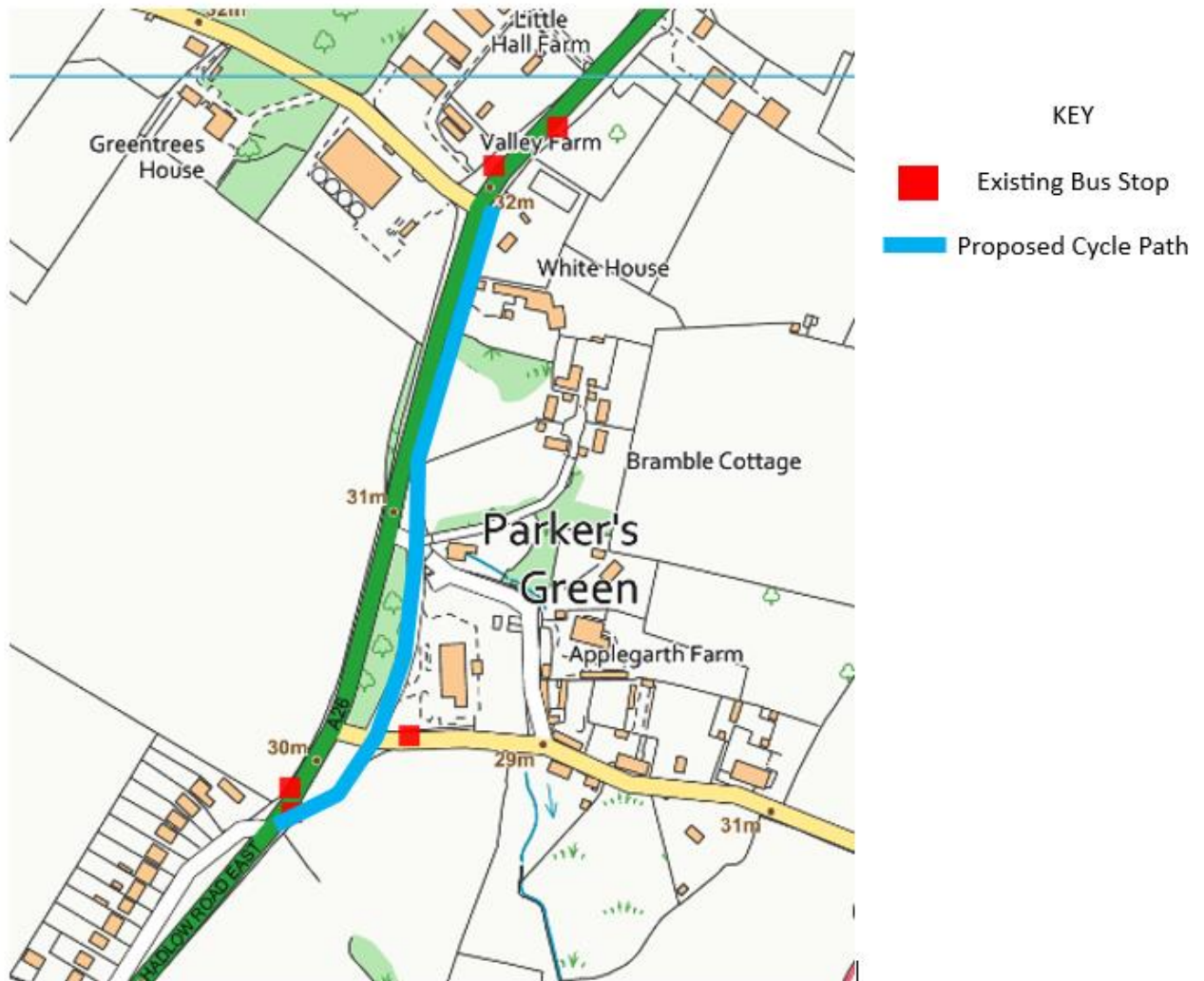
2.1 In August 2023 KCC Officers met with the lead petitioner and walked the proposed cycle path route and productive dialogue has been ongoing.

2.2 Since the initial conversations took place further route options have been suggested. Originally the petition was to keep the route along the main A26. It has since been found that

an alternative route potentially exists which will take users away from part of the A26 by using the old alignment of Tonbridge Road and part of a Public Right of Way (PROW). The entire route has been broken down into sections detailed below starting from Tonbridge along the length of the A26 till it reaches Hadlow College campus.

2.3 Section A (Southwest – Northeast)

Starting at Hadlow Road East (opposite number 247) there are existing footways, bus stops and a refuge island. From this point the route can be widened utilising existing highway verge and footway either side of the Three Elm Lane junction. The route can then go past the BP Garage extending along the eastern side of the A26 towards Redlands and then towards Cuckoo Lane on the alternative side of the road. This route contains several established trees and hedges which may need to be removed or at least cut back.



