

Reviewed Long Wittenham  
Neighbourhood Development Plan  
2018-2033

# EVIDENCE PAPER CYCLE AND FOOTPATHS

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Submission draft

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## INTRODUCTION

1. There is a need to improve both walking and cycling opportunities between the villages of Long Wittenham and Clifton Hampden. The villages are only one mile apart, yet there is no safe and easy walking or cycling route between the two. The emerging Local Plan also proposes improved sustainable transport links between Didcot and its countryside hinterland and to the employment centre at Culham.
2. This evidence paper considers the existing cycle and footpath network and recommends improvements that will enable Long Wittenham to increase its transport sustainability.
3. The new policy seeks to promote four sustainable transport projects:
  - a. **Community Hub:** Improved footpath links between the Didcot Road site and the Village centre.
  - b. **Didcot to Wittenham Clumps:** Improved cycle and footpath links between Didcot Garden Town and Wittenham Clumps.
  - c. **Link:** The completion of the cycle route between Culham, Didcot and Harwell – the section from Long Wittenham and Clifton Hampden is the only gap in this network for future sustainable public transport. It will also be used by Long Wittenham residents to get to the shop/doctors (in Clifton Hampden) safely by bicycle, and also for recreational use.
  - d. **Circular Route:** The creation of a circular walking route between Long Wittenham and Clifton Hampden, along the Thames Path.

## SUPPORTING EVIDENCE IN THE LWNDP

4. There is a strong focus in the LWNDP evidence base regarding the need for improvements to the local cycling and walking network.
5. The community survey, question 18, shows strong support for a new shorter footpath from Long Wittenham to the Thames Path (to Culham or Clifton Hampden), and question 19 shows strong support for the creation of a new cycle path and footpath between Long Wittenham and Clifton Hampden. Questions 20 and 21 indicate that people would use an improved footpath and cycle path network.
6. Appendix 3 of the made NDP (Project list for CIL funding) lists several footpath/cycle paths projects that the council seeks to put into place. Though not expressly stated, the apparent intention is to create a network of cycle paths, plus a circular walking route incorporating the Thames Path.

7. Evidence at the recent planning inquiry demonstrated for Fieldside Track (allocated in the RLW NDP as “Fieldside”) that the cycling and walking links to Clifton Hampden need improvement and could not realistically be used throughout the year for commuting to work (there are no safe bridleways /cycle paths). There has been no recent progress made on the project.
8. Since the planning inquiry, the Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan has been issued (2017) which indicates that it would be desirable to improve access to green infrastructure in Long Wittenham to serve the needs of Didcot residents. This is discussed extensively in the **Countryside** evidence paper.
9. All this indicates that there is a need for an improved footpath and cycle path network. This evidence paper sets out how this could be achieved in a new NDP policy.

## PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

10. The NPPF stresses in para. 102 that plan-making should consider opportunities to promote walking and cycling and in para 103 that the planning system actively manage patterns of growth in support of this and other objectives. In par 104d of the NPPF it is made clear that planning policies should provide high quality walking and cycling networks.
11. Core strategy policy CSQ3 seeks to ensure that new development secures high levels of accessibility and ease of use by all modes of transport both within the site and in the wider area, also making sure that any new development is properly integrated with existing development ensuring accessibility to local services.
12. Local plan policy T1 ensures that all proposals will provide for safe and convenient routes for cyclists and pedestrians.
13. Emerging Local Plan Policy TRANS2 seeks to ensure that new development is designed to encourage walking and cycling, not only within the development, but also to nearby facilities, employment and public transport hubs. The policy supports the provision of measures which improve cycling and walking networks. Emerging Local Plan policy TRANS5 seeks to ensure that development should provide safe and convenient routes for cyclists and pedestrians.
14. In its response to the Regulation 14 consultation, Oxfordshire County Council, on behalf of the Highways Authority, raised its concerns that due to the lack of public transport in Long Wittenham, the capacity of the transport network in advance of new strategic infrastructure would result in their objection to further housing proposals in the area. In this light of this, the improvements set out under this evidence paper and RLW NDP policy LW9 will go some way to address these concerns.

