

**6 DCSE2003/2781/F - CONVERSION OF FOREST TRACKS AND FORMER RAILWAY LINE TO SHARED SURFACE PATH FOR WALKERS AND CYCLISTS EXISTING PATH BETWEEN ROYAL HOTEL CAR PARK AND ADMINISTRATIVE AREA BOUNDARY, SYMONDS YAT EAST, HEREFORDSHIRE.**

**For: SUSTRANS Ltd per SUSTRANS Planning, 5 North Avenue, EXETER**

**Date Received: 1st October 2003      Ward: Kerne Bridge      Grid Ref: 5603 1563**

**Expiry Date: 26th November 2003**

Local Member:    Councillor Mrs R Lincoln

## **1. Site Description and Proposal**

1.1 The application site is on the border of Herefordshire with Forest of Dean District Council. It comprises three sections: (i) a forest track (ii) former railway track bed which leads directly to (iii) the car park of the Royal Hotel. Apart from the car park the route of some 225 metres is through woodland managed by Forest Enterprises.

1.2 The application is for a new cycle route between Monmouth and Goodrich. The section between Hadnock (Monmouth) and Symonds Yat East is not on public roads and this application is for the extreme northern end of this "off-road" section. From the Royal Hotel the route joins the C1258 Symonds Yat East - Huntsham Bridge road. To the south the route continues on forest tracks through the Forest of Dean. The proposal involves making good the existing tracks which are currently used by forestry vehicles as well as informally by walkers, and a safety barrier 1.2 metres high on the upper level of the incline where the path diverts down a steep track to join a section of former railway.

## **2. Policies**

### **2.1 Planning Policy Guidance**

- |       |   |  |
|-------|---|--|
| PPG.7 | - | The Countryside: Environmental Quality and Economic & Social Development |
| PPG17 | - | Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation                            |

### **2.2 Hereford and Worcester County Structure Plan**

- |             |   |                                    |
|-------------|---|------------------------------------|
| Policy CTC1 | - | Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty |
| Policy CTC2 | - | Area of Great Landscape Value      |
| Policy LR1  | - | Leisure and Recreation Development |
| Policy LR2  | - | Leisure and Recreation Development |
| Policy LR10 | - | Cycling Routes                     |

### 2.3 South Herefordshire District Local Plan

|             |   |  |
|-------------|---|--|
| Policy C5   | - | Development within Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty |
| Policy C8   | - | Development Within Area of Great Landscape Value       |
| Policy C12  | - | Statutory Protection of Nature Conservation Sites      |
| Policy C12A | - | SAC Protection   |
| Policy R1   | - | Provision of New Recreational Facilities               |
| Policy R12  | - | New Access Provision                                   |

### 2.3 Unitary Development Plan – Deposit Draft

|           |   |         |
|-----------|---|---------|
| Policy T7 | - | Cycling |
|-----------|---|---------|

## 3. Planning History

3.1 There have not been any recent applications relating to the application site.

## 4. Consultation Summary

### Statutory Consultations

4.1 English Nature's advise is awaited.

4.2 Forestry Commission states that the site is within 500 metres of ancient semi-natural woodland. However the side of the proposals is such that there will be no effect on the woodland.

### Internal Council advice

4.3 Head of Engineering and Transportation has no objection to this proposal.

## 5. Representations

5.1 The applicant makes the following submission:

- (1) This application consists of creating a new shared use route made up of various sections.
- (2) Applications have been made to Monmouthshire and Forest of Dean for their part of the route - the latter did not consider that an application was required.

In addition a detailed statement including objectives and benefits of the whole path has been submitted.

5.2 Parish Council support the application.

5.3 Two letters have been received objecting to the cycle route in general. The following points are made:

1. The current visitors to Symonds Yat tend to be of an older age group and when they use the path by the river, they should not have to worry about cyclists. It is suggested that the cycle path and the pedestrian path should be kept separate from the stretch from the Royal Hotel to Biblins Bridge.
2. The plans totally ignore the issue of parking for vehicles bringing the cyclists in and the secure storage of cycles at this end of the ride. On top of this is the issue of the single track access road to Symonds Yat East and the single track Huntsham Bridge.

