

A141 and St Ives Improvements Study

Active Travel Route B - dedicated to walking, wheeling, cycling South Huntingdon to South St Ives

Hemingford Abbots Parish Council wishes to raise the following concerns as part of this consultation – specifically in regard to the proposed Active Travel Route B:

Active Travel Route B is unnecessary, unsuitable and impractical for the following reasons:

1. It replicates an existing cycle route (part of Sustrans National Cycle Route 51) between St Ives and Huntingdon which has been in operation for 20 years and is extremely well-used for both leisure and commuting.
2. Almost the entire length of the proposed route is in open countryside – not adjacent to houses, shops, facilities etc. Whereas, the existing route passes through villages, and is a route to the shop, post office, village hall, schools, playing field etc. The current route takes people directly to where they regularly want to get to without using their car whereas Active Travel Route B does not
3. The proposed route appears to follow the route of the former railway line between Godmanchester and St Ives (closed 1960, when all track, hard surfaces and bridges were dismantled). If this is the case, two new bridges would need to be built over backwaters and two new bridges over combined backwaters and the main river which would incur considerable costs.
4. The proposed route is across floodplain meadows which are inundated for several weeks every year. The embankments built for the old railway line are no longer complete and would need major work if the cycle way was to have flood-free access. This would incur considerable costs. The EA would need to be consulted about the increase of any embankments which would impede the flow of water on the active flood plain.

The proposed route east of Hemingford Lock to the New Bridges causeway at London Road St Ives appears to be to the north of the flood bank. (The old railway line was south of the flood bank). The whole of this meadow floods, and if this is the proposed route, it would either require a new embankment to be built, or for the route to be restricted to seasonal use.

5. Following the presentation at St Ives Corn Exchange, there is a belief that the route may follow the old railway route through California Wood which is now owned by 14 houses on the northern side of Common Lane as private land. This is not in accordance with the map accompanying the consultation and if correct there has to our knowledge been little or no contact with the householders potentially affected regarding this aspect of the proposal.
6. The areas listed above in paras 4 and 5 are currently private land. Creating new Public RoW through those areas would adversely affect and disrupt the current use of that land. Unlike passengers on the former trains, the users of proposed Route B could easily, albeit illegally, access land adjacent and beyond the cycle/wheeling/footpath and disrupt its use. We would therefore like to understand how the safety, personal privacy, and amenity of the landowners and householders would be secured.

7. The Hemingford meadow is actively used by local farmers in the conduct of their agricultural business, and there are concerns that introducing this new route could interfere with these activities, and also introduce significant health and safety risks.

8. The proposed route passes through, for much of its length, land that is extremely important for its environmental and Conservation qualities, and which is designated and protected accordingly. The Hemingford Abbots, Houghton and Hemingford Grey meadows contain County Wildlife sites and SSSIs. Traditionally managed flood-plain meadows are an increasingly rare natural resource nationally. This whole area is within the Conservation Area and is currently proposed as a possible National Landscape.

The route passes through part of the Godmanchester Nature Reserve held by the Beds, Cambs and Northants Wildlife Trust.

A spur towards the western part of the proposed route looks to make a link from the western side of St Ives, alongside The How housing development. This would cut through The Thicket - a rare area of ancient woodland. (To be noted also that The Thicket is on a very steep slope.)

Further notes to expand the above points:

1 a. Sustrans National Cycle Route 51 (The Varsity Way) of the National Cycle Route Network is a long-distance route (190 miles/305 kilometres). It links Milton Keynes, Bedford, Bury St Edmunds and Ipswich, and also links Oxford and Cambridge with Felixstowe before continuing to Harwich and Colchester.

The part of this route between Huntingdon and St Ives was established and sign-posted 20 years ago.

The route is extremely well used because it has very good connectivity.

It is part of a local leisure cycling route around the Great Ouse Valley, and part of a longer leisure route along the National Cycle Route 51.

It is used by local commuters between St Ives and Huntingdon, and as a route to the train station at Huntingdon.

Very many school children cycle the route daily between the Hemingfords and St Ivo School.

There are wider network connections to the segregated cycle route to Fenstanton to join with the off-road cycle way parallel to the A1307 and A14 to Cambridge. A link to a longer commuter route is the off-road cycle way alongside the Guided Bus Way from St Ives to Cambridge.

b. The current cycle route between Godmanchester and St Ives is in good condition.

