



Report to Aylesbury Community Board

Date: 9th March 2021
Title: Southcourt Emergency Active Travel Scheme
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1. Background

1.1 In May 2020, Transport Secretary Grant Shapps announced a £2 billion investment for walking and cycling. An initial £250 million was made available to local authorities, as part of an emergency active travel fund.

The initial weeks of the pandemic saw an increase in walking and cycling, and the fund was launched to support this and to help local authorities make it easier for people to use these methods. They encouraged local authorities to look at reducing “rat-running” whilst maintaining vehicle access, to introduce cycle segregation and other initiatives to encourage walking and cycling.¹

1.2 Buckinghamshire Council applied for funding and received £513,943² in phase 1 (Tranche 1) of the Government’s investment. This was for schemes across Buckinghamshire. Over 100 potential schemes were initially identified, before schemes were shortlisted and discussions commenced with local members and other relevant local stakeholders to progress.

1.3 One of the locations identified was Southcourt, in Aylesbury. This location was identified following the closure of the Old Stoke Road railway crossing (severing the Jet Way, one of the town’s gemstone routes, used to connect to the town centre and encourage cycling). It was also identified using the Department for Transport’s

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/2-billion-package-to-create-new-era-for-cycling-and-walking>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/emergency-active-travel-fund-local-transport-authority-allocations/emergency-active-travel-fund-total-indicative-allocations>

Propensity to Cycle tool, with potential to increase walking and cycling particularly with local schools.

- 1.4 This report is written in response to a petition sent to the Cabinet Member for Transport, received on 27th November 2020. The petition states, "This is a petition about moving the planters and bollards, also the ones near Stoke Mandeville School that people have signed." It contained 643 signatures, the understanding is these signatures were collected via door to door visits undertaken in October and November 2020 by a local resident across both Southcourt and a wider area. The petition and this accompanying report are being presented to the first Aylesbury Community Board following receipt.

2. Main content of report

- 2.1 The trial in Southcourt was introduced to create quieter streets to promote walking and cycling, when accessing shops and facilities, whilst also improving access between the town centre, Southcourt and Stoke Mandeville Hospital. The scheme includes improved cycle route signage and lining, installation of cycle lane segregation and temporary road closures. It provides improved links to some of the existing Gemstone Routes, and a diverted routing to overcome the existing severed Jet Way.

A temporary cycle route connects into the existing Pebble Way and Pearl Way at the Churchill Avenue/ Prebendal Avenue Roundabout by converting pavements to shared footway/cycleways. Cycle directional signage and lining has been refreshed in this area.

Temporary point closures using decorative planters have been installed at the following locations to create quiet routes for cycling and walking:

- Chalgrove Walk near the junction with Churchill Avenue
- Chaloner Road near the junction with Carrington Road
- Thrasher Road near the junction with Carrington Road
- Thrasher Road near the junction with Cottesloe Road
- Old Stoke Road near the junction with Clover Lane

In each location, the full length of the road has remained open, facilitating resident access, but vehicular access is only possible from one side of the road. At each location, a "no through road" sign has been installed on local infrastructure (such as lampposts) and networks updated for mobile satellite navigation systems, to notify of point closures.

Following the above, the cycle route continues on to Cottesloe Road to connect to the existing Jet Way Gemstone route and onto Churchill Avenue. The existing Jet Way continues along Old Stoke Road, Nightingale Road and Penn Road towards the town centre.

Once the cycle route re-joins Churchill Avenue, a segregated cycleway using temporary pop up wands is provided for south eastbound cyclists, and the existing footway is as a shared-use path for north westbound cyclists. The route then joins the existing shared-use paths and advisory cycle lanes on Mandeville Road, connecting into Stadium Approach. Onward connections are available along Stadium Approach towards the Amber Way, A413 and Turnfurlong, in addition to the existing route on Harvey Road. A plan of the route is detailed below:

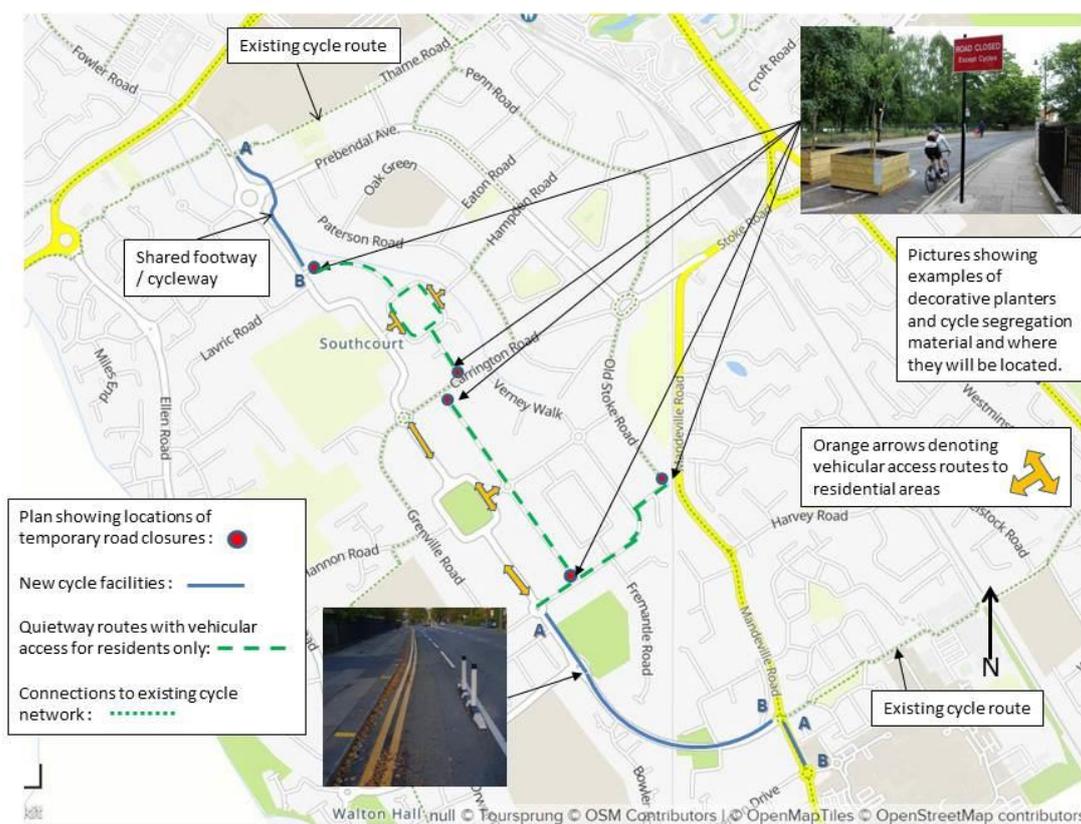


Image 1 – Southcourt scheme plan

2.2 In July 2020, the Department for Transport released “Gear Change, a bold vision for cycling and walking.”³ This focuses on a step-change in walking and cycling in coming years, to transform the role cycling and walking play in our transport system whilst also introducing health benefits. These include:

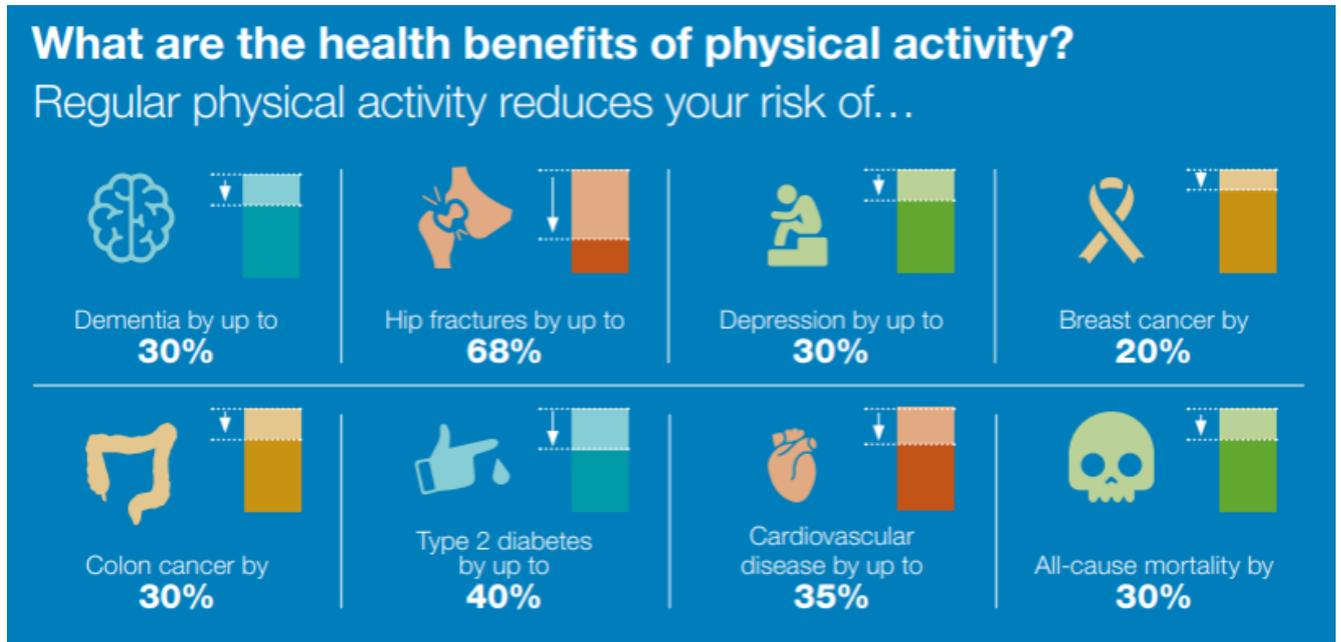


Figure 1: Health Benefits of Physical Activity₃

The segregated cycleway has been introduced in-line with latest Government standards, as detailed in Local Transport Note 1/20.⁴ This includes segregated cycle ways and a move away from shared use paths, due to the potential conflict between pedestrians and cyclists. In the future, the Government will only fund schemes meeting these new standards, through the new inspectorate and funding body, Active Travel England.

2.3 As outlined, Officers worked to identify potential Active Travel schemes across Buckinghamshire, of which Southcourt was one potential scheme identified. Officers met with local Councillors to discuss the potential scheme and feedback was sought on the proposals. Following discussions, it was agreed to progress the Southcourt

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/904146/gear-change-a-bold-vision-for-cycling-and-walking.pdf

⁴

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/951074/cycle-infrastructure-design-ltn-1-20.pdf

scheme. This was supported by Buckinghamshire Council's Active Travel Steering Group, a group formed of Cabinet Members, whose portfolios cover aspects such as transport, logistics, sports and leisure, communities, planning etc.

- 2.4 The scheme was implemented under the Government's Emergency Active Travel Fund which had short, centrally set timescales. There was no requirement for full public consultation and the short timescales provided meant this was not possible. However, engagement was undertaken with local Councillors, the town council, schools, religious organisations, the school transport team and other local parties, such as shops and taxi operators. The emergency services were also consulted as part of the Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders. They did not raise any objection to the scheme and are able to update their routing accordingly in response to changes to public highway. In an emergency, blue light vehicles are not bound by certain traffic regulation orders such as one-way streets.

The potential for an Active Travel scheme in Southcourt was announced via a press release in July 2020⁵. Residents in the vicinity of the scheme in Southcourt received a letter in August 2020⁶ notifying them of the planned scheme and directing feedback via a web link, telephone number and email address. Initial works were delayed by several weeks, and a second letter was dropped to residents in the vicinity of the scheme in October 2020⁷, notifying them of the revised intended programme dates and providing the details for feedback via a web link, telephone number and email address.

Queries and feedback were first received in July 2020, following the press release. This included questions such as would residents be able to park outside their home, would delivery drivers be able to access roads to make deliveries and would visitors be able to get to properties. The answers to these queries were and remain yes, as the full length of the road has remained open, facilitating resident access, but vehicular access is only possible from one side of the road.

- 2.5 On 27th November 2020 the Cabinet Member for Transport received a petition regarding the Emergency Active Travel scheme in Southcourt. The petition states; "This is a petition about moving the planters and bollards, also the ones near Stoke Mandeville School that people have signed."

It contained 643 signatures, the understanding is these signatures were collected via door to door visits undertaken in October and November 2020 by a local resident.

⁵ <https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/news/six-contenders-emergency-active-travel-plan/>

⁶ <https://www.buckscc.gov.uk/media/4516029/walking-and-cycling-schemes-letter-southcourt.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.buckscc.gov.uk/media/4516166/comms-letter-southcourt-october-2020.pdf>

On some of the individual pages, it states, ““this is a petition about the work on Chalgrove Walk.”

The petition was started prior to the scheme being implemented, without the changes being able to be monitored or observed by residents, Officers and others.

Some addresses have been provided along with signatures, and show a mixed area of collection, including Southcourt, Hawkslade and further afield, such as Aylesbury Town Centre. Some signatories have annotated with comments, for example explaining they are a visitor to the area not a resident.

The scheme in Southcourt was introduced for an initial duration of three months. It is a trial, and there is a limit to the extension of Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders (TTROs). For clarity, this means it is not possible for the scheme to be repeatedly extended. As communicated with local residents via letter and via other outlets, such as the Buckinghamshire Council website, if any of the trial aspects of the scheme had support to be made permanent, this would be subject to public consultation.

2.6 As well as receiving the petition, we have also received feedback via our website, emails and through phone calls. Where possible, we have reacted and made changes to the scheme based on feedback received. The changes include:

- Reflective verge protectors installed at various locations due to cars overrunning verges.
- Planters fixed to the road with brackets and screws due to planters being moved.
- Central lines painted on the bridge at Churchill Avenue.
- Additional signage (“Give Cyclists Priority”) installed prior to railway bridge on Churchill Avenue.
- Planters relocated on Chalgrove Walk, and bollards added, due to verge cutting.
- Signage checked and replaced in one location, as it disappeared from the lamp post.

