

The Ashton Court missing link

A proposal for a walking and cycling path from the Church Lodge Car Park entrance to Kennel Lodge Road



December 2018

Greenways and Cyclerooutes Ltd
The Wool Hall, Bristol, BS1 6JJ

The Ashton Court Missing Link – a new path from Kennel Lodge Road to Ashton Road entrance

This proposal sets out a project to construct 700m of new path along the boundary of the Ashton Court Estate in order to complete the Missing Link in the Festival Way from Bristol to Long Ashton and Nailsea. The need for this link has been identified for a number of years and various proposals were developed by the City Council. These were thought to be too intrusive upon the listed landscape of the Historic Estate so did not proceed.

Now, in 2018, the local path building charity, Greenways and Cyclerooutes Limited, have taken account of the various sensitive points of view to propose the details set out in this document. The route leaves Kennel Lodge Road along the edge of UWE's lands, and then joins the course of the original Park Farm track which runs around the eaves of the Woodlands (planted in the 19th Century to hide the Farm from the Mansion). At the end of this track the path runs centrally through the woodland belt planted in the 1970's to mask the playing fields from the Mansion, before finally emerging along the edge of Smyth Fields to reach an existing gate to the Ashton Road entrance.

This route will make a positive attraction to the network of all-weather paths on the Estate, as well as a very useful contribution towards encouraging everyday walking and cycling along the Festival Way from Long Ashton.

The route itself will be all but invisible from the Mansion, and the project will be an opportunity to enhance the overall quality of the historic parkland. The woodland belt is a recent planting which limits the views from the Mansion which originally extended all the way to the Ashton Road. The project plans to work closely with the Park Team, and with Historic England in the medium term

progressively to clear away openings through the woodland belt so that the grass of the playing fields can be glimpsed to give an idea of a greater depth to the park. The proposals for doing this work are set out in the Landscape section.

Greenways and Cyclerooutes Limited would like to carry out the woodland and tree management over this winter 18/19 and to construct the path in time for use in the summer next year.

It should be noted that a very short section of the path lies in North Somerset's area and this section has a valid planning consent as a part of the completed Ashton Lodge Car Park. This Application comprises; the detailed plans and proposals, a Design, Access and heritage Statement, Appendix 1 - Ecological report, Appendix 2 - Woodland Management proposals, Appendix 3 - A letter from Historic England.

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The Ashton Court Missing Link: Location Plan



Section A - B: Footpath past UWE's Campus along Kennel Lodge Road

UWE have completed their redevelopment of this side of their Campus and have included an excellent new path for shared use along the roadside verge. This will form the first part of the Ashton Park link. The only detail still to be done is to make a crossing of Kennel Lodge Road to take the public on the level across to the existing path running up beside the allotments and then through to Bristol.



Plan of UWE along Kennel Lodge Road with a clear pedestrian route added and a traffic free piazza in front of collage entrance

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Sketch of proposed fencing at Kennel Lodge Entrance

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Section B - C: Kennel Lodge Road to Park Farm

Over this section the Greenway will continue along the edge of the UWE Campus land to Kennel Lodge Road. The UWE section will be situated behind the existing fence and will be invisible from the Mansion. We propose to remove the existing wicket gate into the Park and provide a new one at a convenient point along the UWE fencing or even at the line of the original track up from Park Farm. This will take the public away from the veteran tree (where the ground is tramped down as can be seen in the photograph) and even away from the whole of the SSSI site.



View across UWE grounds to Kennel Lodge Road



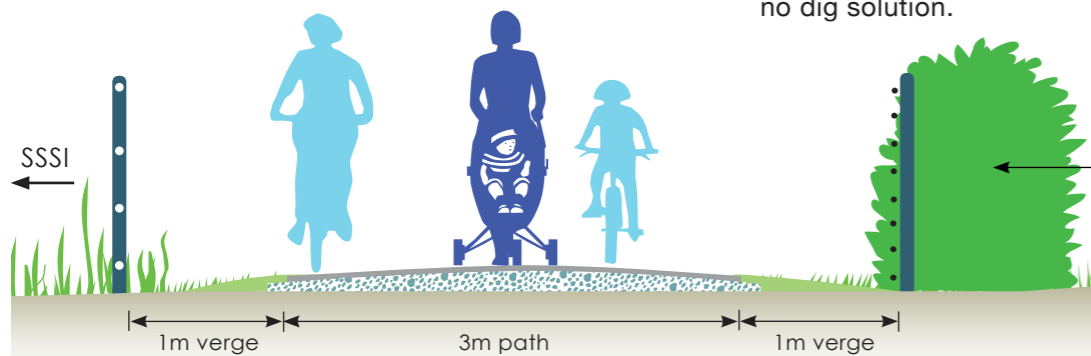
View of current state of the ground past the veteran oak at the entrance to the park

1. Existing road to the Mansion House Carpark.
2. Missing Link to smoothly match up with the completed path past College.
3. Existing gates across Drive unchanged, and fence from wicket gate to existing UWE gate in Park Railings to maintain the security of Park.
4. Remove existing wicket gate and extend existing railings so as to minimise damage to veteran trees, if required.
5. UWE buildings and café looking out over the grass.
6. Selective planting on UWE land retained and new trees planted to screen College buildings.



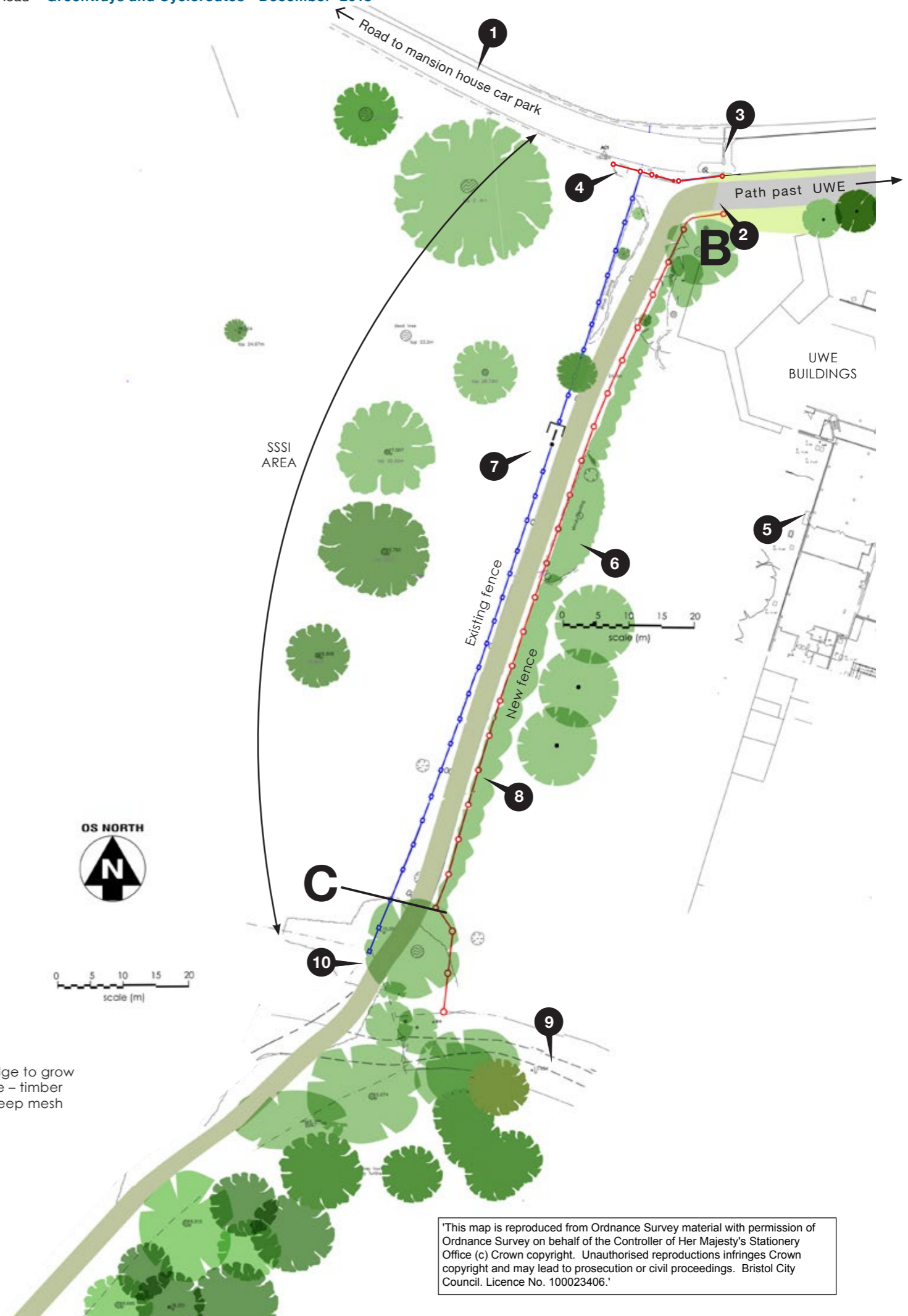
Looking along the line of the proposed path on the college lawn

7. Position of new kissing gate to be selected so as to cause the least damage possible for the public walking across the field to the Mansion House. This could even be at point 10 so that the public avoid the SSSI altogether.
8. New fence and hedge planting
9. Event access vehicles pass on via existing woodyard access track.
10. Path to pass beneath Holm Oak which should be retained. Use cellular tree protection here and follow through to Kennel Lodge Road with no dig solution.



Cross section on UWE grounds using 'no dig' path type

Mixed planting hedge to grow through fields fence - timber posts and 7 wire sheep mesh



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Section C – D: From Park Farm Entrance along the course of the old farm road

The Greenway would follow and pick up the alignment of the original farm track from Park Farm to Park (shown on the 1917 map). This track was under the eaves of the wood which was planted to hide the buildings of the Park Farm. We have not found any photograph showing exactly what this track was like but it may have been fairly substantial as it appears that this was the main route through the Smyth Fields to all the fields south of the Farm. The existing dilapidated fence would be removed and replaced by new Ashton Park railings if required.



View of the state of the fence along the field edge of the wood

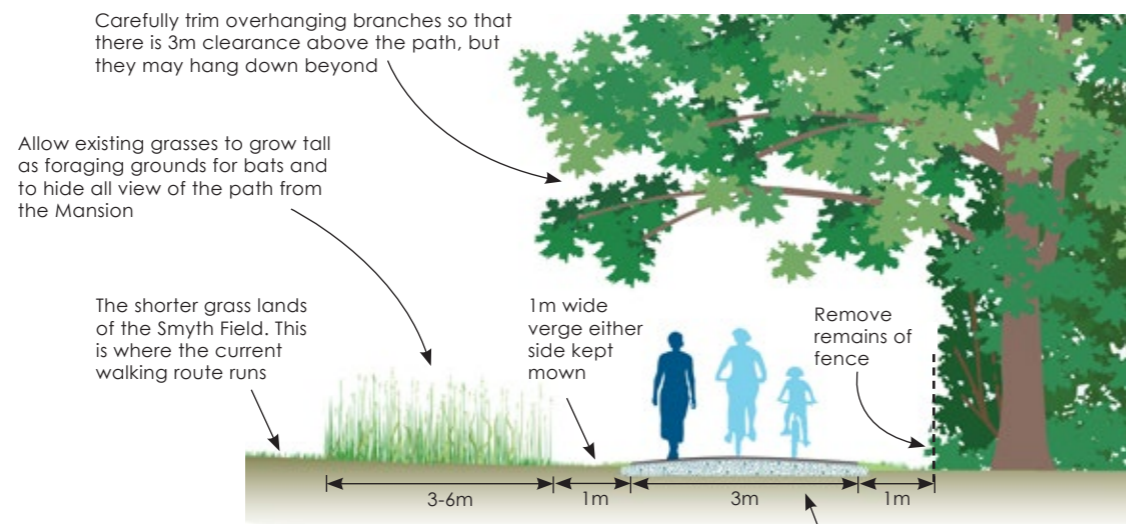
11. Reinforce crossing from farmyard which is used for events such as the Balloon Fiesta.

