

Kent Spa and Castles: cycling the High Weald and the Medway

Draft proposal

Introduction

This proposal is for a 20 mile circular cycling leisure route connecting Tonbridge, Penshurst and Tunbridge Wells, bringing substantial tourism and leisure benefits to West Kent. The route is already outlined in the TWBC cycling strategy, but without further detail.

Diagram 1: route outlines from TWBC cycling strategy



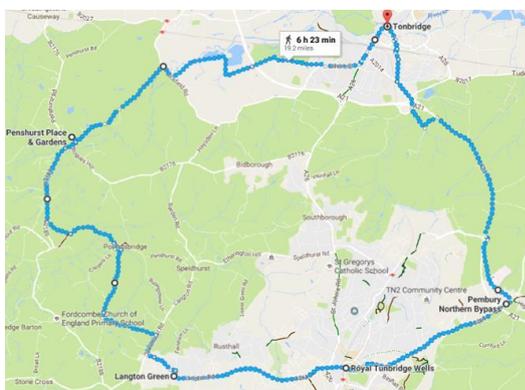
Some parts of the route already exist, others will be built as part of the TWBC cycling strategy and the remainder requires additional work to complete the route or to bring it up to an acceptable standard.

The proposal can be implemented in phases. In the longer term, the aim is for the entire route to be safe and attractive for all ages from 8 – 80 – including those in wheelchairs – and usable throughout the year. In the interim, Phase 1 is low cost and consists of:

- 1) Additional signing for the route along existing (and being built) roads and paths; and
- 2) Surface upgrades between Penshurst and Poundsbridge Hill.

In this phase, the route might not be usable in places after heavy rain or in mid-winter.

Diagram 2: approximate route outline:



Overall route description (anti-clockwise from Tunbridge Wells, Fiveways¹)

1. Tunbridge Wells Fiveways to Longfield Road junction (2 alternatives)
 - a. 21st Century Way through Hilbert & Grosvenor Rec and North Farm
 - b. Pembury Road and Tonbridge Road
2. Longfield Road junction to Vauxhall Lane along (new) NMU
3. Vauxhall Lane to Tonbridge Railway station
4. Tonbridge railway station to Penshurst via Haysden, the existing 'Tudor Trail'
5. Penshurst to Poundsbridge
 - a. Existing bridleway (unpaved trail marked on Google maps) via Nashes Farm
 - b. As (a) but using footpath to B2188, omitting Nashes Farm
 - c. As (b) but using footpath to B2176
6. Poundsbridge to Langton Green
7. Langton Green to Tunbridge Wells Fiveways

Description and issues with each section

Section 1: Tunbridge Wells Fiveways to Longfield Roundabout

Alternative a) via 21st Century Way

From Fiveways to where Goods Station Road branches off from Victoria Road is heavily trafficked in parts. In phase 1, less confident cyclists could walk to the junction of Goods Station Road and Victoria Road. A later phase could take into account proposals to pedestrianise the part of Grosvenor Road in front of Tesco.

In Hilbert and Grosvenor Rec, a section of the route has recently been laid with loose gravel, making it unsuitable for cycling. It is understood that this is a temporary measure and is being rectified, but no sign of when this is happening.

The rest of the 21st Century Way through to North Farm is currently under review and the new design appears to be largely acceptable.

Alternative b) via Pembury Road

Section has known safety and usability issues. Proposals to address them are included in the TWBC Cycling Strategy. As yet there are no detailed designs, but KCC is conducting a study of the Pembury Road, which will take into account the needs of cyclists and pedestrians.

The pedestrianised section of Calverley Road should be signed "slow cycling". The rest of the route up to Pembury Road is usable but heavily trafficked. An advisory cycle lane exists on Calverley Park Gardens, but is not ideal². Whilst the Pembury Road cycle path has significant shortcomings, it is largely off-road and is currently 'the best we have' in the area.

From the junction of Pembury Road with Halls Hole Lane, there are two alternatives. In Phase 1, cyclists will continue along Pembury Road to the junction at Woodsgate Corner and turn left along Tonbridge Road. Woodsgate Corner is not convenient for cyclists and requires cyclists to dismount to cross the junction. Along Tonbridge Road, there is a cycle path as far as the Hospital with a

¹ Alternative is to start and finish at Tunbridge Wells train station

² The route from TW town centre to Pembury Road is currently mapped along Sandrock. This is being amended by Kent County Council and Sustrans.

proposed design and funding for a route to the Longfield Road roundabout, although a safe access from there to the NMU is not yet agreed.

The Woodsgate Corner junction is included in the review of the Pembury Road.

In phase 2, cyclists will be able to avoid Woodsgate corner by using the new foot and cycle bridge over the A21 from Blackhurst lane to Tonbridge Road – a more attractive route for cyclists.

Section 2: Longfield Roundabout to Vauxhall Lane

Currently being designed and built as part of the new A21. There are connection issues at both ends and concerns about the usability of the route in places, but it is hoped that the route will be safe, if not ideal, in all places. A design proposal has been made from KCC and funding is being sought from Highways England – decision expected in January 2017.