2.4 Section B

The cycle path can continue from this point using the existing grass verge from the Bus Stop known as Brown Jug Corner, across the entrance to the Haywards Farm shop and then joining up with the old road alignment of the A26 which is set behind a row of trees and bushes. The old road is constructed to carriageway construction which appears more than wide enough to accommodate a desirable 3-metre-wide shared footway/cycleway. There will be some siding out of the footway (removal of moss and mud from the road surface) and vegetation cut back required. Halfway down where the old road was situated you then turn right into what is currently a PROW.



Photos below show the old A26 carriageway which runs alongside the new A26 behind the hedge line.



2.5 Section C (West – East)

Utilising the existing Public Right of Way (PROW) allows KCC to explore alternative route proposals rather than just a new cycleway alongside the A26. There are three options which have been put forward from the Faulkners Oast driveway access. These are set out in order that they were suggested and all start from Faulkners Oast driveway/PROW access which is shown by the yellow line on the map above.

Option 1 as stated in the petition proposes to keep the route along the alignment of the A26 carriageway. This route would require land/verge to be available to facilitate a minimum width of 3m wide footway/carriageway. Between Faulkners Oast and Ashes Lane there is insufficient width highway boundary to construct such a feature and there are private accesses and boundaries directly up to the kerb line at points on this section of the route. To continue the cycle path along this part of the A26 would require purchase of land and potentially realignment of the existing carriageway which may be prohibitively expensive.



Option 2 was suggested by the lead petitioner and local ward councillor Steve Crisp. As you leave the old A26 carriageway at Faulkners Oast and turn south to proceed down the PROW, turn left directly behind the southern boundary of the White Cottage (which is not currently a PROW but is a well-used walking route) then carry on along the trodden path adjacent to the A26 which eventually leads you out onto Blackmans Lane. This section uses land which is not highway land or a PROW and landowners would need to be contacted before any proposal could be progressed on this route. KCC officers have acquired land registry details for the area around Faulkners Oast and the A26 and will be discussing options/interest with them.



2.6 Section D (Blackmans Lane)

Cyclists will emerge onto Blackmans Lane just south of Blackmans Farm if options C2 or C3 (described above) are progressed. There are no footways and limited verge space on Blackmans Lane so cyclists and pedestrians would have to use the carriageway. Although this is typically a quiet lane, it is used by wishing to reach Golden Green and areas beyond. It is recommended that warning signs and road markings be used to help make drivers aware of cyclists and pedestrians using this route and encourage slower driver speeds.