12. The Greenway now follows the line of the original farm access road close to the eaves of the wood



The path here would run well under the eaves of the wood

13. The cross section shows how the path would be positioned under the sweeping branches from the adjacent trees. The lower ones would be lopped to give a height of 3m above the path but they could drop lower on the field side. The effect will be very similar to sections of the Riverside path to Pill. The existing wide band of tall grasses and cow parsley would be retained as foraging for bats and to prevent any view of the path from the Mansion. The remains of the fence would be removed and replaced with Park railings or similar if required.



A. Sketch view of path under the eaves of Park Wood looking towards the Art College

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14. At this point the remains of the track boundary wall are visible. This would be an opportunity for an information board explains the role of the Wood and the farm track. The isolated ash tree is a feature.



Remains of farm track boundary wall

15. The Greenway would cross the existing path at its central point before continuing through the woodland strip.



Section D - E: The School Field Tree Belt - A Woodland Promenade

The path leaves the line of the old farm road and runs along the centre of this tree belt which was originally planted to hide the school playing fields from the house. Very little woodland management has been done over the years and the central part of the woodland strip is largely spindly trees which need to be thinned in order to allow selected ones to flourish.

The cross-section on this page shows how a path might look if the existing boundary bushes and understorey growth were left undisturbed. We envisage that this arrangement will gradually evolve to a more open aspect as this undergrowth is carefully cut back over a 3 or 4 year period to give glimpses of the green grass playing fields from the Mansion.

16. The path to run centrally through the woodland strip. Some thinning out of trees is required and the exact line of the route to be agreed in a walk through. The path would be constructed on root guard mesh throughout this section. A certain amount of additional tree planting could be done if this is required

17. Renew the school fence in sheep mesh and one smooth wire so as to prevent dogs wandering out onto the pitches. Maintain the existing link to the playing fields in this area and consider making a hard path through to Parklands Road for a school link. But over the remainder of the boundary of the playing field restore the existing fence and fence across other entrances so as to keep the public from crossing the playing pitches if possible.

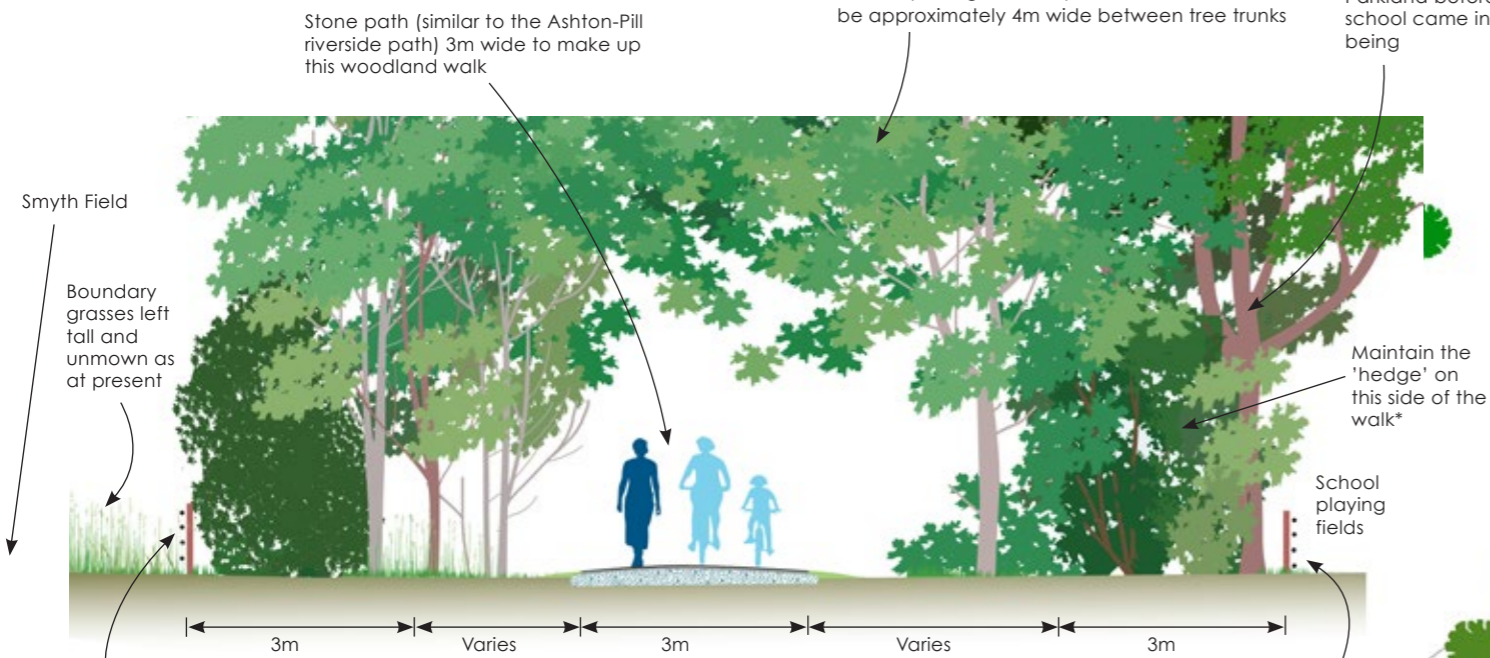
18. This link to be closed off to minimise the public walking across the school playing fields. But maintain the entrance into the Park so that the woodland walk can be joined halfway along.

19. The line of the path to take account of feature trees which predate the planting of this woodland belt.

The existing trees should be carefully thinned so as to allow selected specimens to flourish and to grow higher so as to mask views of the school and other buildings. And so as to create a clear passage for the path. This should aim to be approximately 4m wide between tree trunks

On the school side of the tree belt there are a few much old trees which must have stood around in the Parkland before the school came into being

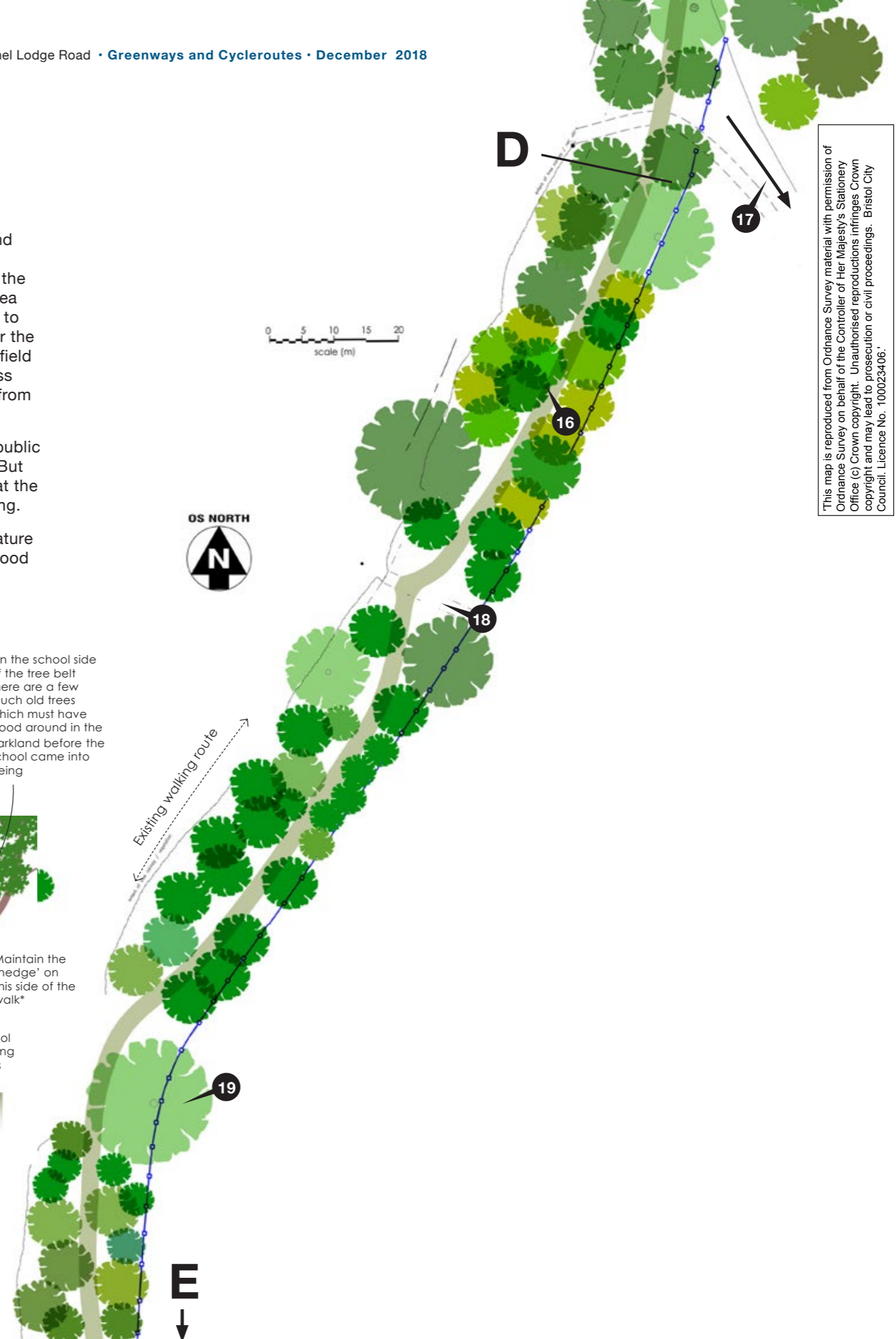
Maintain the 'hedge' on this side of the walk*



View of Woodland Walk running approximately centrally down through the woodland strip between the playing fields and Smyth Field with boundary hedge maintained

*Note that in selected areas a more open aspect may be preferred in order to enhance the landscape by creating a view between Smyth Field and the playing fields. This option is discussed in the Landscape Section.

Replace the existing dilapidated fence with an agricultural fence comprising a 7 wire sheep mesh and one smooth top wire



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Sections E-F: The link to Ashton Lodge Car Park drive

As the woodland strip turns away to the south the path can emerge into Smyth Field and will be all but invisible from the Mansion. This will give walkers and cyclists a long view up towards the Deer Park in the distance beyond the events field. At the end the path joins the car park access road to either continue on the Festival Way towards Long Ashton, or to circle around through the car park area back to the Mansion.

20. Emerge from the wood where there is a length of chestnut saplings well before reaching the large specimen tree.
21. As this field is used for caravans and the like during the Balloon Festival this section of the path should be built to a higher standard and reinforced to take the vehicles crossing back and forth.
22. The Cart Wheel Pond is an interesting feature which deserves an explanatory board - perhaps with a picture of Constable's Hay Wain?
23. The path can now run along the edge of Smyth Field as the Mansion is all but invisible in the distance and hidden by trees.

