



27 July 2020

Luke Gibbons
Operations Officer
Highways Operations Sponsor Group
Environment and Infrastructure
Hertfordshire County Council
County Hall
Pegs Lane
Hertford SG13 8DE

Dear Luke,

A41 Northchurch/Berkhamsted Crossing Closures

Berkhamsted Town Council (BTC) approved a motion at its Transport & Environment Committee meeting on the 15 June 2020 to send a detailed response to the HCC Highways public consultation on the A41 Northchurch/Berkhamsted crossing closures.

Comments as follows:

Background

BTC notes that there has been no maintenance of the steps on the footpaths to the A41 roadway and as such these have become treacherous to attempt. The design of these crossings would not be regarded as safe in terms of today's standards. BTC also notes that the A41 traffic flow has increased by over 50% since construction in 1993 and that there have been approximately 50 injury accidents including at least one fatality recorded in this section.

Accordingly, BTC accepts that it is time to close these crossings and find alternative safe means of access between Northchurch/Berkhamsted and its adjacent rural amenities.

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BTC Objections to HCC Notice Content

- BTC does not accept the HCC position that it has no obligation to uphold these historic rights of way (RoW). These RoW are historic amenities and BTC feel that it is disingenuous to now claim that there never was any intention or obligation for these to be maintained. As you acknowledge in your notification, the signage for the last 27 years has clearly implied to the general public that these RoW were continuously upheld via these crossings when the A41 by-pass was constructed. There is also a clear fenced off footpath between crossings 3 and 4 on the attached map which appears to be a formal public right of way although not marked as such on HCC official RoW map. <https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1w0d-ZUuYIK7PYch1hqekxAUXIWE&ll=51.758598905680536%2C-0.5937302564651858&z=16>

- The HCC notice asserts that the crossings at Shootersway bridge and Dennys Lane underpass are both nearby and safe. BTC does not accept these assertions for the following reasons:

As currently constructed, the footpaths from the crossing at 4 up alongside the A41, over Shootersway Bridge and back down to crossing point 4 alongside the A41 (before cutting across the field away from the roadside) is fully 1 ¼ miles. This adds at least an hour of deafening road traffic noise and vehicle air pollution to any recreational walk to and from the beautiful amenity of Marlin Chapel wood and the rural countryside beyond. Currently, unless one is prepared to take their chances with the crossings (and fit/brave people regularly do so despite the obvious risks) this changes a pleasant walk into a disagreeable and lengthy one. Effectively the inadequate provision of safe crossing has cut off the countryside amenity from the vast majority of the residents of West Berkhamsted and closing these crossings permanently reduces accessibility almost completely.

There is road access along Shootersway and Dennys Lane but there are no footpaths between Durrants Lane and Shootersway Bridge nor between Shootersway and Dennys Lane underpass (which by the way is also a deterrent for people wishing to access Hockeridge and Pancake woods).

Over 20% of the population of Berkhamsted is over 65 years old, this being higher than for Hertfordshire and the rest of the UK. Therefore, recreational walkers are likely to be a little slower, hard of hearing, less agile and more nervous than other areas in the county. Therefore, safe and short routes to rural amenities are additionally crucial.

BTC additionally notes the following points that have changed since the by-pass was originally constructed that also mean that safe crossings are of greater value.

- There has been a significant increase in the population of the town around Shootersway. Since construction of the A41 there are the major developments of Bearroc park 1 and 2 (approx. 250

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homes) plus the smaller developments of Hemmings/Balcary Gardens/Blegberry Gardens/Spinney/Hockeridge View and more substantial developments anticipated within the emerging local plan. Thus, the number of residents impacted by the restricted access to the countryside is now that much greater.

BTC Alternative Solutions

There has been a significant reinvigorated interest in recreational rural walking during the current crisis which, as public officials, we ought to try to maintain. The physical and mental benefits of increased walking, especially within our green spaces is well documented. This not only benefits the individuals but provides societal benefits in terms of NHS/Social Care costs etc.