Section 3: Vauxhall Lane to Tonbridge Railway Station

Being considered as part of Tonbridge & Malling's proposals for cycling in Tonbridge. A design has been proposed by T&MBC and KCC. Part of the funding is believed to be available from the Tonbridge High Street project and the rest is being sought from Highways England – decision expected in January 2017.

Section 4: Tonbridge Railway Station to Penshurst

Route already exists and is heavily used by cyclists, walkers and horse-riders, particularly in summer. The count of all users recorded near Tonbridge was 60,000 in 2012 (last year of available data). Two simple changes would make the route more attractive and usable all year, particularly for cyclists:

- 1) Repair the puddles and kerbs between Ensfield bridge and the Straight Mile
- 2) Remove or widen the metal gates that currently restrict access. The metal gates were originally put in to restrict motorcycle access and were a condition of the original upgrade, but do provide a barrier to cyclists. A review should be conducted of the continuing need for the barriers, balanced against the need for access for other users, particularly those in disabled vehicles.

In the longer term, a number of upgrades would allow its use by all, including those in wheelchairs:

- 3) Upgrade the surface in various places to tarmac instead of rolled gravel;
- 4) Straighten the tight bends / steep gradients at the Ensfield bridge / end of the Straight Mile
- 5) Find an alternative to the steep crossing over the flood barrier near the A21. The cycleway could either be rerouted via the concrete road around Hayesden Water or the gradient can be reduced by using considerable amounts of material. Either solution would require significant effort and resource.

[add photos]

Section 5: Penshurst to Poundsbridge

Three main alternative routes exist. In each case, Penshurst Estate needs to be consulted, as the owner of land between Penshurst and Poundsbridge:

- a. Existing 'unpaved trail' to the B2188 between Smarts Hill and Saints Hill.

The route is already marked for cycling, but an upgrade would be required along the lane near Nashes Farm to make it usable. Further surface upgrade would be needed in the fields between

Nashes Farm and Poundsbridge to make the route usable all year. A safety concern is the need to use the busy / fast B2188;

- b. Divert to use the footpath at end of Nashes Farm lane along the Medway and then the lane to the B2188 at the bottom of Smarts Hill

Better than (a) as it reduces the amount of cycling on the B2188, it may be preferred by the Lord de L'Isle (owner of Nashes farm) and would avoid need to upgrade Nashes farm Lane. Would require footpath to be upgraded to make it usable.

Both (a) and (b) need traffic calming on the B2188, particularly where it crosses the River Eden at Long Bridge³ unless an alternative bridge is built for walkers and cyclists. A possible variant is to use the footpath that runs to the B2188 by the River Eden, instead of the lane to Smart's Hill, but this would require additional footpath upgrade.

- c. As (b) but diverts to the B2176, using the footbridge across Medway and the footpaths below Swaylands

More direct and avoids the need to use the B2188, but B2176 is also busy. Upgrading of footpaths needed; footbridge over Medway is not cyclable.

Issues:

Upgrading PROWs to bridleway status need to be approached with care, as it can be difficult and take time, particularly the need to gain the consent of the land owner.

Signing an official route would require the route to meet certain standards and to pass a safety audit.

Add photos.

Section 6: Poundsbridge to Langton Green

The route would use Coopers Lane, Poundsbridge Hill, Leggs Lane, and Speldhurst Road. The route is mostly lightly trafficked, but Speldhurst Road is busy and high speed, particularly where it becomes national speed limit. Would require clear signing and traffic calming, ideally 20mph in Langton Green and an extension of the 30 mph limit to Leggs Lane. There is support from Speldhurst Parish Council to reduce both of these speed limits.

Add photos.

Section 7: Langton Green to Tunbridge Wells

Included in the Tunbridge Wells cycling strategy. In phase 1, signing through backstreets to Rusthall High Street is acceptable. Consideration to be given to route across Rusthall Common towards Tunbridge Wells. The section along from Rusthall common to Tunbridge Wells needs further consideration

Other issues

Route falls into three boroughs – Sevenoaks, Tonbridge & Malling and Tunbridge Wells – and cooperation between the three is needed

³ Understood that a plan to do so is in progress

Cooperation from Lord de L'Isle, owner of land around Penshurst required. Surfaces of existing bridleways could be upgraded with permission. Upgrading footpaths along edges of fields would be more complex but has occurred elsewhere, such as the Saltern's way near Chichester.

Proposal summary

Initial phase

Agree route, signage, permission from Peshurst estate, hardcore, repairs and minor upgrades, including changes to gates on Tudor Trail; marketing including new NMU and Blackhurst Lane section to show complete safe route for most people, cost plan, timing.

Longer term

Upgrade Tonbridge to Peshurst: better surface, solving steep gradient issue at flood barrier, remodelling of Straight Mile at Ensfield Bridge end, consider link from Haysden into Tonbridge via Lower Haysden Lane to link into A26 cycle route from Tunbridge Wells to Tonbridge.