

South Downs Local Access Forum

Active Travel Interventions in the Itchen Corridor - Formal Advice from the South Downs Local Access Forum

The South Downs Local Access Forum (SDLAF) welcomes the opportunity to provide formal advice on the proposed Active Travel Interventions for the Itchen Corridor.

As a body listed under Section 94(4), Hampshire County Council is required, in accordance with Section 94(5) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, to have regard to advice from this forum in carrying out its functions.

It will also be important for all authorities to take account of the strengthened duty on all local authorities (and others) within The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (S.11A) (as amended by the recent Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 (S.245)):

In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in any National Park in England, a relevant authority must seek to further National Park purposes and if it appears that there is a conflict between those purposes, must attach greater weight to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area comprised in the National Park.

Members of the Forum have reviewed the proposals and there is a strong consensus that the extension of Active Travel Routes in this area is an excellent initiative. The potential to connect rural communities (such as Twyford and Otterbourne) more effectively with Winchester, and to improve sustainable access to Shawford rail station, is highly supported.

However, to ensure these routes are successful and truly accessible for all, the Forum has compiled the following advice and technical recommendations based on outdoor accessibility guidance and local knowledge.

1. Access and Inclusion Principles

The overarching priority for the SDLAF is that the design should default to 'inclusive access' wherever feasible.

- **Least Restrictive Access:** We strongly advocate for a "Least Restrictive" approach to boundaries. The hierarchy of preference should be:
 1. A gap (preferred).
 2. A chicane (of appropriate width for adaptive cycles/scooters).
 3. A gate (only if strictly necessary for stock control).

- **Gate Specifications:** If gates are required, they must be accessible. We recommend a minimum width of 1100mm, though **1500mm** is the ideal standard to accommodate double pushchairs, adapted cycles, and users with assistance dogs (who require space alongside the handler). Latches and handles should be colour-contrasting for visibility.
- **Adaptive Users:** The design must account for the increasing size and capability of all-terrain wheelchairs and "Trampers," as well as cargo bikes and trikes. Path widths and turning circles must be generous to "future proof" the route; for example, a Trumper requires approximately 4.2m width to make a U-turn.
- **Lived Experience:** We recommend conducting a simple questionnaire with local users, specifically those with disabilities, to gain "lived experience" insight before finalising designs.

2. Surfacing Materials

Surfacing was a key topic of discussion among members. While balancing landscape sensitivity is important, poor surfacing is the primary deterrent for the very users these interventions aim to assist.

- **Durability vs. Sensitivity:** Members highlighted that crushed stone surfaces often suffer from wear and tear, leading to potholes and loose debris which impede mobility aids and pushchairs. Loose gravel should be avoided entirely.
- **Preferred Approach:** A fully sealed surface is preferred for accessibility and longevity, particularly given the proximity to urban areas and expected commuter use. It was noted that dark tarmac often blends better with the landscape than light-coloured stone and is quickly softened by vegetation.
- **Alternative Materials:** Where landscape sensitivity is paramount, the Forum suggests investigating resin-bound rubber crumb (potentially using recycled materials). This provides a smooth, stable, non-slip surface for walkers, wheelers, and equestrians, with higher impact absorption.
- **Water Considerations:** Special care must be taken to ensure surfacing materials do not leach into the River Itchen or Itchen Navigation, given the high biodiversity of the chalk stream.

3. Design, Safety, and Amenities

- **Path Width:** We recommend a width of 3-5m for multi-user routes to reduce conflict between different user groups and allow for the social aspect of walking side-by-side.
- **Lighting:** There is a need to balance safety (particularly for lone females and winter commuters) with the National Park's Dark Skies status. If lighting is required, it should be low-level, low-height, and potentially motion-activated to minimise ecological disturbance.
- **Resting Points:** Seating should be provided every 100m (Gold standard) to 300m. Designs should consider angular arrangements (to facilitate communication for British Sign Language users) and include space alongside the bench for a wheelchair to park. Also consider bike rack. Where appropriate, bike racks should be incorporated to encourage sustainable travel and provide secure storage for cyclists.
- **Gradients:** Gentle gradients are a priority. Where existing topography is steep (e.g., Shawford Down), surface grip becomes critical.

4. Local Context and Connectivity

- **Twyford Parish Council:** Close collaboration with Twyford PC is vital. Members noted that the Parish Council owns significant land west of Twyford (Twyford Meads/Berry Meadow). Currently, cycling is restricted in some of these ancient water meadows. Any adaptation of bridges or paths here requires sensitivity to the historic landscape and reassurance regarding maintenance costs.
- **M3 Underpass:** A specific safety concern was raised regarding the width available under the M3 bridge alongside the river. This pinch point needs careful assessment to ensure safe multi-user passage.
- **Junctions:** The junction at Compton Street is currently splayed and may encourage higher vehicle speeds; traffic calming may be required here to assist cyclists crossing.
- **Ecology:** Construction works must be timed to avoid disturbance to ground-nesting birds and protected species.
- **Site furniture:** Signage, seating, gates, and bollards should, wherever possible, be commissioned from local small firms using timber sourced from sustainably managed woodlands in the southeast. This approach supports woodland management, strengthens the local economy, and ensures that materials remain in keeping with the character of the landscape, avoiding generic off-the-shelf products.
- **Surfacing:** If sealed gravels are used, they need to be carefully selected to be in character with the surroundings and local geology.

We hope these comments are helpful in refining the proposals. We look forward to seeing the project progress.

Yours faithfully,
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On behalf of
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Chair of the South Downs Local Access Forum

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