3. This also needs to be considered in the context of the planned new Canoe Centre which is also presumably going to generate significant parking problems and the question as to whether the character of Symonds Yat East will be destroyed as it is turned into a (an even bigger) giant car park and traffic jam. The situation is already acute at summer weekends. I would also note that the future draft plans will have the cycleway continuing along this single track road to Goodrich and Ross, although many will presumably terminate at Symonds Yat as this will be the limit of the off-road track.
4. Consideration might be given to the cycle track on the other side of the river from Biblins, running to the easily accessed and extensive parking at Symonds Yat West which is directly accessed from the A40. This would also have the advantage of allowing possible local use of the track between Whitchurch and Monmouth which has been identified as useful in local Parish Council meetings but seems now to have been rejected.
5. Regrettably the current Sustrans plan, which is meant to benefit those not relying on the use of cars, seems to have totally ignored the impact that the cars associated with the cycleway will have on the local villages.
6. This footpath is heavily used by walkers and presumably will be upgraded so that the speed of cyclists would make it unsafe for walkers – at the least there should be some means of segregating the two.
7. I consider that Herefordshire Council should not approve the plans until these questions have been properly addressed.

The full text of these letters can be inspected at Southern Planning Services, Blueschool House, Blueschool Street, Hereford and prior to the Sub-Committee meeting.

## **6. Officers Appraisal**

- 6.1 The proposal raises three issues: the effect on the environment including the natural beauty of the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the nature conservation interest of the River Wye; the effect of any additional traffic generated by the cycle route; and pedestrian safety.
- 6.2 The Council's policy supports the provision of such routes. Policy LR10 of the County Structure Plan states:

The need for recreational cycling routes to enable safer access to recreation facilities and the countryside in general is acknowledged and proposals which in particular allow access from urban areas and make use of disused railways, forest tracks or other linear features will be encouraged where they do not conflict with Policy LR2.

In addition the Unitary Development Plan – Deposit Draft points out that:

As part of the National Cycle Network the Wye Valley Cycleway is proposed to link Hereford with Ross on Wye, Monmouth and Chepstow following for the most part a route alongside or near the River Wye. Support for the establishment of the route is given within Policy C7.

- 6.3 There would be a minimal works required to provide this route. Only the safety barrier would have any adverse impact and this is required for only a short section. The use of the route by cyclists need not cause any significant harm to flora or fauna. This is not a circular route or part of a network of routes through an area with full public access, as is the case in the Forest of Dean. The proposed route, at the northern end, is through private woodlands, where other routes for cyclists would presumably not be provided. It is not considered therefore that the natural beauty of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the nature conservation interest of the River Wye SSSI/candidate SAC would be harmed. The views of English Nature on the latter would need to be taken into account, however, before the application is determined.
- 6.4 The route links Goodrich to Monmouth. Nevertheless it seems reasonable to assume that some cyclists will wish to start/finish at the off-road section. There is a small public car park at Symonds Yat East but the intention is to encourage parking at Symonds Yat Rock, Symonds Yat West and Goodrich Castle. Provided car parking is dispersed in this way the estimated traffic (5 to 20 cars per day, peaking at weekends, during the summer months) would not cause congestion. If it were to be concentrated at Symonds Yat East there would be increased traffic problems. It is not considered however that any problems would be so serious as to justify refusal of planning permission. The Head of Engineering and Transportation does not object to the proposal.
- 6.5 The concerns regarding pedestrian safety have been taken into account by Sustrans and 95% of the off-road cycle route have separate paths for pedestrians. At the Symonds Yat East end this cannot be fully achieved. However at this point there would be additional footpath as an alternative for walkers viz. the riverside path below the level of the railway track-bed" (which runs close to the River).

**RECOMMENDATION**

**That subject to the advice of English Nature regarding the effect on the River Wye cSAK the officers named in the Scheme of Delegation to Officers be authorised to approve the application subject to the following condition and any further conditions considered necessary by officers:**

- 1 A01 (Time limit for commencement (full permission) )**

**Reason: Required to be imposed by Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.**

Decision: .....

Notes: .....

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**Background Papers**

Internal departmental consultation replies.