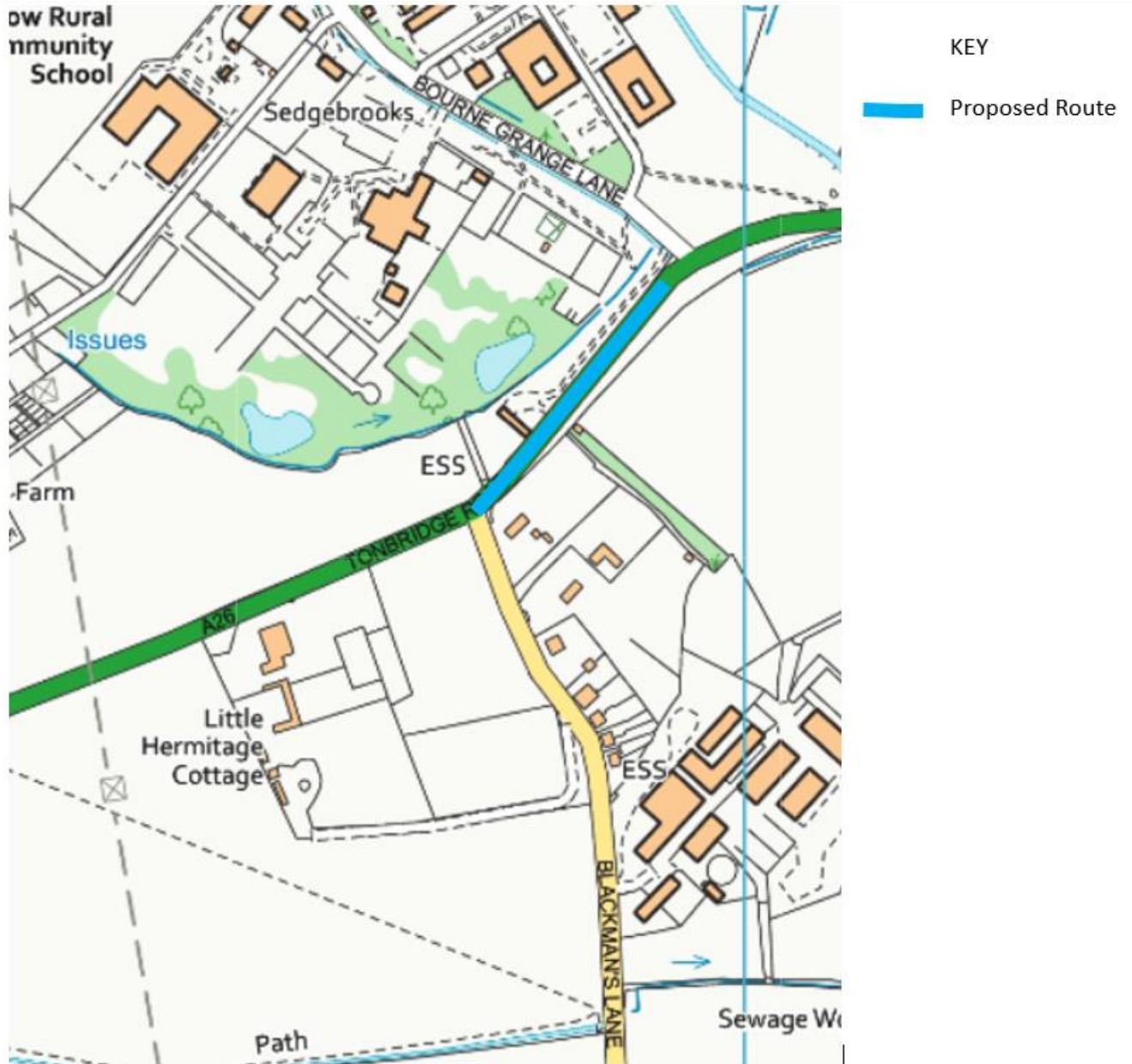


Streetview images of Blackmans Lane



2.7 Section E Blackmans Lane junction with A26

This route continues where Blackmans Lane rejoins the A26 and runs Northeast. There is an existing footway which can be widened utilising an existing highway verge to provide a 3-metre-wide shared footway / cycleway. The route can then be connected to the signalised crossing point opposite Hadlow College.



Images of the A26 Tonbridge Road Junction with Blackmans Lane looking east:



3.0 Project Risks

3.1 Soil Quality will need to be tested to ensure any cycle path that is going to be installed is being laid to correct specifications and may need to be dug out deeper depending on the current quality of soil in place. The soil quality works as a layer of structural support for the new footway. This will need trial holes completed.

3.2 Utilities (Gas/Water/Electric) need to be considered when designing the new cycle path. Currently there are some utilities which run along the proposed new cycle path (currently in the grass verge). We would require a utility check to be carried out (known as a C2 search) along the full section to determine which utilities will be affected and then this would need to be discussed as to how we can move or work around to not interfere with these existing services.

3.3 If options C2 or C3 are taken forward the existing PROW would need to be upgraded from a public footpath to a cycleway or bridleway to allow the required users to access this section. This would be dealt with by our Public Right of Way team to which they would need

to agree with our proposal and potentially put this out for consultation to change the status of the PROW / amend the PROW depending on the route taken forward.

3.4 We would need to discuss the proposals with the existing landowners to ensure they agree and that we work with them during the upgrade of the public footpath to a more durable surface to allow cyclist a better-quality track to use.

3.5 Public consultations may be required as part of the statutory design process.

3.6 There is currently no funding in place for these works to be actioned and without working out any measurements or materials to be used we will be expecting the costs to be in excess of £250,000. There may some avenues to obtain full/partial funding for these works, but they would be in the form of bids which may take some time to be presented and agreed. There will be no scope for any funding provided to us via the Active Travel Team as this would need to have been presented on the Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) for Tonbridge & Malling which this site wasn't.

3.7 This project if taken forward could be implemented in phases. This would help with funding bids and help progress delivery. The Highway Improvements team would be able to include this scheme in the annual local transport plan (LTP) funding bid. There is no guarantee funding would be achieved.

3.8 KCC have ordered some traffic accounts along this A26 section of road and are currently awaiting the results, the survey was installed on 19th August and was in place for 7 days. The data from the survey will be used to ascertain how many cyclists are currently using the A26, as well as speed and volume of all motorised traffic. As the survey is being conducted during school holidays a second round of surveys will be undertaken during school term time from 25th September, so we have a true reflection of actual traffic flows and the number of cyclists currently using the A26 at present both within and outside of school term periods.

3.9 if implemented the route will now take the users away from riding/walking along the main A26 for a large section. This may increase journey time for some as the route is not as direct, but it would become a much safer and user-friendly option for both commuting and leisure. Taking into account the educational establishments within the area this route would offer a safe alternative to younger road users.

3.10 Tree surveys and ecological surveys would need to be conducted in areas where vegetation / siding out would be required. If trees are removed, we would be required to replace with more than what is removed.

4.0 Conclusion

4.1 KCC Highway Improvements team see the merits and benefits of this scheme, however there is currently no funding in place to deliver improvements along the A26. So any works would be subject to successful funding bids. There are land ownership and/or changes to existing PROW route which would also need to be overcome.

4.2 Highway Improvement Team would be willing to create an internal bid via the Local Transport Plan (LTP) budget which is administered directly by KCC. The bidding process usually takes place in December with successful bids approved in March the following year.

4.3 Outline design and initial communications can be started with other internal stakeholders to identify the correct procedure for upgrading the PROW. This can also include obtaining utility assets within the area to give us a better picture as to what additional works may be required.

4.4 Until a source of funding is confirmed public consultation cannot take place.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

1. Petition proposed plan and aerial image