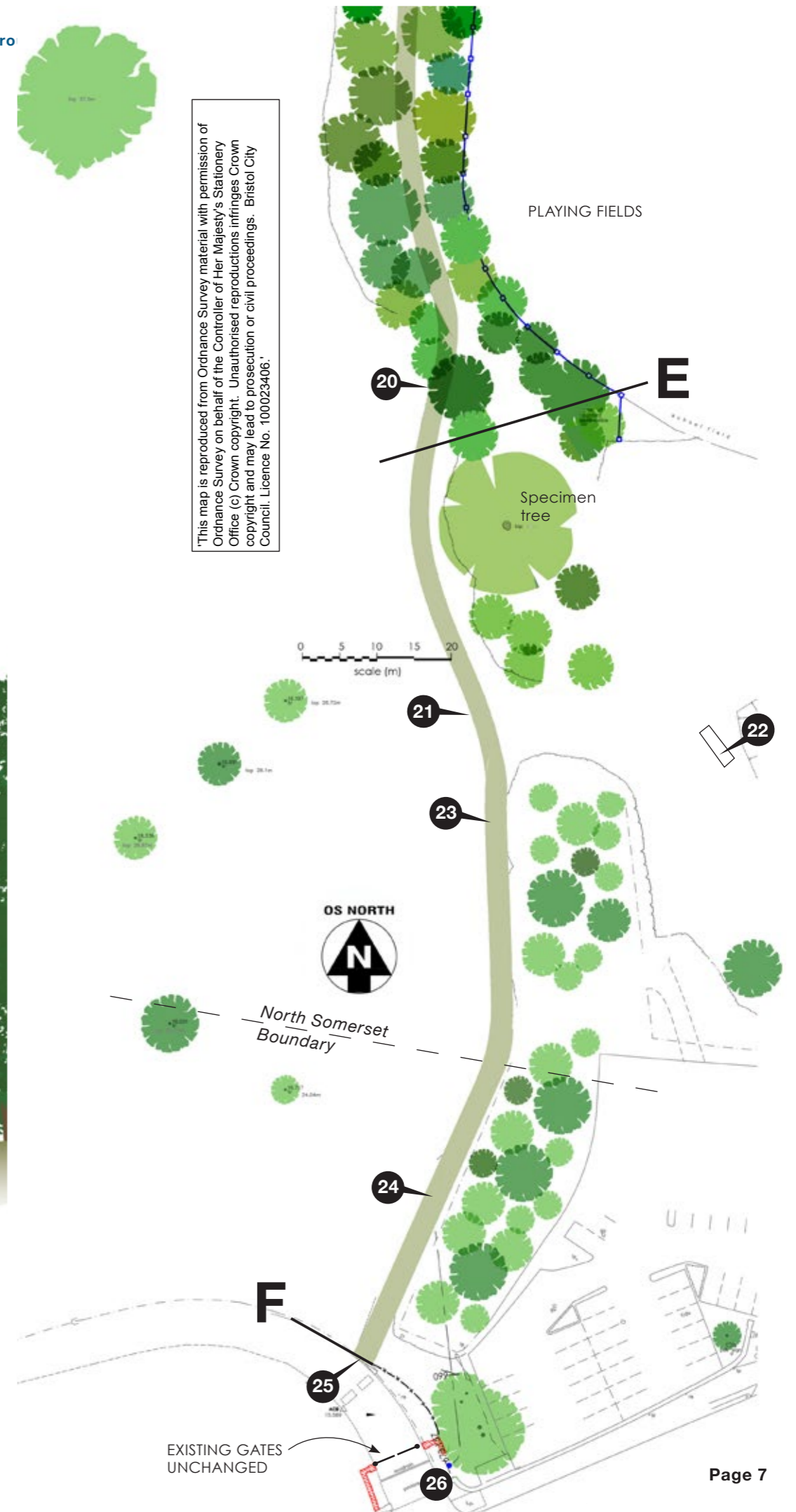
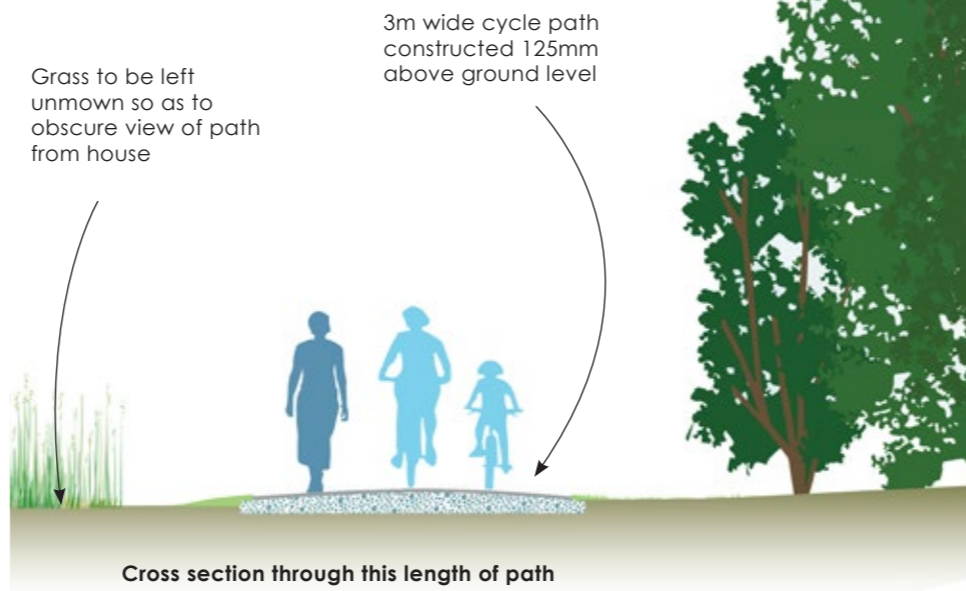


View looking towards Smyth Field showing the line of the proposed greenway

24. At this point the path crosses over the line of the original drive which is now a slightly raised grassy bank.
25. Join the carpark access road via the existing gates, one of which should be locked open to leave a 1.2m wide gap for walkers, cyclists and wheelchairs, but precludes vehicles. Alternatively make new chicane in the park fence immediately to the south of the existing gate. The optimum arrangement will be the one best suited to festival traffic
26. Route continues via completed Church Farm path to Long Ashton.



Existing gate off carpark access road. The near gate would be locked open to leave a 1.2m gap



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Design, Access and Heritage Statement

Introduction

The project seeks to put in place a level route from Kennel Lodge Drive to Ashton Road. This will enable the public to bypass the very steep hill up to the Mansion, and reach the completed Festival Way to Long Ashton and Nailsea much more easily. At the same time the Missing Link will be a valuable local path and one which will be dry and suitable for year-round use by walkers, cyclists and wheelchair users.

Background

In 2010 Bristol City Council submitted detailed proposals which were granted planning consent 10/P/0992/F. The application was backed by a number of detailed reports covering historic issues, archaeology, ecology and arboriculture.

The City Council did not proceed with the project in 2010 because the details did not receive English Heritage's support. It should be noted that North Somerset's consent 03/P/1333/F was acted up and has largely been realised with the construction of the Ashton Lodge car park, although the short length of the missing link covered in their application remains to be built. In order to be confident of fulfilling the correct procedures Greenways are also making a planning application to North Somerset Council.

In 2015, a local supporter, John Grimshaw, prepared a revised route and held discussions with English Heritage who made further suggestions. At that time the matter was not followed up because the City Council were not in a position to do so. The next year North Somerset Council started to construct the Weston-`super-Mare and Brean Down Greenway working in partnership with the newly formed local charity Greenways and Cycloroutes Limited.

This charity undertook to develop the details of the Missing Link to the point where the project had the support of Historic England and the current planning application is accordingly submitted.

Supporting Documents

We do not intend to reproduce all the documentation associated with previous proposals. It was extremely comprehensive in nature and maybe summarised in the following two documents which are submitted as separate items to this planning application document:

1. **The Design, Access and Heritage Statement May 2010** prepared by the Landscape Design Team of the City Council.
2. **The Ashton Court Missing Link April 2015** prepared by John Grimshaw CBE.

The ecological study has been updated and its findings assimilated into the current proposals Appendix A. A woodland management plan is set out in Appendix B. Historic England's letter of quiet support Appendix C.

A summary of the significant elements of the Missing Link Project in respect to the Historic Estate and Landscape

The revised project details can be described in relation to the key plan.

Section A and B avoiding Kennel Lodge Road has now been constructed by UWE as part of its reconstruction of the campus. At the eastern end of the new path a crossing of Kennel Lodge

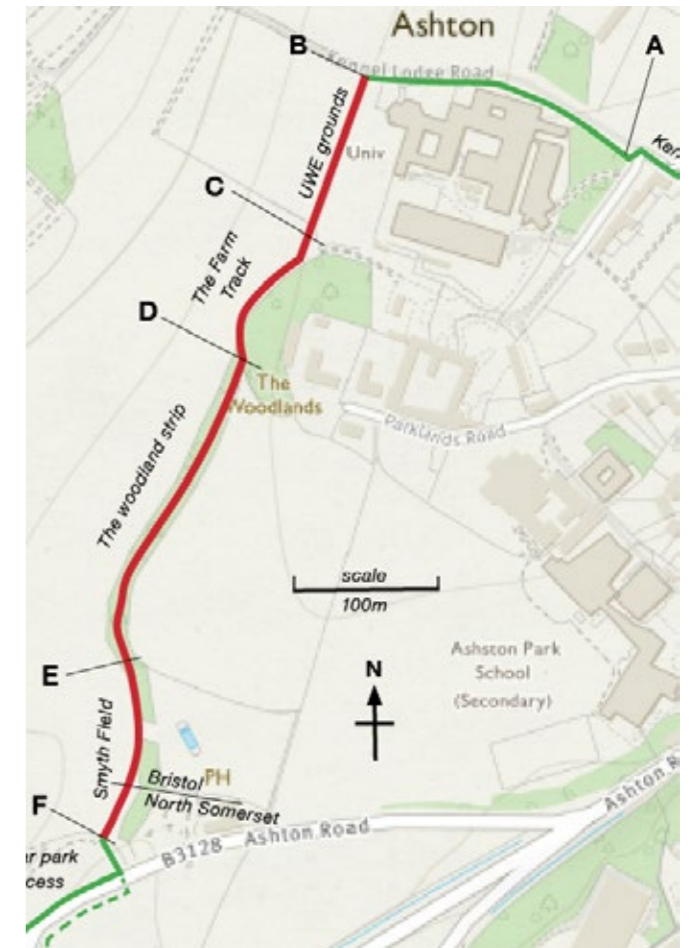
Road is required to reach the ongoing path by the allotments.

B-C Here the path runs inside the UWE boundary fence in order to be outside the adjacent SSSI area. Long grasses growing up against the iron railings will completely mask the path surface from anywhere in the park.

C-D Over this section the path would follow the line of the original farm track running under the eaves of the adjacent trees. Here as all through the project we will use a "minimum dig" arrangement excavating up to 100mm and then leaving the surface open for our archaeologist to inspect before construction. In this area we will clear the tree litter and tithe down to the underlying compact stone track and construct up from that.

D-E This section of the original project which was the most visible will now run down the centre of the woodland strip. This narrow belt of trees was planted in the '60's and has not been managed since. The trees towards the centre all need removing in order to allow the ones on the side to prosper. The path will select a course as determined by these trees and the surface will be constructed on "rootguard" cellular material throughout.

Over this section the path will be quite invisible from the Mansion. However, working closely with Historic England over a number of years we will gradually open up some glades either side of the path so that, from the Mansion, one gets occasional views of the green playing fields and an idea of the scale of the original parkland.



E-F Once around the corner of the woodland strip the path emerges into Smyth Field to run along the field edge to reach the Ashton Lodge car park access road via existing gates.

F-G Here the Missing Link joins the existing path to Long Ashton and Nailsea.

H We understand that Sustrans are working on resolving the difficult crossing of the main road, and of linking through to the Metrobus cycleroute.

Landscaping issues and opportunities

The proposed path could slip through the end of the Ashton Park lands almost unnoticed, but it provides opportunities for enhancing the historic landscape at the same time. The montage shows two opportunities:

1. Extending the views from the Mansion by cutting through gaps or openings in the tree belt so that glimpses of grass fields beyond become visible to give an extended depth to the Park – similar to its original views.