The route from Huntingdon bridge goes through Godmanchester - partly on a cycle path, partly along side streets, and then into Cow Lane (a quiet cul-de-sac)

The bridleway across Godmanchester East Side Common was surfaced with tarmac in 2004.

The route through Hemingford Abbots and Hemingford Grey to the centre of St Ives is within a 20mph speed limit for over c 95% of its length.

The on-road sections of the route through Godmanchester and the Hemingford villages have the benefit of street lighting.

2 a. New bridges across the river and backwaters would need to be built for the proposed Travel Route B.

From west to east this would entail:

Bridge 1 across the backwater of Cook's Stream at Godmanchester,

Bridge 2 across the Hemingford Abbots backwater at the parish boundary of Godmanchester and Hemingford Abbots,

Bridge 3 a combined crossing of the main river plus the Trout Stream plus a Mill race below Houghton Mill,

Bridge 4 a combined crossing of a former relief channel plus the main river below Hemingford Grey lock.

The approach to these bridges would need to be of suitable incline and length to facilitate all users of the proposed Active Travel Route (wheelchairs, mobility scooters etc) – yet of sufficient height to permit river navigation beneath.

3 a. The route of the railway line is across flood plain meadows which are inundated for several weeks every year. Some parts of the embankments for the old railway line remain – these were necessary to maintain the railway track above flood level. The embankments would need rebuilding in many places, as well as clearance of the dense self-sown mature trees.

3 b. Sustrans chose the Hemingford villages route in preference to the track of the old railway line because of the engineering complexities, expense and unsuitability of re-using the old railway line as explained in 2a and 3a above.

Discussion

Who are the potential users of Active Travel Route B? i.e. those people who will use this route and mode of transport as an alternative to using their car or bus?

Perhaps to begin – is to identify who will not use it

1. Almost any one from Hemingford Abbots and Hemingford Grey going to St Ives. This includes school children between the Hemingford villages and St Ivo School. The route is remote from and not connected to either village settlement.

2. The same can be said for villagers and school children from Houghton. The Thicket Path is a more direct and convenient route between St Ives and Houghton..

3. Similarly the most direct and convenient route for travellers across the river between Houghton and the Hemingfords would be to continue to use the bridleway across the meadow from Houghton Mill and the Black/Bailey Bridge and then the existing National Cycle Route 51.

4. Commuters to Huntingdon from both Hemingford villages. Travel Route B is remote from their homes – and much further to Huntingdon. These commuters will continue to use National Cycle Route 51

Who might use Active Travel Route B?

1. The route seems that it will only attract cyclists etc from St Ives and Huntingdon between those two towns - and no-one in between. These users are largely commuters and/or train users.

However, of this group, there will probably be many who would continue to use the route through the villages because it is well-lit, less isolated and more sheltered for much of its length.

Possibilities:

1. The western section of the proposed Active Travel Route B - between Godmanchester and Cow Lane - could be added to National Cycle Route 51, and this would be of benefit.

The old railway embankment is largely intact along this stretch. If this were re-surfaced as a cycle path, it would significantly shorten the distance of that part of the route, making it geographically direct and also off-road.

However this route is within the Godmanchester Nature Reserve, and may well require fencing and gates so as not to interrupt or disturb the Reserve.

2. More could be done to improve the existing Cycle Route 51. Where there are suitable verges, these could be used to build segregated cycle paths. One example is between Pembroke Close and Hemingford Grey School which would be of great benefit to children.

In Conclusion

- For the many reasons as explained above, Active Travel Route B as proposed, will make almost no improvement to the current or future road traffic conditions around St Ives and Huntingdon. There is a much better route which has been in use for 20 years and is in the right place to serve its purpose – i.e. encourage people to cycle and walk.
- The proposed Active Travel Route B is in the wrong place.
- The costs of the necessary civil engineering to facilitate the path across an active flood plain, and to bridge the river channels in four places, would be very significant and far outweigh the benefits of the path's usage.
- Ditto the costs of purchase of the required land – both that in agricultural use, and that adjoining domestic gardens.
- The construction of more embankments, bridge approaches plus an increase in solid surfacing within an active flood plain will impede the flow of flood water and may cause an increase in water levels.

- It is very disappointing to see Active Travel Route B included in the A141 Transport Study at this stage of its presentation and consultation. It would appear that very little preparatory investigation or analysis has been done.
- Active Travel Route B is fundamentally unsuitable and impractical.