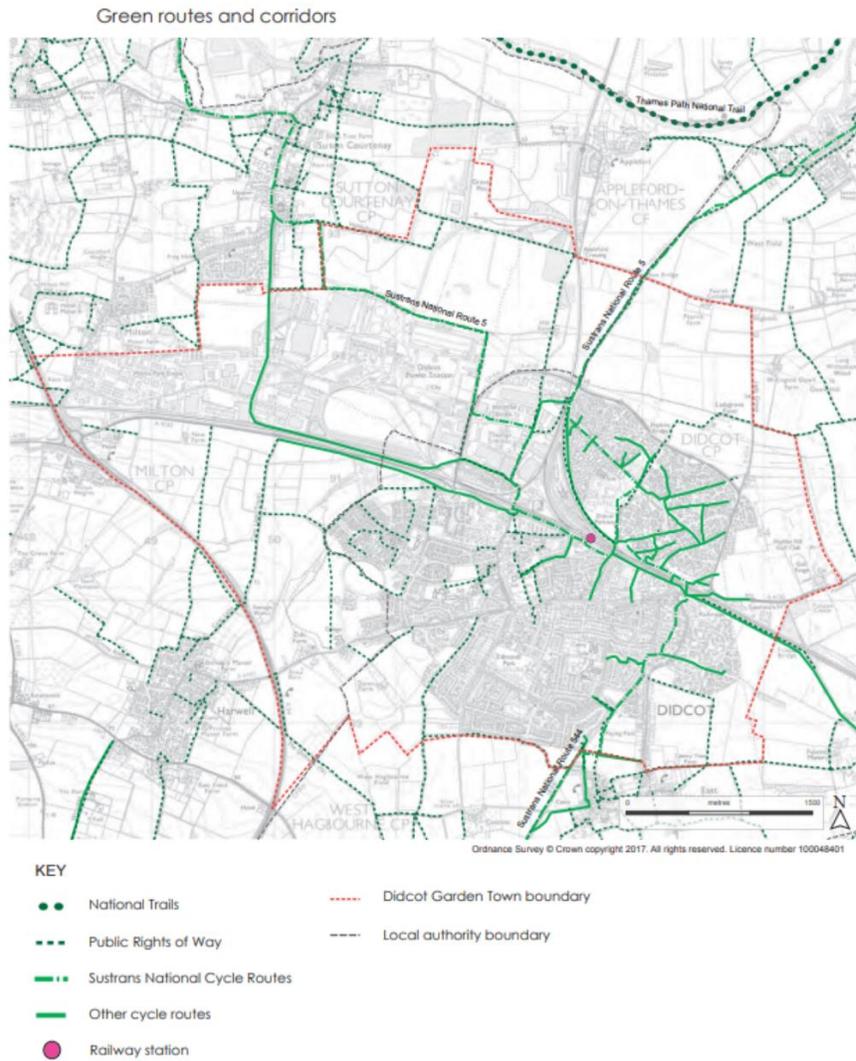
## EXISTING PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY (PROW)

15. There exists an extensive Public Rights of Way (PROW) network around Long Wittenham (**Figure 1** and **Figure 2**).
16. Existing footpaths and cycle paths (where they exist) are well used and maintained, and improvements have been made in the past 10 years to the cycle path from Long Wittenham to Didcot (287/8 and beyond to Didcot), with many volunteers from the village helping out and part funding from villagers. The problem is that the network isn't complete – only a small but critical section of cycle path from Didcot to Culham, via Clifton Hampden is missing, and that puts many people off using it. The road between Long Wittenham and Clifton Hampden is extremely dangerous, narrow in places with high volumes of traffic.
17. There is a footpath to Clifton Hampden, but it is circuitous (at least 50% longer than the shortest potential route) and it is also heavily waterlogged for much of the year, especially the section by the River Thames (287/1). For this reason, it is not practical to consider this for a cycle path. There is also potential to create a new, much shorter walking link to Clifton Hampden via the Thames Path from Long Wittenham village via the Island. This would create a circular walk which would encourage more recreation. The Thames Path is only a footpath in the sections around the two villages, and there is no prospect of changing that status.
18. The outcome for villagers is that they have reduced opportunities to use sustainable transport modes to commute to work or access to the amenities in Clifton Hampden (doctors, shop), but villagers will also have reduced opportunities for recreational walking and cycling in their beautiful and valued countryside.