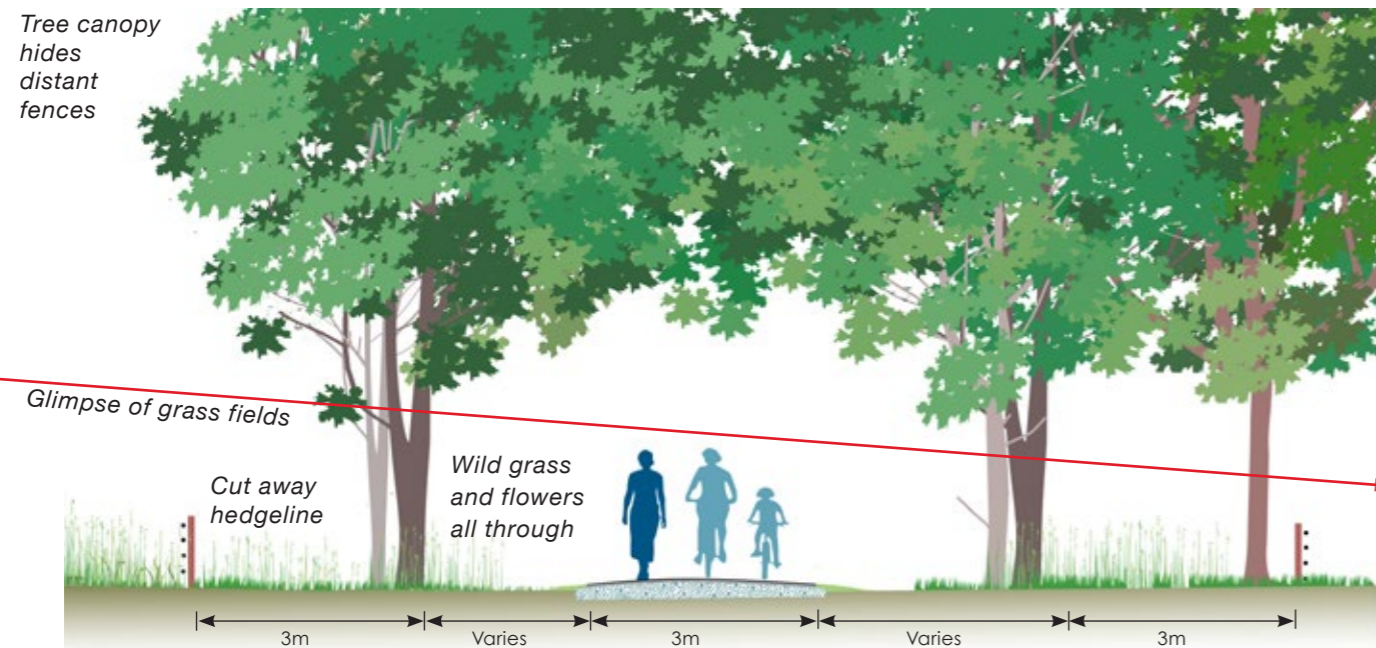
The cross section shows the hedging and understorey cleared away, but the upper canopy left to mask the school security fence, goal posts and the like. The view highlighted in green could see the newly restored Gatehouse if the school gym were removed.

Greenways suggests opening up these views in stages perhaps over 3 or 4 seasons, and

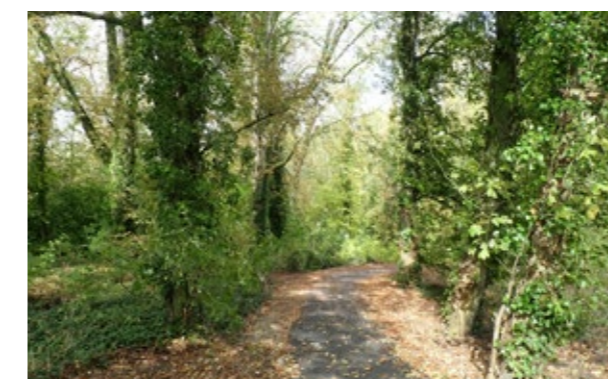
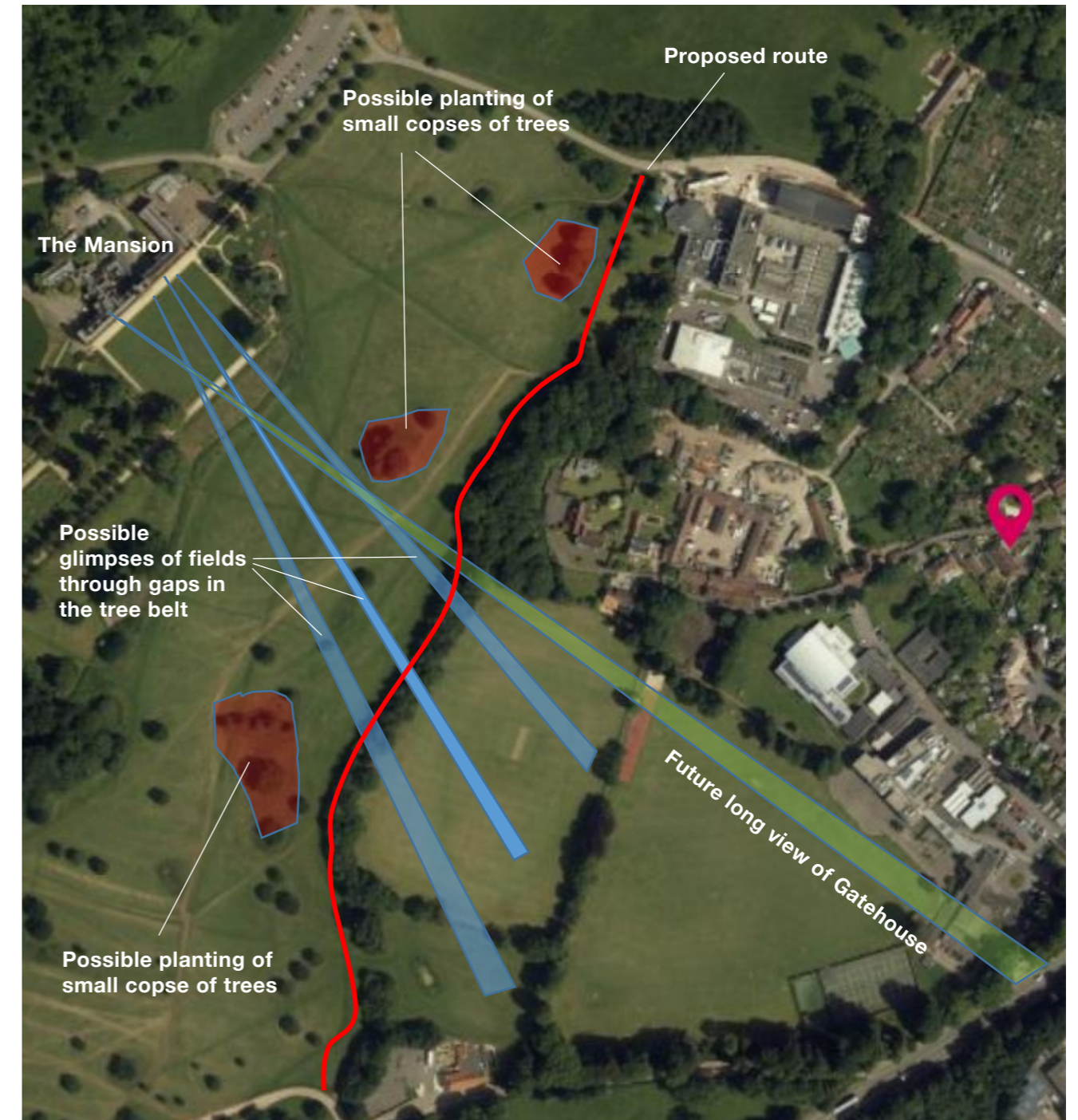
possibly checking the effect of quite small amounts of clearing or felling of individual trees, literally one at a time to ensure that the vistas are what is intended. It should be noted that the long frontage of the Mansion makes for different viewpoints to add to the complexity and subtlety of the matter.

2. It is thought that the historic estate might have had rather more copses of trees to give interest to the landscape rather than single plantings. The Greenways project envisages working closely with Historic England and the Estate to plant up possible copses. These need to be positioned to both mask objects one wishes to hide, but at the same time not to block potential glimpses through the tree belt.

Wild grass and wildflowers mixes could be sewn along the path margins and these would manage these for their seeds only mowing the immediate half metre short as the verge to the path.



Aerial view of Ashton Park showing key features



View of Greenways Waddesdon Greenway 2018 through the Avenue at Waddesdon Manor



Construction through Wormstone Wood which lies in the Grade 2 listed Waddesdon Park - 2018

Wildlife and Ecology

The original ecology report has been updated by Rupert Higgins (shown in Appendix I) and the project will adopt his recommendations.

Design and Access Statement

The purpose of this Missing Link Project is to project a sound, dry, and all-weather link on the level to fill in the missing gap in the Festival Way. It will also provide a link to Ashton School and the UWE campus, and the basis for further interesting walks and rides in Ashton Park. The path will link with all existing footpath routes.

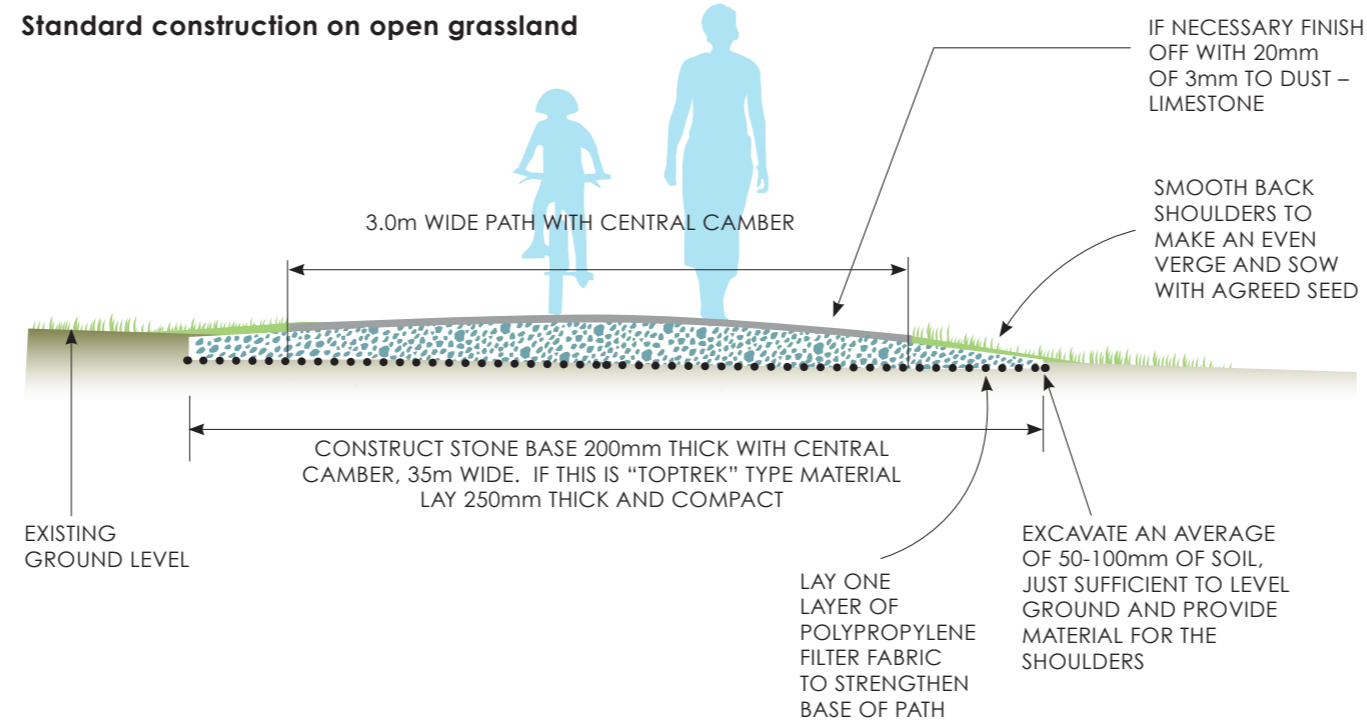
The construction cross section is shown here. The finished surface will have a central camber and be slightly revised from the ground so as to be ensure it is dry at all times.

The verges will be sown with woodland or open pastures grass and seed mixtures. There will be no barriers to free access but slow down chicanes will deal with speedy cyclists at either end of the path. Signage will be discrete. There will be no lighting on this scheme.

