
Completing the Viking Coastal Trail - Creation by Agreement of a Cycle Track (Sec 38 Highways Act), St Nicholas at Wade.

To: **Joint Transportation Board – 13th September 2012**

By: **Colin Finch, Senior Projects Officer, Countryside Access Service**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Ward: **St Nicholas at Wade**

Summary: The completion of the Viking Coastal Trail (VCT) recreational route as a circular loop is a longstanding objective as outlined by the approved Thanet Cycle Plan. This report is for “information”, to advise members of an agreement to be completed with the landowners through Section 38 of the Highways Act 1980 to secure the route as publically maintainable highway.

For Information

1.0 Introduction and Background

- 1.1 The route being proposed is part of an established initiative to complete the Viking Coastal Trail cycle tourism route, for which members from Thanet District Council, Canterbury City Council and Kent County Council have offered their support. A project partnership is co-coordinating delivery and includes all those listed above, along with; Sustrans (The Sustainable Transport Charity), Thanet Cycle Forum, the Kent Countryside Access Forum and St Nicholas at Wade Parish Council. The local County Member Charles Hibberd has been on site to review the situation and indicated his support in completing the trail.
- 1.2 “In principle” agreements have been received from by the landowners following an approach by the County Council to deliver key objectives set out in the Countryside Access Improvement Plan. Specifically, this creation will facilitate the completion of this regionally important tourism asset as a circular loop. Local surveys and national tourism advice demonstrates significant demand to complete the Viking Coastal Trail. By providing the in-land link, it is anticipated that the already sizeable economic value of the trail would be spread into the Thanet villages of St Nicholas at Wade and Minster.
- 1.3 The initiative to secure the route was indicated and mapped within the adopted Thanet Cycle Plan. In providing this new route the County Council will be securing a long awaited objective for the local communities and local area authorities. A plan of the route is available at annex 1.
- 1.4 Finance for the project has been secured through the successful application of an external grant from Sustrans, known as the “Connect 2 Whitstable links scheme”. This funding amounts to approximately £130,000 of investment into Kent’s cycle network.

2.0 The Current Situation

- 2.1 Legal Services are in the process of securing the agreements that will provide the new Cycle Track. As previously mentioned the current Viking Coastal Trail is an in-complete circular route with members of the public negotiating an “at grade” rail crossing or narrow pavement alongside the east running carriageway of the A299. The pavement has no

protection of crash barriers. Those connections cannot be promoted as part of the route but are understood to be used in an informal way.

3.0 Options

- 3.1 Alternative options were considered using a route along Belle Isle Road to connect and extend existing Public Bridleway TE9, over the River Wantsum to connect with Snake Drove. This alternative however did not receive the support of the landowner and the parish council also indicated their concern in relation to the safety of users riding directly through the intensely used farm yard at St Nicholas Court.

4.0 Next Steps

- 4.1 With the assistance of Legal Services, The Countryside Access Service will complete the "Creation Agreement" with the affected land owners and then manage all elements of construction and opening.
- 4.2 Land owners have requested the diversion of two bridleways across other areas of their estate. These diversions have the acceptance of the British Horse Society, local Parish Council and Ramblers' Association.
- 4.3 If successful, it is expected that a media invited opening would be completed to which members of the JTB would be invited.

5.0 Corporate Implications

5.1 Financial and VAT

- 5.1.1 Finance is to be provided by a Sustrans Connect 2 grant fund mentioned above. This includes the management and compensation to be paid to landowners. An approximate total scheme cost is around £130,000. Much of the new cycle track will follow existing concrete farm accommodation tracks originally built by KCC following the widening of the A299. KH&T officers are content that the route is suitable and achieves the ambition to complete the wider Cycle Route. Area managers Paul Valek and Chris Maw will be given oversight of the construction tender documents.
- 5.1.2 The external funding from Sustrans must be spent by March 2013. It is therefore imperative that there are no delays in delivery of the programme that would lose the funding.
- 5.1.3 Work has been tendered out to three KCC approved contractors under the management of the Countryside Access Service.
- 5.1.4 The finance department will have full overview of the projects as this involves both payment of compensation and external grant funding. The only core KCC funding being put in is the cost of the two Cycle Bridges. Both bridges are of standard design and will have been approved by KH&T structures.

5.2 Legal

- 5.2.1 KCC's legal department are drawing up and managing the completion of the "Creation Agreement" to be signed by all parties.
- 5.2.2 As an agreement between the parties involved there is no requirement for public consultation for the Cycle Track creation.

5.3 Corporate

- 5.3.1 The completion of the Viking Coastal Trail is specifically referenced within the Thanet Cycle Plan and Countryside Access Improvement Plan. The recommendation of the officer is to support the creation of the Cycle Track at St Nicholas at Wade by completing

an agreement with the landowners. This will enable the County Council to deliver those key objectives identified and a strategic cycle link that has been long requested by the local community.

5.3.2 Delivery of the scheme will also contribute to the objectives contained within “Bold Steps for Kent” and “Growth without Gridlock”. Specifically this would provide an increase in access availability for non motorised vehicles to encourage sustainable transport and also deliver a recreational tourism offer that would deliver an injection to the rural economies of St Nicholas at Wade and Minster.

5.3.3 The implications of not supporting the scheme would be in direct contradiction to published County and District Council policy, along with the loss of a sizeable external grant investment in to the counties cycle network. The implications for the public are the continued inability to complete the recreational route along a safe and specifically designed route. Implications of failure to deliver could amount in negative press coverage due to a local expectation being raised. A further implication of not completing the agreement would be the loss of the potential economic support for the villages of St Nicholas at Wade and Minster.

5.3.4 Environmental Implications – The areas of construction are away free from any planning constraints and have limited implications. Those identified are the bridge crossings of the two water courses, both of which are adjacent to the existing A299 bridges and have equivalent clearance. The Environment Agency have been contacted to ensure all relevant precaution is made.

5.4 Equity and Equalities

5.4.1 An initial screening has been completed to assess the implication to equalities.

5.4.2 Considerable research was completed by the Countryside Access Service which provided the following relevant information. A greater variety of routes was considered important as numerous routes were available alongside rivers or promenades but not so many in other environments. Information of where people could go was also felt to be a key issue in encouraging use. The main reasons stated for people using routes, was to enjoy views and landscapes and have areas to sit and relax. Key requirements were identified as car parking, toilets and places to gain refreshment. This route is directly connected to Reculver Country Park which offers all of the facilities requested above. It also offers a wide, surfaced and traffic free route suitable for all ages and ability. A requirement from the landowner is the installation of 2 Cycle Barriers. Care will be taken to ensure these barriers are set to allow for wheelchairs.

6.0 Recommendation

6.1 Members are asked to show support for the project as summarised in this report, so that external funding can be secured for construction to be carried out before the end of 2012.

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Reporting to:	<i>Mike Overbeke, Head of Regulatory Services.</i>

Annex List

<i>Annex 1</i>	<i>Plan of the proposed Cycle Track</i>
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