Figure 1: Existing PROW network



**Figure 2: wider PROW routes linking Didcot to Long Wittenham**



Source: Appendix K: Green Infrastructure Strategy, Didcot Garden Town Delivery Strategy October 2017

19. The Oxfordshire County Council Rights of Way Management Plan (RWMP) sets out the County’s aspirations for enhanced access to the countryside and leisure and recreational facilities in support of the anticipated expansion of new homes in the County.

20. The Introduction to the RWMP explains how important convenient and attractive access is to improving health, wellbeing and the environment. It also sets out how better access to the countryside supports many of its key (County Level) strategic objectives.

21. The RWMP's Foreword states:

*Oxfordshire's urban and rural rights of way, the Thames Path and The Ridgeway National Trails, contribute to it being an outstanding place in which to live, work and visit.*

22. These routes provide significant economic, health and well-being and environmental benefits. Economic benefits arise from the desire of people wanting to, visit, live and work in an area with such wonderful access to such beautiful countryside. Health and well-being benefits come from walking, riding and the many ways to actively enjoy the countryside as well as being able to connect with the natural environment. Environmental benefits come from attractive alternatives to encourage walking or cycling instead of using cars for short and longer journeys and therefore reducing congestion. Paths between fields, alongside hedgerows and watercourses, and along sunken lanes offer superb opportunities to protect and enhance wildlife and habitats. Many routes are also ancient highways that by themselves are evidence of times past and some give access to historic and prehistoric sites.

23. All routes and green spaces in towns and countryside are part of the continually evolving cultural landscape of Oxfordshire.

24. Introduction PP1 states:

*Public rights of way are valuable assets for current and future generations. They are used by countless Oxfordshire residents and visitors for many different sports, pastimes and physical activities, mostly based around walking, cycling or horse-riding, which take place on the network. Oxfordshire's countryside, urban and rural rights of way and landscape, including the Thames Path and The Ridgeway National Trails, contribute to it being an outstanding place in which to live, work and visit*

25. PP3 states:

*A large number of local communities have produced Community-Led Plans, and more are developing statutory Neighbourhood Plans. Access and rights of way often feature in them and reflect the value of these routes for local journeys and contributions to their health and quality of life. These community plans help galvanise local action and are useful in the development planning process. Many local communities and organisations also undertake work to protect, maintain, improve and promote the routes and areas that are important to them. This new plan aims to continue to support local communities and organisations.*

## LINK BETWEEN DIDCOT ROAD AND VILLAGE HIGH STREET

26. Footpath 287/5 runs across the Didcot Road allocated site for the community hub. In order to meet the policy provisions referred to earlier in this report, it will be necessary to ensure that this link is retained and enhanced so that the new development of a school, a hub and housing will have safe and attractive sustainable transport access.

## LINK BETWEEN DIDCOT GARDEN TOWN AND WITTENHAM CLUMPS

27. The Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan Figure 8.7, has been discussed at length in the **Countryside** evidence paper and will not be discussed again here. The delivery plan identified the need for green corridors to be improved between Didcot and the countryside around and including Wittenham Clumps. The justification for this was that Didcot had deficiencies in its green infrastructure (for larger land sizes) that could be met by access to the Long Wittenham countryside.
28. It is beyond the scope of the LWNDP to deliver these improvements, but they are, in principle supported. It will be up to other mechanisms, for instance future CIL support and funding that will, most likely, deliver these improvements.