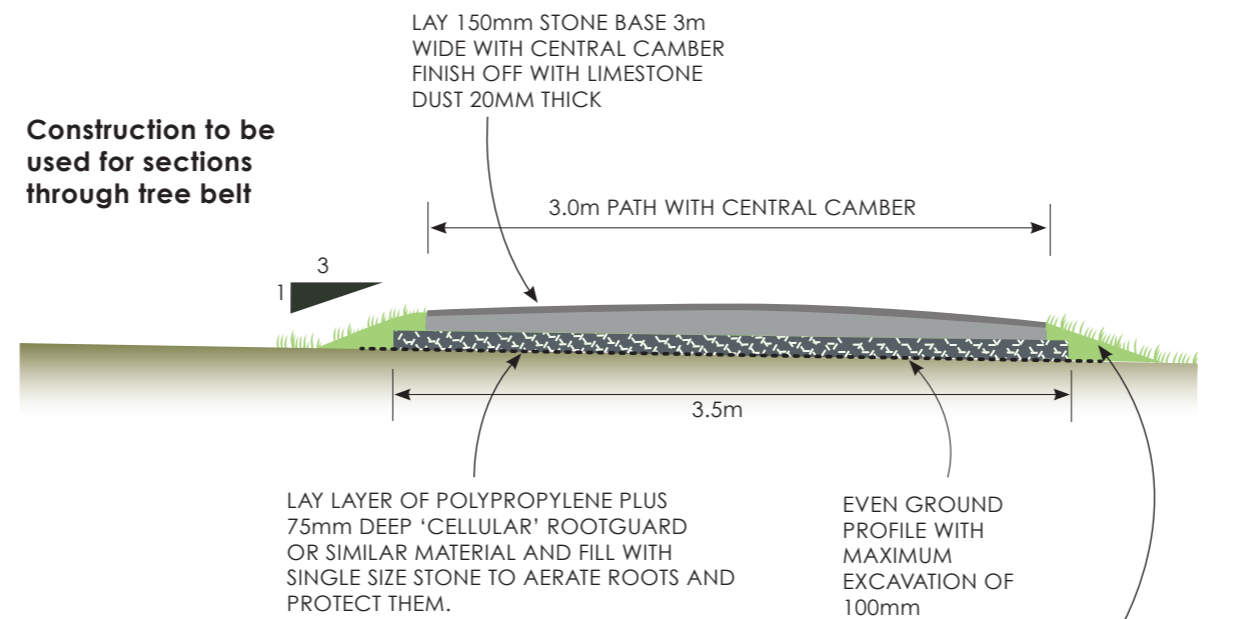
Path construction details

The 2010 proposals were rather urban in nature with extensive use of concrete and timber kerb edges. We propose to support the edges of the path by means of a wider stone base, rather than kerbs. This will have the double advantage of providing a visually less formal path edge, and giving support to occasional heavy vehicles which might otherwise damage any kerbs.

Where necessary, past selected trees and other sensitive areas, the path will be constructed without excavation, so its arrangement would be slightly different as shown below. These 'no dig' sections could either utilise a tree root mesh, or not, depending on the circumstances.



"Toptrek" type surface on Brean Down Way



NOTE: FOR BOTH SECTIONS - SOME ADDITIONAL THICKNESS OF STONE MAY BE REQUIRED AT ESTATE VEHICLE CROSSING LOCATIONS

MAKE UP SHOULDERS TO BE FLUSH WITH PATH SURFACE



limestone dust finish on Brean Down Way and also Forest of Dean through woodlands

Appendix 1: Ecological Report - December 2018

Greenways and Cyclerroutes Limited

Greenways is a local based charity specialising in the promotion, construction and maintenance of dedicated greenways for walkers and cyclists. It is pertinent that during the summer of 2018, Greenways constructed the Waddesdon Greenway which crosses a similar listed historic parkland and wood. This work was done with a significant input from volunteers in a summer work camp. Greenways actively encourages public input to these projects because we believe in the value of local ownership. Indeed, we are already coordinating the maintenance of the historic rose garden at the Mansions.

Construction and works programme

It is proposed that material and plant will be brought into the Council's yard and that access for these to the path will be at point 9 on map section B-C, all keeping well clear of any public highways or motorised traffic. The trees will be thinned and cleared through by the end of February, as part of a woodland management work programme. This will make it easier to assess the route if the Planning Committee wish to do so. The 2009 Tree Survey Report recommended 20-30% thinning which will be sufficient to let the path through.

Drainage and Flood Statement

This project does not cross or affect any water courses, ditches or drains. As the path has no longitudinal fall, all rain water will run off the camber and sink into the ground just to one side of the path or the other.

The path is remote from any flood zone and is expected to remain dry at all times.

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ASHTON COURT PROPOSED CYCLEPATH

ECOLOGICAL REPORT

DECEMBER 2018

ASHTON COURT PROPOSED CYCLEPATH

ECOLOGICAL REPORT

1 INTRODUCTION

This report assesses the potential impacts on biodiversity of a proposed cyclepath running through the edge of the Ashton Court Estate, and makes proposals for mitigation and enhancement as appropriate. A series of surveys, covering the same area, was carried out in order to assess an earlier application and the results of these surveys have also been used to inform this assessment.

The northern part of the route is close to the edge of the Ashton Court Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

2 METHODOLOGY

An extended Phase 1 survey and several protected species surveys have been carried out. The extended Phase 1 survey covered vegetation types and plant species, birds and some groups of insects and was carried out on 17th December 2018. In addition, several Phase 1 surveys covering the same area were carried out in 2009 and 2010; the findings of these surveys have also been used here. The following protected species surveys have been carried out:

Badgers: The site was checked for badger setts and signs of badger activity, including paths, foraging signs, hairs and dung pits, in 2009, 2010 and 2018.

Great crested newt: Two ponds are present close to the route of the proposed cyclepath. Both appear to be former carriage washes. The western pond, in the main grounds of Ashton Court, has very turbid water and a large population of fish. It was therefore judged to be unsuitable for great crested newt. The other pond, however, in the field between the school playing field and The Dovecote public house, was assessed as being potentially suitable for great crested newt. If a population of great crested newt is present here then construction of a path close to the pond would have a potential impact on newts using their terrestrial habitat and would require licensing and mitigation. An amphibian survey of this pond was therefore carried out. It was checked twice on 10th and 26th June 2009 and 10th and 14th May 2010. On each occasion plants were checked for eggs and a search for adults was made, using a powerful torch, after dusk. It was then checked for larvae (efts) on July, 8th, 9th, 12th and 19th. On each occasion the pond was swept with a net and checked after dark with a powerful torch.

Bats: Three activity surveys and an assessment of the potential of trees for roosting bats were carried out in June and July 2010. The potential value of trees for roosting bats was checked in December 2018, using binoculars where necessary.

Habitat potential for protected species was assessed in 2018, in order to determine whether the 2010 surveys remain valid.

A data search was carried out at Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre (BRERC), who provided information on protected and notable species and designated sites within 500 metres of the route.

3 SURVEY RESULTS

3.1 Site Description

The northern end of the proposed cyclepath leaves the access road to Ashton Court Mansion just west of the University of West of England building and runs through mown grassland within the university property. It then follows a former track underneath the canopy of trees in an adjacent wooded bely, before running through a belt of treeplanting. The southern end of the route runs through grassland.

3.2 Vegetation

Species lists for the various areas described below are attached as an appendix.

1 The section within the university property passes through mown amenity grassland. This is dominated by perennial rye-grass (*Lolium perenne*) with herb species including white clover (*Trifolium repens*) and common daisy (*Bellis perennis*). To the east of the route there is a line of mature trees, which include poplar (*Populus cultivar*), sallow (*Salix x reichardtii*), Swedish whitebeam (*Sorbus intermedia*), holm oak (*Quercus ilex*) and sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*). To the west there is a laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*) hedge with tree saplings including ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and holm oak.

2 At the northern end of this area the path passes under the canopy of a mature holm oak tree. The ground flora here is dominated by ivy (*Hedera helix*). To the south the route passes in part under the canopy of a line of sycamore trees. The ground flora under these trees is dominated by ivy with other species including cow parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*) and wood dock (*Rumex sanguineus*). The area also includes small patches of bramble (*Rubus fruticosus agg*), and there are scattered saplings of English elm (*Ulmus procera*), hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*).

3 The tree planting belt has mixed immature trees, which include beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*), ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*). The understorey is generally sparse, but there are locally dense patches of laurel, bramble and holly (*Ilex aquifolium*). The ground flora is overwhelmingly dominated by ivy throughout much of the area, but in places it is slightly more diverse with additional species including wood false-brome (*Brachypodium sylvaticum*), wood avens (*Geum urbanum*) and tutsan (*Hypericum androsaemum*).

4 The grassland at the southern end of the route is mown occasionally. Grass species here include perennial rye-grass, creeping bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*) and timothy (*Phleum pratense*). Herb species are not diverse here but include white clover (*Trifolium repens*), red clover (*Trifolium pratense*), lesser trefoil (*Trifolium dubium*), and ribwort plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*).

3.3 Birds

The following species were recorded:

Area 1: Blackbird, jay and wren (2009/10); blue tit, great tit, goldcrest, song thrush, redwing and robin (2018).

Area 2: Blackbird, blue tit, wren and woodpigeon (2018).

Area 3: Blackbird, blue tit, great spotted woodpecker and jackdaw (2009/10); blackbird, blue tit, great tit, long-tailed tit and song thrush (2018).

Species recorded in veteran trees to west of route included: Green woodpecker, stock dove and jackdaw (2009/10); and sparrowhawk, kestrel and mistle thrush (2018).

3.4 Insects

The following species were recorded:

Area 1: *Acrocerops brongniardella* moth (2018).

Area 2: *Stigmella lemniscella*, *Stigmella aurella*, *Stigmella splendidissima* and *Coptotriche marginata* moths; and *Cerodontha iridis* fly (2018).

Area 3: *Stigmella aurella* and *Acrocerops brongniardella* moths; and *Phytomyza ilicis* fly (2018).

Grassland adjacent to area 3: meadow brown butterfly; and *Celypha lacunana*, small magpie and snout moths (2009/10).

Area 4: *Crambus lathoniellus* moth (2009/10).

3.5 Amphibians

Torching

In the pod to the east of the route on 19th July 2009 one male smooth newt was recorded and at least one female newt (given the size this was most probably smooth) was also recorded. On 14th May 2010 five male and two female smooth newts were recorded. No amphibians were recorded whilst torching during the other visits.

On all occasions many hundreds of small fish, all believed to be minnows (*Phoxinus phoxinus*) were observed in the water column.

Netting

On 12th July 2009 two newt efts of one of the smaller newt species (palmate or smooth) were caught as well as an adult male and an adult female smooth newt. No newts were caught on any other night.

On all occasions many small fish (believed to be minnows) were caught in the net and immediately released once the net had been checked for newts.

BRERC hold records of great crested newt from ponds in the surrounding area, but the most recent of these date to 1996.

3.6 Badgers

Badger paths and foraging signs were seen at several points along the route. No sett was seen either on the route or within thirty metres of the route.

3.7 Bats

The 2010 surveys found that large numbers of pipistrelle and leisler's bats forage and commute along the route, and several other species were recorded. No evidence of any bat roost was found.

4 ASSESSMENT

The nature conservation value of the site has been assessed to determine whether it is of nature conservation value in a national, regional or city-wide context, of either high or low value in a local context, or is of minimal nature conservation value. The assessment has been made using standard ecological criteria, such as size, diversity, rarity and fragility. Reference has been made to suitable guidance, including the UK, North Somerset and Bristol Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs). The value of the site for groups not surveyed, such as most invertebrates, has been assessed using information gathered on the nature and structure of the habitats present.

The 2018 survey was carried out very late in the year, and it is inevitable that some species have been missed. This has been taken into account in carrying out the assessment.

The habitats along and adjacent to the route have changed little since 2010, and there is nothing to suggest that there has been any change in their nature conservation value.

4.1 Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

The key feature of nature conservation importance in the area is the population of veteran trees, which support invertebrate populations of national importance and for which the SSSI has been notified. No such trees lie on the route of the proposed path, and the closest the path comes to any such tree is at the northern end of the route: the path here would be eleven metres from the outer edge of the canopy of a veteran oak, and 23 metres from the trunk.