2.7 Whilst the scheme has received mixed feedback, there has been support at each of the point closure locations as well as regarding the scheme overall. Some residents have voiced concerns over being seen to support the scheme, in-case of local community repercussions.

Comments in support of the scheme include:

- Road feels safer and quieter (multiple point closure locations).
- There is less through traffic, the closure is worth the extra driving distance for the quieter road.

- Requests for the scheme to remain and be made permanent (multiple point closure locations), and some requests for it to be extended to other roads.
- A perception of less “anti-social” driving with slower traffic.
- Cyclists have commented they feel safer with bollards separating them from other traffic in the cycle lane/they prefer segregation.

2.8 Although at the time of writing (February 2021) the country is in a national lockdown, many pedestrians and cyclists continue to use the scheme as evidenced by the data collected. This is expected to increase when schools reopen, more people return to offices and the climate becomes a little warmer.

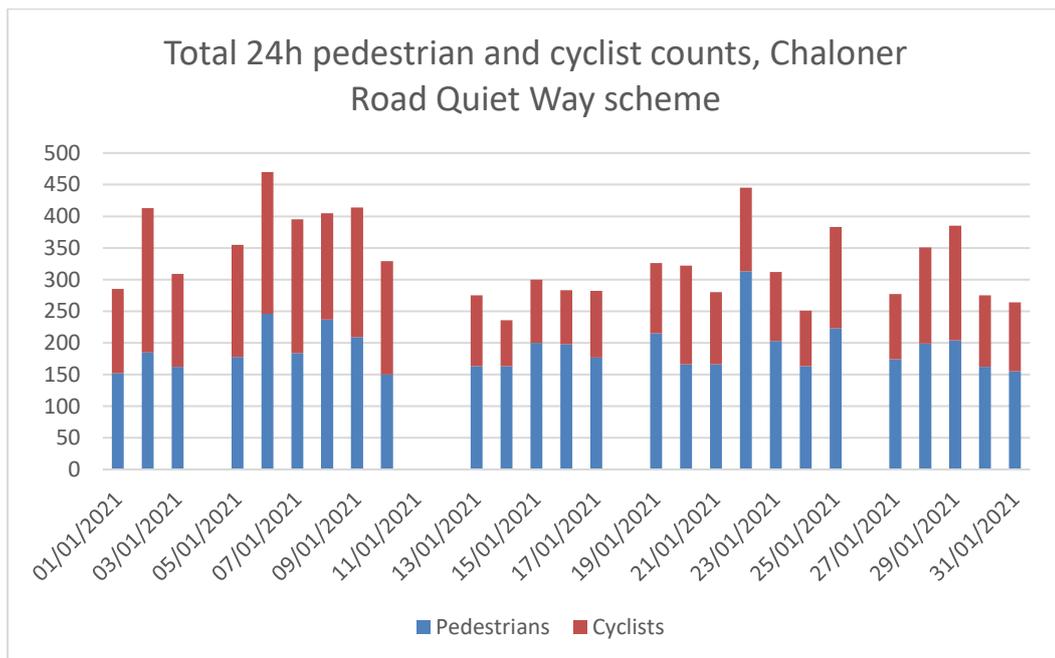


Figure 2: January Pedestrian and Cyclist counts, Chaloner Road

2.9 In February 2021, Officers extended the trial by one month, following discussions with local Councillors and subsequent approval by the Active Travel Steering Group. This was communicated to residents in the vicinity of the scheme. This was requested to take the trial to past the date of Community Board, where the petition is being heard, in line with the democratic process.

3. Next steps and review

3.1 This report has been provided to Aylesbury Community Board for information in response to the petition received.

3.2 The Department for Transport shares best practice is to undertake door to door surveys, to understand public opinion directly and once local residents and

communities have had the opportunity to experience any trial schemes. It is not currently possible to undertake a door to door survey due to the national lockdown.

- 3.3 In the meantime, feedback can still be provided via <https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/parking-roads-and-transport/active-travel/> and also transportstrategy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk All feedback is logged and monitored and used as part of the ongoing evaluation of the scheme.
- 3.4 A meeting is held on a monthly basis, including representatives from Aylesbury Town Council and local Councillors. Feedback from the Aylesbury Community Board meeting on 9th March 2021 will be taken back to this group, and Buckinghamshire Council's Active Travel Steering Group, for their consideration. As previously stated, if any aspects of the scheme were proposed to be made permanent, this would be subject to public consultation.



Appendix 1: images of the scheme



Image 1: Churchill Avenue and Ellen Road junction, including the segregated cycleway



Image 2: Thrasher Road with verge protectors installed



Image 3: Old Stoke Road with verge protectors installed



Image 4: Chalgrove Walk, following relocation of planters and bollard installation