## LINK BETWEEN LONG WITTENHAM AND CLIFTON HAMPDEN

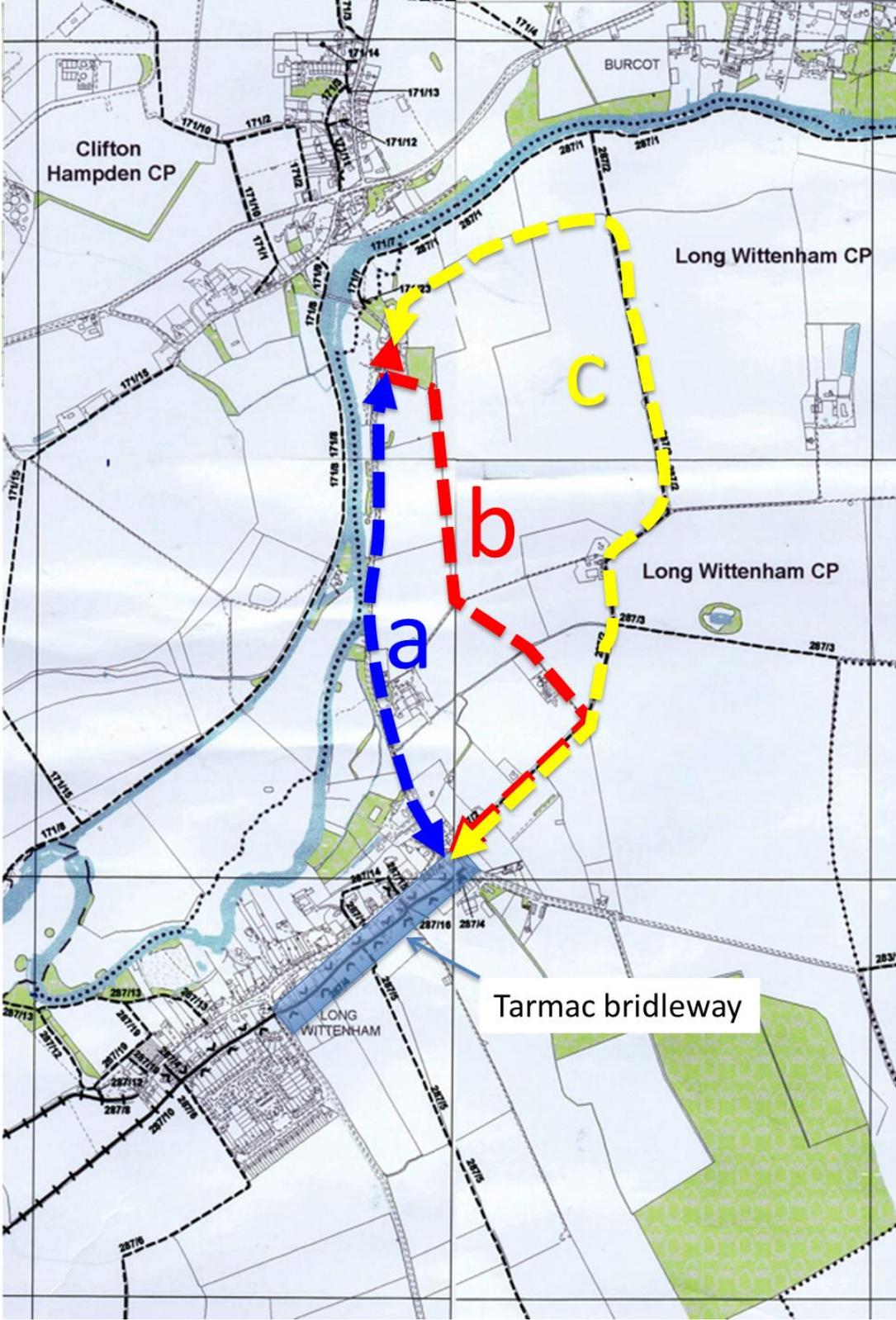
29. **Preferred Solution.** The preferred route will be a fully surfaced raised (kerbed) footway/cycle path adjacent to the existing road between Long Wittenham and Clifton Hampden. This route is also being promoted by Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) as part of the infrastructure improvements for the Science Vale links between Culham and Harwell sites and will complete an off road, tarmacked route from Didcot to the employment site at Culham. It will serve the local communities of Clifton Hampden and Long Wittenham, allowing them to walk and cycle between the two villages without having to cycle or walk on the main road. Long Wittenham residents use the village shop and surgery in Clifton Hampden, and this proposal will give a permanent, off road, safe and flood free route.
30. The Thames Path is a possible route, but in practice, it is unsuitable for cycling. It is narrow in parts and the route is broken by styles, the surface is uneven and can be muddy, and the plant growth beside the paths is not regularly mown. There is also potential conflict with walkers. Overall, the Thames Path is not suitable as a cycling commuter route between the villages and it is therefore not considered a realistic option.
31. **Figure 3** illustrates the remaining alternative options for creating a new cycle route in relation to the existing PROW and road network. These will be ideal for leisure activities. There are two sections required to create the route:
  - a. **Fieldside Track** – this is currently an unmade road. The section on Fieldside Track through Long Wittenham is cement from the Didcot End to the Didcot Road, but would need