4.2 Habitats

Ashton Court Estate also has significant areas of unimproved grassland, which support large populations of plants that have become uncommon due to agricultural intensification. None of the grasslands through which the route passes support populations of such plants and all appear to have been agriculturally improved in the past. Regular management of the grasslands means that they lack any features indicative of potential value for invertebrates. Grasslands of this type are frequent throughout lowland Britain and are readily recreatable.

The grasslands surveyed are of minimal nature conservation value.

The woodland through which the route runs is of relatively recent origin. The trees here are all young, and the ground flora lacks any species indicative of ecological continuity. The species recorded are generally common and widespread, but tutsan is uncommon in the Bristol area. The woodland strip provides habitat for birds and other wildlife. It also contributes to ecological continuity by providing a link between habitats on the southern edge of the Estate and those to the north around the

University site. It does not, however, form part of any link to the more significant woodlands to the north-west.

The woodland strip is of low nature conservation value in a local context.

The pond to the west of the route has been damaged by the introduction of fish and is not currently of nature conservation value. The pond in the field to the north of the Dovecote public house is of greater value. It supports populations of native wetland plants and is probably of some value for invertebrates. It also supports a population of smooth newt, but the surveys carried out suggest that it does not support great crested newt.

The pond in the field to the north of The Dovecote public house is of high nature conservation value in a local context.

4.3 Protected and Section 41 Species

There are no buildings or other structures on or adjacent to the route that could support bat roosts. The trees that would be affected are all immature and lack any hole, crevice or dense growth of ivy that could be used by roosting bats. The 2010 surveys found no evidence of roosting bats in the area.

The grasslands through which the route passes are not diverse and are mown rather than grazed by animals. The grasslands are not of significant value for foraging bats.

The belt of trees and hedge, with associated tall herb and grassland vegetation, along which the path would run forms an almost continuous corridor through an otherwise open area. It is used by large numbers of bats as a commuting route and foraging habitat and is of significant importance for several bat species.

There is no evidence of great crested newt in the surrounding area.

The route is unsuitable for reptiles: the grasslands are all mown, and the wooded habitats are heavily shaded. There are records of grass snake and slow worm in the surrounding area, but there are no habitats suitable for either species adjacent to the route.

The habitats at areas 2 and 3 are potentially suitable for hedgehog and common toad, both of which have been recorded in the surrounding area.

The only Section 41 species to have been recorded along the route of the path are bats and widespread species of bird such as song thrush. The wooded strip is also likely to be used by moth species that have been included in Section 41 due to steep population declines, although they remain widespread. The site does not have any features that suggest that it is of significance for such species in any wider context.

5 IMPACTS

5.1 Habitats

The potential impacts of the current proposal are significantly lower than those of the scheme submitted in 2010. In particular, that scheme passed within four metres of a

veteran tree that forms part of the designated feature of the SSSI. Mitigation measures to prevent damage to this tree were therefore required as part of that scheme. The current route is at its closest eleven metres from any veteran tree and is in a separate land parcel. The potential for impacts on the SSSI is therefore significantly reduced, although mitigation measures are still proposed.

The grassland that would be affected, at areas 1 and 2, is species-poor and is of minimal nature conservation value. There would not be any significant adverse impact as a result of the small scale loss of grassland that is proposed.

The woodland that would be affected is of low nature conservation value in a local context. Both areas 2 and 3 would remain largely intact. At area 2 there would be some loss of the ivy-dominated ground flora and small numbers of tree and bush saplings would also be lost. Some overhanging tree branches would be trimmed back. At area 3 there would be some thinning of immature trees and loss of patches of understorey. There would be a minor adverse impact as a result of these changes.

5.2 Protected Species

No potential bat roost would be affected as a result of these proposals.

No lighting is proposed.

The proposals have been modified since 2010 and the foraging habitat provided by grassland and tall herb vegetation along the hedge and belt of trees identified then is avoided in the current proposals.

The bat commuting route provided by the wooded belt would remain, since the proposed clearance is minor and continuous strips of woodland would remain to either side of the path. Clearance of a corridor for the path through the woodland may enhance foraging habitat for bats by creating an open sheltered belt within the woodland.

No badger sett would be affected by the proposals. The area of foraging habitat that would be affected is minor compared to the quantity that would remain in the surrounding area. Mitigation would be required to prevent impacts on badgers during construction.

Areas 2 and 3 may be used by species such as common toad and hedgehog, and measures to prevent impacts on these species would be required.

No great crested newts were recorded in the pond adjacent to the route and a licence to construct the path nearby would not be required. However, there would be a potential effect on smooth newts using the pond. This would not be illegal, but it would have a minor adverse impact.

6 MITIGATION

In order to prevent impacts on the SSSI, in particular on veteran oak trees, vehicles and contractors will not be allowed to enter the Ashton Court Estate, which is protected from the working corridor by a robust fence. No storage or disposal of materials, or similar activities, would be allowed within the Estate. Contractors and

volunteers working on the scheme would be briefed on the importance of protecting veteran trees and other features of importance within the estate.

These measures would prevent any adverse impact on the features of nature conservation interest for which the SSSI is notified.

Impacts on grassland could be minimised by keeping the working corridor as narrow as possible. Where soil adjacent to the path is disturbed then it should be restored by creating a surface of subsoil mixed with topsoil, in order to create a nutrient-poor substrate. This should be sown with red fescue and natural colonisation by herbs should be allowed.

Plants of tutsan in area 3 would be identified by an ecologist before works commence, and would be protected from loss during construction.

In the section adjacent to the pond to the north of The Dovecote public house a destructive search for smooth newt would be carried out. This would involve an ecologist being present as the initial soil strip and excavations are carried out so that any smooth newts, or other amphibians, could be removed safely as follows:

i) An ecologist will be present during any topsoil stripping carried out within 100m of the pond. The ecologist will directly supervise removal of soil and if newts or other amphibians are found works will pause temporarily so that the animals can be safely removed. Hand excavation of the area immediately around the location that animals are found might be necessary.

ii) The ecologist will assess the need for supervision of any further excavation within this area. For instance, if areas of rubble or limestone bands within clay are present then supervision would be required.

iii) The treatment of animals found during the operations will depend on weather conditions at the time. If conditions are unsuitable for amphibian activity then the newts (or other amphibians) will be stored in a cool, dry, dark place on an inert substrate and protected from predators. They will then be released to the pond once weather conditions are suitable. If weather conditions are suitable for amphibian activity when the animals are found then they will be released directly to the pond.

iv) The surveys found no great crested newts. However, if any are found then works will cease whilst a licence application is made and suitable mitigation measures are agreed.

v) A brief report will be submitted to the planning authority, reporting on the outcome of the destructive search.

Areas 2 and 3 would be checked by an ecologist for common toad and hedgehog immediately before works commence, and any animals found would be safely removed to suitable habitat nearby.

Badger signs have recently been seen in the area. A check for badger setts will be made before works commence and if a sett is found within thirty metres of the

working area a mitigation strategy will be drawn up. In order to prevent badgers from becoming trapped, any excavations left open overnight will be either covered or provided with an exit ramp.

In order to avoid the destruction of occupied birds' nests woody vegetation, including bramble and ivy, will be removed between 1st September and 28th February. Where this is not possible the area will be checked by an ecologist before vegetation clearance commences. If active nests are found then works will cease in the area (as defined by the ecologist) until a further check has shown it to be clear of active nests.

7 ENHANCEMENT

The scope for biodiversity works at Ashton Court is constrained by the over-riding need to maintain and enhance the site's historic landscape, as laid out in the Ashton Court Estate Management Plan. The requirements of the plan limit the scope for works such as tree planting. However, there are measures that can be undertaken.

7.1 Grassland Enhancement

Sowing of yellow rattle seed aids grassland diversification because the plant is a hemi-parasite of grasses, and by weakening the vigour of grass growth it allows other species to become established in a grassland sward. Sowing of yellow rattle at Ashton Court has been successful and there is scope for further use of this species.

Sow 2kg of yellow rattle seed into the grassland adjacent to the cycle way in September, at a rate of 4g per m². Prepare the area to be sown by harrowing.

7.2 Tree Planting

Re-inforce the line of limes on the southern edge of the estate to the west of the southern end of the cycleway, along the B3128 boundary, with six lime (*Tilia x vulgaris*) trees.

All trees are to be heavy duty standards. Any tree dying within the first five years following planting should be replaced with the same species.

7.3 Bat Enhancement

Fit the following bat boxes at suitable locations, to be agreed with Estate managers:

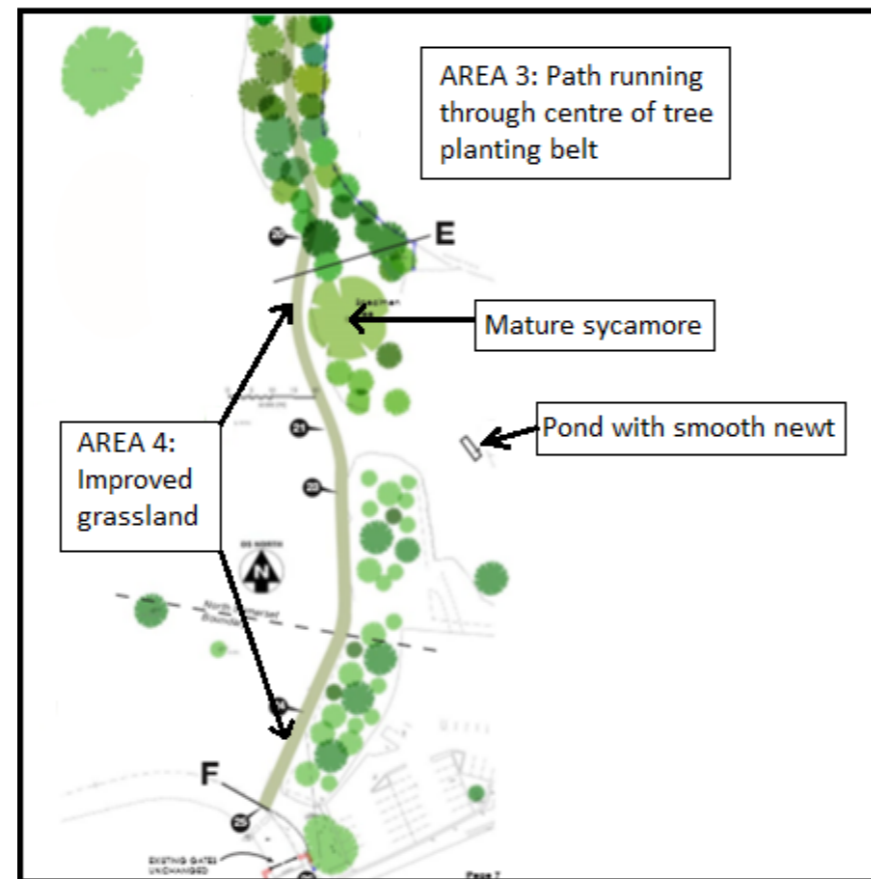
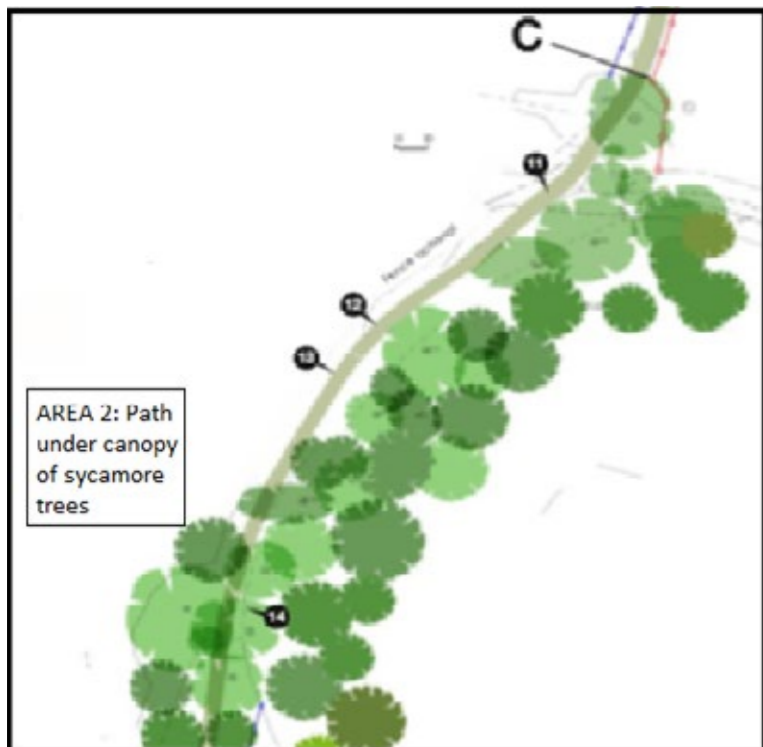
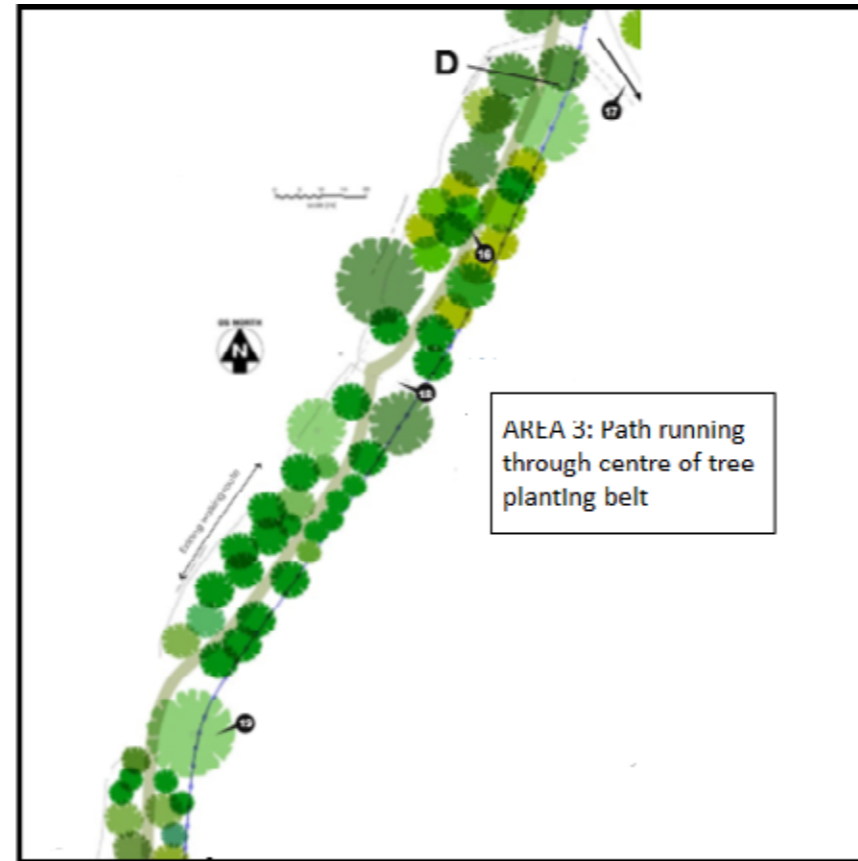
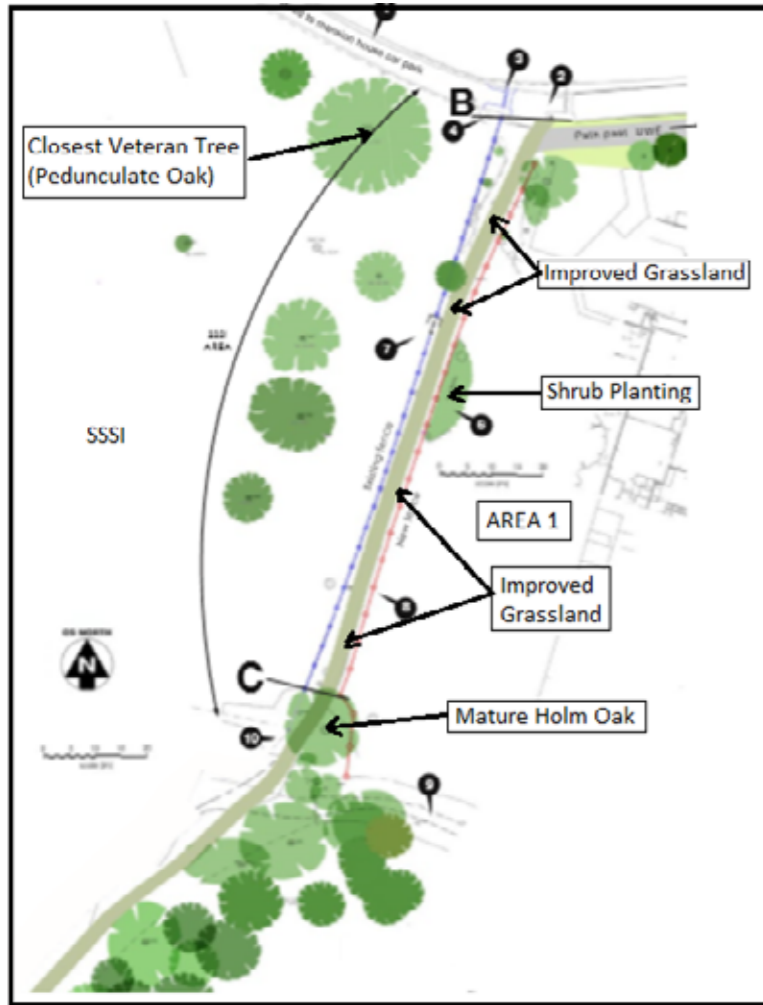
Schwegler 2F	6
Schwegler 2F-DFP	2
Schwegler 2FN	2

A check should be made every year for the first five years after fitting that the boxes are still in position, and missing boxes should be replaced.

Rupert Higgins

Wessex Ecological Consultancy

18th December 2018



APPENDIX 1: PLANT SPECIES LISTS

		Grassland Areas	
		1	4
Grasses			
<i>Agrostis stolonifera</i>	Creeping bent	RLF	RLF
<i>Arrhenatherum elatius</i>	False oat-grass		OLF
<i>Cynosurus cristatus</i>	Crested dogstail	R	O
<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>	Cocksfoot	R	O
<i>Festuca rubra</i>	Red fescue	RLF	RLF
<i>Holcus lanatus</i>	Yorkshire fog	R	RLF
<i>Lolium perenne</i>	Perennial rye-grass	F	OLF
<i>Phleum pratense</i>	Timothy		R
<i>Poa trivialis</i>	Rough-stalked meadow grass	R	R
Herbs			
<i>Bellis perennis</i>	Common daisy	OLF	
<i>Cerastium fontanum</i>	Common mouse-ear		R
<i>Crepis capillaris</i>	Smooth hawkbeard		
<i>Ficaria verna</i>	Lesser celandine		R
<i>Geranium dissectum</i>	Cut-leaved cranesbill		O
<i>Potentilla reptans</i>	Creeping cinquefoil		
<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>	Ribwort plantain		R
<i>Plantago major</i>	Ratstail plantain		R
<i>Ranunculus acris</i>	Meadow buttercup		R
<i>Ranunculus bulbosus</i>	Bulbous buttercup		R
<i>Ranunculus repens</i>	Creeping buttercup	RLF	F
<i>Rumex acetosa</i>	Common sorrel	R	R
<i>Rumex obtusifolius</i>	Broad-leaved dock		R
<i>Taraxacum vulgare</i> agg	Dandelion	R	R
<i>Trifolium dubium</i>	Lesser trefoil		R
<i>Trifolium pratense</i>	Red clover		R
<i>Trifolium repens</i>	White clover	O	O
Mosses			
<i>Calliergonella cuspidata</i>		OLF	

		Grassland Areas	
		2	3
Trees and Shrubs			
<i>Acer campestre</i>	Field maple		R
<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	Sycamore	O	O
<i>Castanea sativa</i>	Sweet chestnut		O
<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	Hawthorn	R	R
<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>	Beech		O
<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>	Ash		R
<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>	Holly		RLF
<i>Ligustrum vulgare</i>	Wild privet		R
<i>Pinus sylvestris</i>	Scots pine		R
<i>Prunus avium</i>	Wild cherry		R
<i>Prunus laurocerasus</i>	Cherry laurel	R	RLF
<i>Prunus lusitanica</i>	Portuguese laurel		R
<i>Prunus spinosa</i>	Blackthorn		R
<i>Quercus ilex</i>	Holm oak		RLF
<i>Quercus robur</i>	Pedunculate oak		R
<i>Rubus fruticosus</i> agg	Bramble		R
<i>Sambucus nigra</i>	Elder	R	R
<i>Taxus baccata</i>	Yew		R
<i>Ulmus procera</i>	English elm	R	R
Ground Flora			
<i>Anthriscus sylvestris</i>	Cow parsley	O	R
<i>Brachythecium sylvaticum</i>	Wood false-brome		RLF
<i>Carex pendula</i>	Pendulous sedge		R
<i>Dryopteris filix-mas</i>	Male fern		R
<i>Galium aparine</i>	Goosegrass	R	R
<i>Geum urbanum</i>	Wood avens	R	R
<i>Hedera helix</i>	Ivy	ALD	ALD
<i>Heracleum sphondylium</i>	Hogweed	R	
<i>Hypericum androsaemum</i>	Tutsan		R
<i>Iris foetidissima</i>	Stinking iris	R	
<i>Phyllitis scolopendrium</i>	Hart's-tongue fern		R
<i>Poa trivialis</i>	Rough-stalked meadow grass		R
<i>Rumex sanguineus</i>	Wood dock	R	R
<i>Taraxacum vulgare</i> agg	Dandelion		R
<i>Urtica dioica</i>	Stinging nettle		RLF
<i>Brachythecium rutabulum</i>	Moss		R

Appendix 2: Woodland Management Plan

The Ashton Court Missing Link will create a woodland path which will require some initial tree clearance and then ongoing management. Two sections of the path run within existing woodlands.

Section CD runs around the eaves of the 'Woodlands', approximately on the line of the original farm track. These woodlands were planted to screen the home farm from the Mansion. The work involved now will be to trim away any branches which cross the line of the path lower than 2.5m (Note that higher branches which then droop down beyond the line of the path will be left). The ramshackle boundary fence will be cleared away and any dead bushes or laurels also taken away.

Section DE, some 260m long runs through a strip planted in the 70's to act as a screen to hide the playing fields from the Mansion's view. This strip has the negative consequence of foreshortening the view down from the Mansion across to the boundary of the historic landscape at the wall beside Ashton Road.

This woodlands strip is 15-20m wide and has not been managed, since it was planted. It has many straggly trees and saplings, particularly towards its centre where they have been crowded out. The arboricologist's report from 2010 recommended that 20% -30% of the trees should be thinned but nothing was done at that time.

Our plans for this woodland are to thin out the trees, particularly to make space for the path, and to allow selected trees to prosper, and gradually open up some carefully selected glades to create open views for the Mansion to be able to glimpse the green grass of the playing fields beyond.

Year 1: February

The initial work will be to thin the trees in the woodland strip to make space for the remaining trees to flourish, and to make space for a future path. The timber and brashings will be piled up in the rest of the woodland to make wildlife habitats, or removed. At this stage no work will be done to the boundaries of the woodland strip, either on the Smyth Field side, or the playing field side.

Year 1: Summer

Over this period, we will construct the stone path, provided planning is consented.