(E.G. <https://www.ramblers.org.uk/-/media/Files/What%20we%20do/factsandfigures-1-benefits-0510.ashx?la=en&hash=2DEAFC36773C2D626A2354A944566F13>)

In response to the climate emergency greater walking and less use of cars is encouraged. The effective cutting off of the rural amenity on the other side of the A41 means that there are more car journeys across Berkhamsted and up to Ashridge to compensate.

The Government has recognised all of the above via numerous official statements and has also provided £2bn of additional funding to help support infrastructure developments for walking and cycling.

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

BTC notes the final point in your email dated 7 May 2020, which states that the Rights of Way team are reviewing alternative routes including forging new rights of way. BTC make the following suggestions:

- A new pedestrian Bridge (or Subway) is constructed at crossing point 4 which creates a four-way link-up between the path from Dennys Lane underpass to the footpath to Marlin Chapel and the footpaths from Shootersway Bridge and the one from opposite Barncroft Road off Shootersway. BTC notes that some residents have received responses from HCC to their calls for a bridge to be created claiming that a simple footbridge would cost “millions of pounds”. The link below relates to a wonderful “green bridge” over the A556 dual-carriageway near Manchester that is at least 20 feet wide at its narrowest point. The construction of this bridge itself is quoted at £890,000 (before the green additions) which presumably is rather more than would be required for a safe crossing over the A41. BTC recognise that a six-figure expense is a significant amount of money but for a long-term asset with considerable community, ancillary financial and environmental benefits does consider this to be unreasonable. Has HCC obtained any provisional quotes for either a bridge or a subway?

<https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/stunning-green-bridge-designed-help-14169472>

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- On the Berkhamsted side of the A41 to reroute the existing footpath from crossing point 4 to Shootersway Bridge (including that between crossing points 3 and 4 which appears not to be acknowledged as a RoW) away from alongside the A41 to run on the opposite side of the fields adjacent to the existing houses and tree line. In the event that these fields do get developed for housing in future then this continues as a “green corridor” as an integral part of that development. Access from Shootersway currently to crossing point 4 would truncate at the point it reaches the new rerouted path (since it would no longer serve any useful purpose to continue to extend to reach a dead end at the A41).
- On the opposite side of the A41 to negotiate with the landowner to reroute the existing footpaths from Shootersway Bridge to crossing point 3 before crossing the field to Marlin Chapel to now run along the opposite side of the fields away from the road. This would slightly reduce the total footpath the landowner has on their land (as well as remove a path through the middle of the field) and also provide a more direct and pleasant access for pedestrians heading to Marlin Chapel.
- Create a new footpath from Dennys Lane to Shootersway to provide safe access to both Hockeridge Wood and the footpath from Dennys Lane to Marlin Chapel.
- Create a new footpath alongside Shootersway itself to run along all the way from the top of Durrants Lane to the Hospice of St Francis entrance, linking up with the existing RoW that continues to the top of Pea Lane and Hamberlins Lane.

These suggestions are marked on the attached map with the new footpaths marked in Green.

Conclusion

These constructive comments have focussed almost entirely upon the needs of Berkhamsted residents. BTC also notes that similar and equally powerful arguments can and should be made in respect of Northchurch residents for the closure of the crossings at 1 and 2. A safe crossing point should be constructed (at crossing point 1) and the footpath extension referred to in point 5 above to link to Shootersway bridge. The benefit of this is so that Northchurch residents would get safe and efficient access to Marlin Chapel/Hockeridge Wood but also Berkhamsted residents get safe access for longer walks out to the lovely fields and woods towards Cholesbury.

BTC would welcome the opportunity to work with HCC to ensure Berkhamsted and Northchurch residents can continue to experience the beautiful rural areas on the western side of the A41, in a safe and accessible manner.



A D Noakes

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