surfacing between the Didcot Road and College Farm (570m). The full length of Fieldside Track is already a public bridleway.

**b. A link between Fieldside Track to Clifton Hampden (Barley Mow Car Park):**

- i. Option a - A discrete, dedicated tarmacked cyclepath/footpath, alongside but physically separate from the main road (from the bridge in Clifton Hampden to the Little Wittenham Road junction in Long Wittenham. (blue route). The County Council has indicated that this is their preferred route;
- ii. Option b - Create a completely off road tarmacked new route from the sewage works across the fields to the car park at the Barley Mow (red route); Note there is already a tarmacked surface from the end of Fieldside track to the sewage works.
- iii. Option c - the longer (yellow route) – achieved by improving the northern part of the route along footpath 287/2 which is currently grass at that end but 5m wide. Create a new 500m stretch from this path across to the car park at the Barley Mow. Note that 287/2 is a tarmacked road for 50% of the route, which is currently designated as a footpath only. 10 years ago, the parish council applied to change the use of 287/2 to a bridleway, which is still unresolved with the County Council.

**Figure 3: Options for cycle route between Long Wittenham and Clifton Hampden**

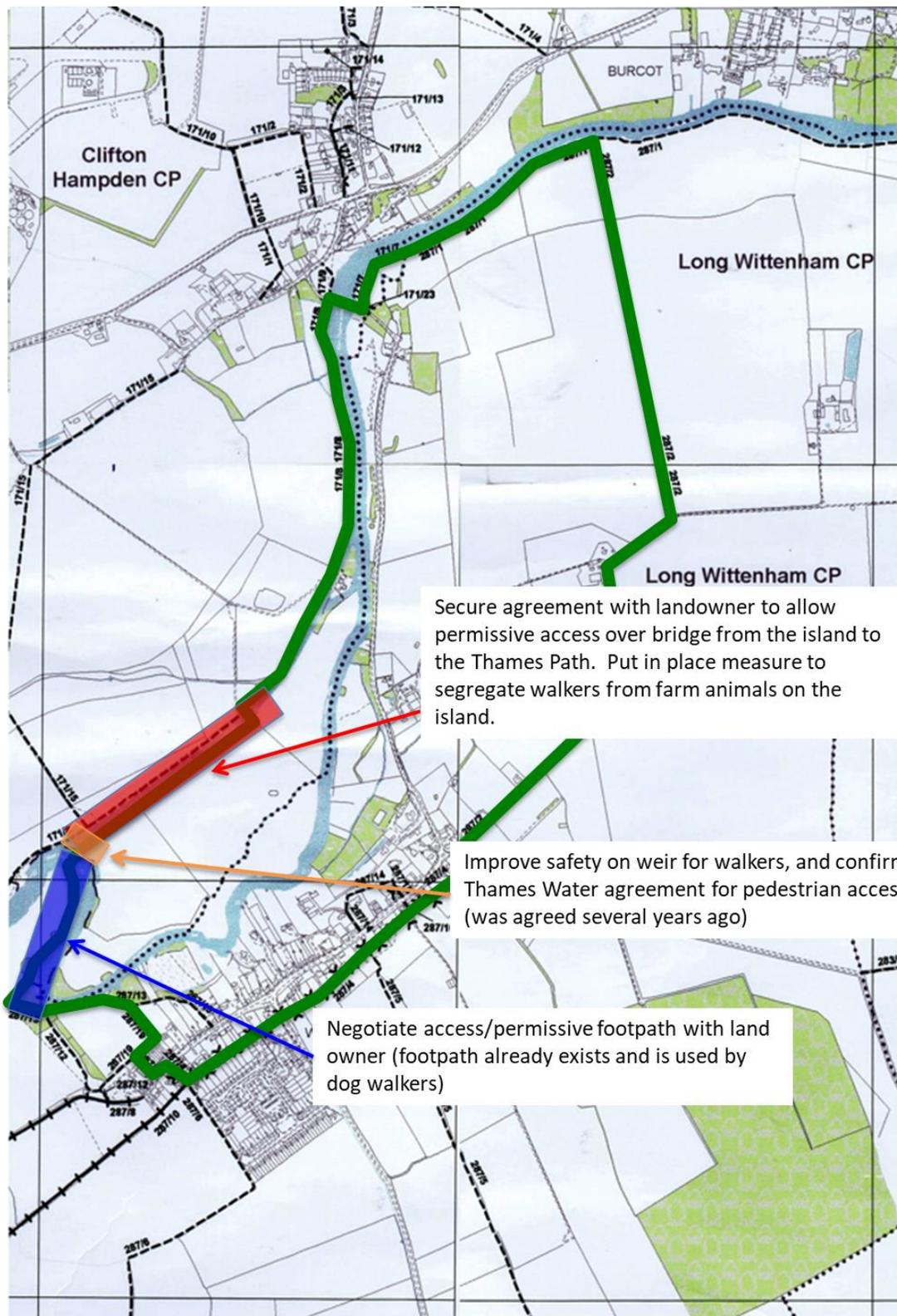


32. Option a is the preferred option as it is the most easily delivered and the shortest route (therefore the most likely to be used). However, the path must be segregated from the road, so cycle and foot traffic are safe and separate from motorized traffic.
33. Option c is the longest distance and is therefore less likely than the other two to be used on a regular basis by commuters. However, option c will be the cheapest, as 35% is already surfaced, and 75% of the route has potential access as it uses existing paths for the majority of the route. It also won't flood as the