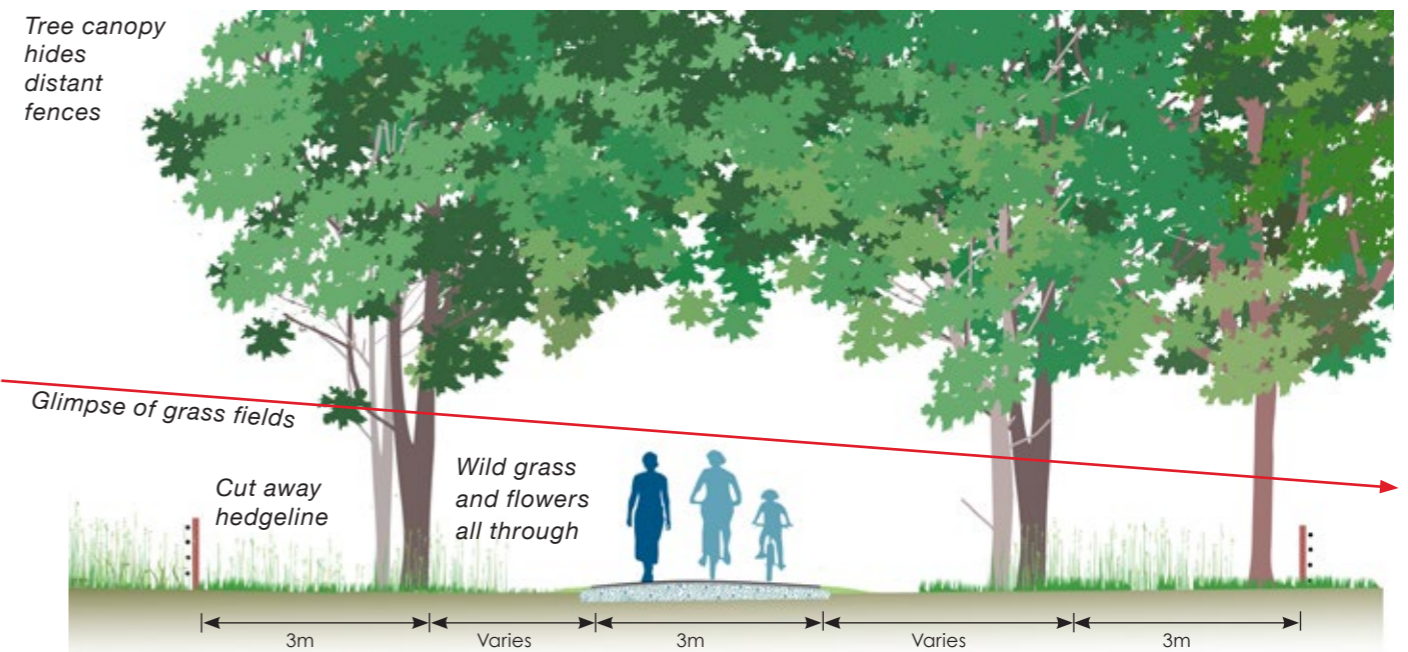
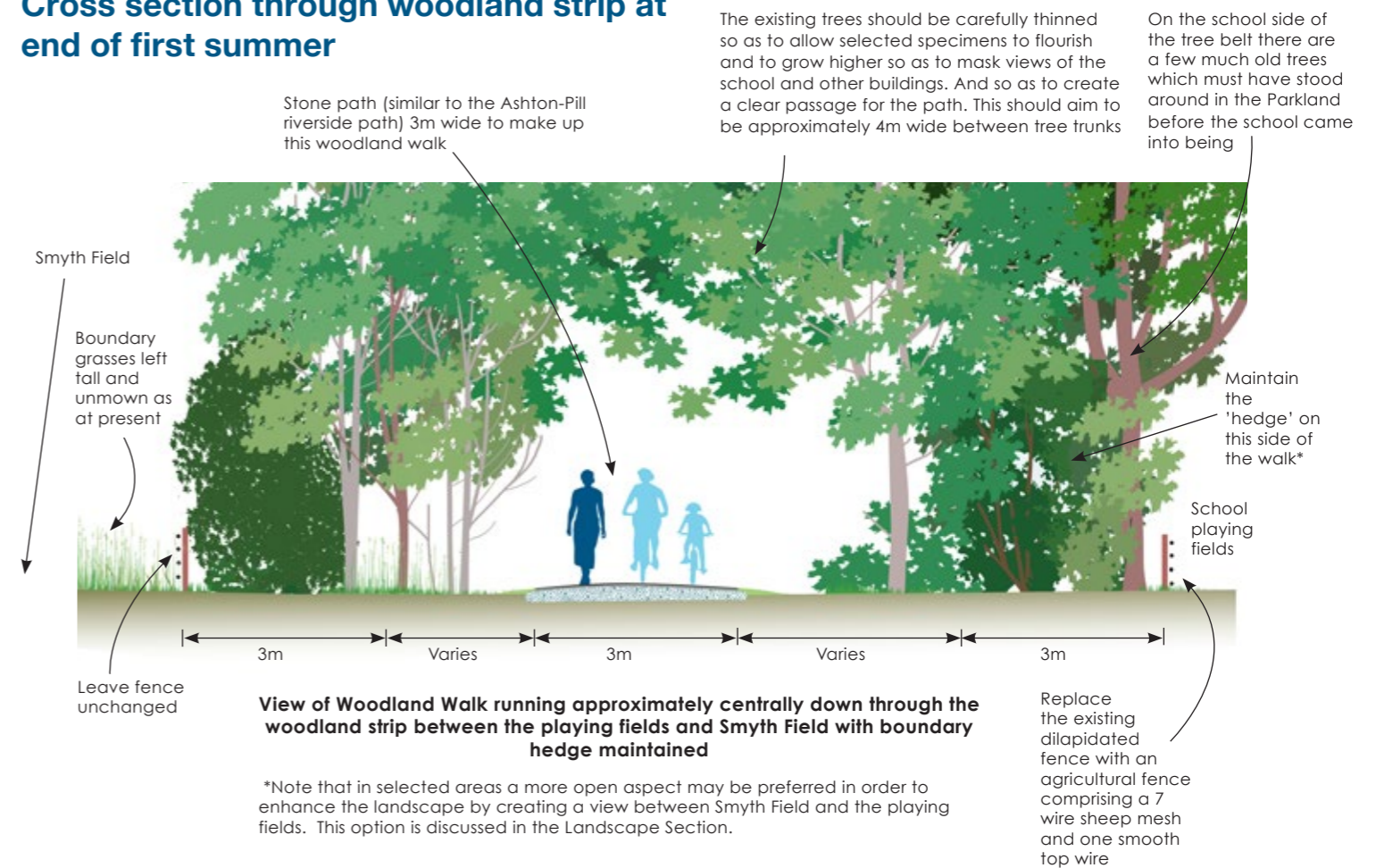
This will give us the opportunity to walk up and down the woodland strip to work out where best one could create openings for views.

Year 1: Autumn

The first opening will be cut through to give a view from the Mansion. The exact location and width of this will be agreed with the Parks Department who will inspect the options before work starts.

The intention will be to completely clear through at ground level and encourage a grass to grow, but to maintain a high-level canopy so as to block out the security fence around the school fields and other jarring details from the view from the Mansion.

Cross section through woodland strip at end of first summer



Section showing the way through a cleared glade

Year 2: Spring

The whole woodland walk section will be inspected on an annual basis for any branches which might fall and these will be removed if they are a danger to the public.

Year 2: Summer

Mow through the glade to maintain the view from the Mansion., also mow the path verges. And at this time agree with the Parks Department and Historic England if there is any structural tree planting which should be done so as to plan for gradually evolving this woodland strip into a series of copses each blocking out selected items but allow views of the grass either side.

At the same time, we will agree one or two more openings or glades to be cut out in the autumn of year 2.



Possible seat set in open glade, (from the Waddesdon Greenway Summer 2018)

Year 2: Autumn

Cut out a further one or two glades for views from the Mansion. Following this the Parks Director and Historic England may decide on whole sale removal of the boundary hedging so as to give a wider view through to the playing fields. If this is the case Greenways will remove whatever lengths are decided.

As part of this gradual opening up of views, the Parks Department and Historic England may decide that they wish to further manage the views from the Mansion by reinforcing one or two selected trees in Smyth Field with additional planting to create small copses to recreate the atmosphere originally intended when the park was laid out.

This may be an ongoing programme and Greenways will plant up these copses as and when it is decided where they are required.

Year 3 onwards

Greenways will continue to manage and maintain the Missing Link path, its immediate verges and the associated woodlands. We will endeavour to respond to evolving requirements but anticipate that this will be a gradual process, rather than a major work in any one year.

Appendix 3: Letter from Historic England



SOUTH WEST OFFICE

Mr John Grimshaw
Greenways and cyclerooutes Ltd
The Wool Hall
St Thomas Street
Bristol
BS1 6JJ

Direct Dial: 0117 975 0717

Our ref: PA00926861

13 December 2018

Dear Mr Grimshaw

Pre-application Advice

ASHTON COURT ESTATE, LONG ASHTON, BRISTOL, BS41 9JN

I write further to our meeting of 7 December where we discussed the proposed cycle path at Ashton Court. Historic England, and its predecessor English Heritage, have had long involvement in discussions for a cycle path at this location. We recognise the practical advantages of the route, chief amongst which is separating cyclists from the vehicular traffic on the steep hill that provides access to the mansion car park.

The proposed cycle path would run within, and along the edge of, the planting at the foot of the lawns to the South of the mansion. The vegetation here is a mixture of historic, established to screen the Parklands Farm complex from the mansion, and more recent planting forming a boundary between the parkland and the playing fields of Ashton Court School.

In previous discussions about a cycle path at this location, we have expressed strong reservations. A letter of June 2010 summarises our views on the previous proposals - *"We believe that the introduction of a 3 metre wide, raised Macadam surface, with additional land-take on either side, together with boundary fencing to enclose the whole, is unacceptable in such close proximity to the house. There is no existing historic route or desire line in this location and the route will act as a distraction in intended views from the principal front of the building to the wider or 'borrowed' landscape. Moreover, based on past experience we consider it only a matter of time before further applications are received in respect of signage and lighting, further undermining the historical and aesthetic values that underpin Ashton Court's significance."*

There are some fundamental differences between the current proposals and those suggested in 2010. The path will not be tarmac'd, will not be fenced, and will not be lit. It would limestone-dust-surfaced, and would start within land controlled by the University of the West of England, where a series of improvements are proposed to reduce the institutional character of the campus landscaping, until the historic

Parklands Farm tree-belt. From here it would utilise the formation of a historic farm access road, which as we noted on our site visit remains in place beneath layers of soil and dirt. The scruffy post-and-wire fencing adjacent to the tree-belt would be removed to facilitate a softer transition between park and woodland.

At the more recent linear woodland planting which separates the parkland from the playing fields, the cycle path would run through the middle of the woodland. It is suggested that construction of the path would be accompanied by a sustained programme of woodland management, which would carefully enhance "borrowed" views through from the parkland to the playing fields - former parkland itself, of course - without revealing any of the sports equipment. In some areas trees may be removed, in others the understorey thinned to allow grass to run through, visually uniting the parkland and playing fields. Improved tree management also potentially offers the opportunity to visually reunite the Ashton Gatehouse with the park, through opening up managed glimpses of its castellated upper levels.

It is extremely important that the proposed cycle path does not reinforce the artificial linear margin created between the playing fields and the parkland, but instead seeks to soften this boundary through careful landscaping.

It is likely that the proposed cycle path would result in a degree of harm to the setting of the Grade I listed mansion and Grade II* registered park. Although it is now suggested the path will be a naturalistic and recessive feature interwoven with the woodland, it is nevertheless likely to be visible in places and could reinforce the unfortunate linear boundary between the park and the playing fields. However, we acknowledge that this visual impact is likely to be minor (if accompanied by the suggested regime improvements to woodland management) and in town planning terms could be balanced against the benefits offered by the proposals.

If a planning application were submitted, we would recommend it is accompanied by a woodland management plan. Our landscape architect would be happy to attend selected working parties to discuss final alignment and laying out of the route.

Yours sincerely

Simon Hickman

Principal Inspector of Historic Buildings and Areas

E-mail: simon.hickman@HistoricEngland.org.uk



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