

BONIFACE TRAIL ASSOCIATION

UPDATE MARCH 2022

Background and Current Update

The Boniface Trail Association (BTA) is currently a regular working group of interested parties, now a registered Charitable Incorporated Organisation, which has the main broad objectives

To promote, encourage, provide and maintain a multi use, traffic free trail, for general use by walkers, cyclists and wheelchair and mobility scooter users, in whole or in part between the town of Crediton, the village of Newton St Cyres and the city of Exeter, in the County of Devon.

The organisation's working group was formed in April 2015, and currently the group intends to meet roughly once every month. The constitution follows the Charities Commission model format for a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. The membership is composed of representatives from Newton St Cyres Parish Council and co-opted interested local people, with invitation to the respective neighbouring District Council and County ward members and neighbouring parish councils concerning the proposed route, and representatives for sustainable transport interest in Crediton.

There are currently on average 8 members in regular contact and 4 of those members are Trustees

Progress to date

The BTA is promoting a significant large scale, long term project, with the ultimate aim of securing a multi use trail from Crediton to Exeter.

An initial consultation was held with local people in 2016 which indicated a very strong level of support.

The scheme has met with support from local land owners and one of the Trustees has had discussions with relevant land owners for Phase 1 of the project (see phasing details below) who have expressed a willingness in principle to grant legal agreements for the building of the Trail and its use. One of the BTA's main objectives is to formalise appropriate legal agreements with land owners. The first main legal agreement with John Quicke, which covers a

substantial section of Phase 1, has been the most complex, involving detailed legal negotiations and consideration of the route. We are pleased to report that the BTA completed this agreement in April 2020, which was an agreement for lease conditional upon planning permission and funding. Following this legal agreement the other Phase 1 agreements, which should be simpler in content, are expected to be completed. This will demonstrate to funders and planning authorities that land owners are in full support of this Phase.

In Spring 2020 we were pleased to be told that the Boniface Trail had been added to Devon County Council's list of approved projects. However, DCC had no budget allocation to support this in the 2020-21 or 2021-22 financial years. Following this approval a brief Zoom meeting was held between various trustees and DCC officials. One outcome of the meeting was that DCC generated a document "DCC Core design principles for shared use trails". Although part of this document is generic, part of it is specific to the route under consideration for the Boniface Trail. Another successful outcome from that meeting was that the Boniface Trail is being considered as a project to attract contributions from future developers of sites close to the proposed route under statutory planning requirements. It is also expected that DCC will consider a further funding allocation in the 2023/24 financial year.

Most recently and significantly, we were very pleased to note that, thanks to the work of the recently formed A377 Action Group, composed of relevant ward Parish Council Chairs, District and County Council Ward members and appropriate DCC Officers, DCC agreed in November 2021 to allocate funding of £20,000 for an outline feasibility study of the route from Crediton to Exeter with focus on the route between Crediton and Newton St Cyres (but with the hope that the BTA may be able to persuade DCC to extend this focus further along the route towards Half Moon). The appointed Consultants had a background meeting with the BTA on 4th March 2022.

Additionally the BTA is participating in the series of discussions called Climate Conversations instigated by Mid Devon District Council. Like Crediton Town Council, MDCC has recognized the climate emergency. One discussion item has been allowing/encouraging certain roads in mid Devon to be classified such that cyclists have priority over other road users and some key roads in Crediton have been mentioned in this context.

Route and Phasing

The BTA considers that it would be appropriate to approach the scheme in the following phasing.

Phase 1 – Smallbrook to Half Moon. This presents a small number of engineering challenges which the BTA consider would be relatively easy to resolve, comprising bridges over watercourses to be constructed and new fencing where the route goes inside existing hedging. Some investigation may need to be made regarding the gradient in places, especially either side of the “dip” in the middle of Newton St Cyres village.

Phase 2 - Smallbrook to Wellparks Roundabout (a possible additional route away from the A377 to link up on the Exhibition Road side of town, to serve the new developments, may also be considered, but possibly in addition to a route linking up to Wellparks Roundabout at Tesco). There are considered to be very few engineering difficulties in this section assuming a route shadowing the main road since the path is intended to largely utilise existing verges alongside the carriageway which would be publicly adopted.

Phase 3 – Half Moon to Langford Bridge. Some carriageway adjustments may need to be looked at, due to the narrow pavement in Half Moon, otherwise no major engineering challenges expected.

Phase 4 – Langford Bridge to Exeter. This is the section that would present by far the most geographical and engineering challenges. It was initially thought that an appropriate link point would be Cowley Bridge, but the BTA is encouraged to note the new flood defence work which has been carried out beyond St Davids Station towards the direction of Cowley Bridge and there may be a possibility to construct a path section upon the bank along the new flood relief channel. The BTA has obtained informal opinion from the Environment Agency that, whilst there is no promise to fund that particular part, the path could link up to join alongside the new flood defence work. That would take away the need for potentially expensive bridge construction to navigate the Creedy/Exe and Railway line, although one bridge over the River Creedy is likely to be necessary, subject to the comments above.

Furthermore there is no natural route along the side of the A377 between Langford Bridge and Cowley and further work may be required to find a possible solution.

Engineering Requirements/Challenges

Tarmac surface for longevity

Stock proof fencing where the path goes inside hedges

Suitable drainage

Bridges over watercourses in the Phase 1 section

Carriageway enhancement over railway bridge at Downes (secure barrier between path and traffic)

Review of gradients

Requires at least 1 bridge over Creedy in Phase 4

Steep bank at Downes requires excavation in Phase 2

Lack of verges and narrow/bendy sections of A377 Langford Bridge to Cowley

Key objectives

To secure legal agreements with land owners in Phase 1 of the scheme, thereby facilitating the advantage to funders,

To co-operate fully with forthcoming Crediton to Exeter outline feasibility study funded by DCC.

Retain recognition by MDDC and DCC of the scheme in any relevant strategic plans and to secure the continued benefit of Section 106/Community Infrastructure Levy funding, and co-operate with DCC to attract grant funding and available public funding streams.

Benefits

Increased well-being/health to users

Sustainable travel option

Attractive leisure option for walking and cycling

Providing a safe route to walk and cycle as an alternative to current options

which are considered inadequate in terms of safety (there being no pavement along much of the A377 between Crediton and Exeter nor is there along any back lane routes)

Fully access friendly route for wheelchairs/mobility scooters

Safe transport link for school children

A route to join several community hubs and leisure/shopping amenities

A pleasant amenity for users

Reducing travel costs for those travelling regularly between Crediton and Exeter

Imrpove air quality especially in Crediton

With a segregated traffic option the shared path will reduce the number of cyclists on the main A377 improving traffic flow. This is likely to improve safety for all road users as well as improving travel time particularly at peak periods