northern part of this route is 2.5m above the Thames Path. However, there are objections from at least one land owner, who also objects to option b which is also on his land. The tarmacked track to the sewage works is paid for and maintained by residents although it is a public footpath. For this path to become the official route, a public sector body would need to take over the cost of upkeep and maintenance of the track. This option will probably be difficult to deliver.
34. Option b is also not straightforward. It will be a significant challenge to create a completely new path from the sewage works across the fields to the car park at the Barley Mow, as the owner of this land is opposed to this ever happening. The tarmacked track to the sewage works is paid for and maintained by residents although it is a public footpath. For this path to become the official route, a public sector body would need to take over the cost of upkeep and maintenance of the track. This option will probably be difficult to deliver.
35. All three routes have been investigated with SODC officers. The only option that seems to be deliverable given land owner objections is option a. However, option a is liable to occasional flooding when the Thames breaks its banks. It may be the most expensive, as the road will have to be closed during construction, and will require additional costs to separate the route from the road. The route will be less desirable for recreational use, given it is by the main road.
36. The requirements to complete this project are:
  - a. To deliver the off-road section for option a, OCC highways and SODC would be required to commission the work given its proximity to the public highway. To deliver options b or c, agreement needs to be secured with the landowners to create new bridleways.
  - b. Resurface (tarmac) Fieldside Track between Didcot Road and College Farm. The Parish Council can use CIL funding towards this project.

## CIRCULAR WALK BETWEEN VILLAGES AND INCORPORATING THE THAMES PATH

37. **Figure 3** shows the proposed route of the new four-mile circular walk, encompassing the Thames Path and the two historic villages. All paths are on footpaths, bridleways or quiet lanes.
38. The route will be attractive to local people and could encourage visitors and tourists. It is envisaged that it will be used as a recreational resource rather than for commuting. It will also help make the amenities more viable in both villages (e.g. pubs and shops). The circular walk is independent of the plans for a cycle route, and the two projects are not dependent on each other, but both are needed. Timing can be staggered.
39. The route in green exists as the PROW. There is a short section, under three separate land ownerships that, if changed to permissive routes, would enable the network to join into a circular walk.
40. There are three road crossings, one at the bridge in Clifton, and two in Long Wittenham at the first at the junction of Northfield Lane/Little Wittenham Road, then where Fieldside crosses the Didcot Road.
41. Parking would be at the public car park at the Barley Mow by the bridge in Clifton Hampden. Having this new local attraction will promote the village shop and Barley Mow pub in Clifton Hampden, plus the Plough and Vine and Spice in Long Wittenham, which are short detours from the route.
42. A leaflet would be created describing the route and points of interest, and made available on the local village websites.

Figure 3: Circular Walk



43. The circular walk can be created if all the following proposals are put into place:
- c. Agree access across private land between the junction of footpath 287/12 and 287/13 and the weir (blue). A path already exists and is used by walkers, although is not officially a permissive path
  - d. Agree access across the weir with Thames Water, subject to the introduction of some safety improvements (agreement in principle already achieved).
  - e. Agree access with the land owner for the route between the weir and the Thames Path (red). The tenant farmer keeps animals on the land and it will therefore be necessary to also put a fence in place to segregate walkers and dogs from farm animals.

## DELIVERY MECHANISMS

44. Delivery of the improved cycle and footpath network will require a number of mechanisms, some of which can be secured through the planning system, some through non-planning means. Funding from CIL receipts to the Parish Council could be put towards the creation of new and upgraded infrastructure. **Evidence Paper: Infrastructure Project List** provides a guide of some of the necessary expenditure.

Ref number	Description	Estimated cost (£)
RA7	Upgrade the un-made section of Fieldside Track (from Didcot Road to Little Wittenham Road (Byway 4 as part of the cycle route)	35,000
RA12	Improve public footpath (Number 1 Thames Path and Footpath Number 2) from Northfield Lane to the River Thames to form part of a new circular walking route. If option c is chosen for cycle route, the top of footpath 2 will need tarmacking). RA12 isnt needed for the circular walk – paths are ok for waking already	7,000
RA13	Make improvements to the existing path (assuming landowner agreement) from the junction of paths 12 and 13 by the footbridge bridge at Moor Ditch to Clifton Lock via weir and island as part of circular route (Extension of	30,000

	Footpath Number 12 and improve safety features at the weir).	
RA14	Upgrade surface of damaged public footpaths adjacent to Ward's Field and River Thames (Footpath Number 13)	500
RA15	Upgrade village website and supporting communications channels to better inform villagers. Also put in new signage to promote new routes.	1,000
RA18	Animal fencing along the Island, which will link up Long Wittenham to the Thames Path. A style at both ends will also be required.	5,000

32. The Parish Council (or a delegated cycle path sub-group) will be required to lead activities, such as:

- a) Securing agreement with landowners that permissive routes can be created on their land.
- b) Work with Oxfordshire County Council to identify and implement a route along the High Street, should option a be realized.
- c) Agreement on how CIL and other planning-related financial receipts will be put towards the projects.
- d) Liaison with statutory consultees such as Thames Water and Oxfordshire County Council to secure necessary agreement that public access on non-PROW routes is acceptable.
- e) Agreement with all parties on who takes responsibility for maintenance over the long term.
- f) Communicating the improvements and encourage local people and visitors to use them.