

## Agenda item 3

### For Decision: Progress on Frome's Missing Links cycle route and proposal to support this project

Author: Cllr Rich Ackroyd

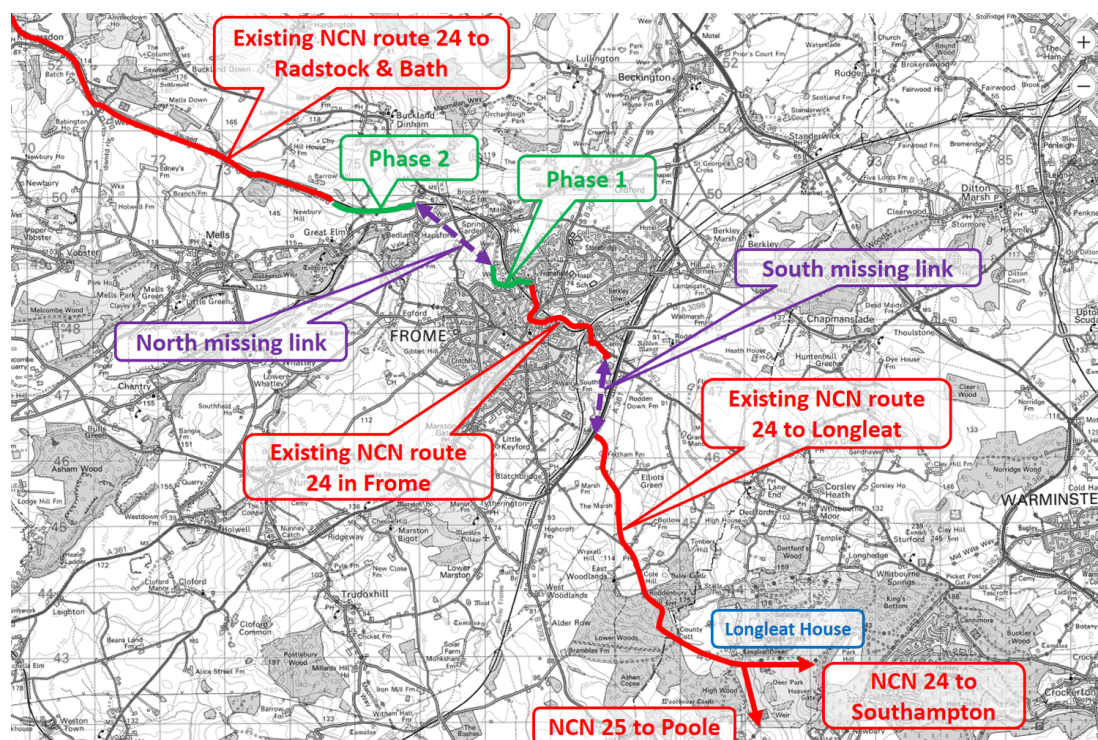
#### Summary

This report from Cllr Ackroyd provides an update on the progress of the Frome Missing Links project to date. The Town Clerk supports the recommendations which are to work with the project to help secure planning permissions and funding to complete it.

Cllr Ackroyd chairs Frome Missing Links and will present the report at the meeting.

#### Background

Frome's Missing Links started in 2010 to campaign for better and safer walking and cycling routes in Frome and better connections to neighbouring towns and villages. The goal was to develop traffic-free routes with gentle gradients suitable for all ages and abilities. It soon became clear that what people wanted first was to see the Colliers Way cycle path to Radstock completed with a traffic-free route into the centre of town. This cycle path, Sustrans' route 24, currently ends at Great Elm, just 2.5 miles outside Frome. The road route from Great Elm follows narrow roads and includes three steep hills, before it threads through the streets of Frome to the town centre. A traffic free path would avoid these obstacles.



## Work so far

Frome's Missing Links began construction by extending the path from the centre of Frome out towards Great Elm. Volunteers spent many days clearing scrub, erecting fences and preparing the ground. Grants from Mendip District Council, Frome Town Council and Aster Housing helped to back up financial support from Sustrans and the section from Welshmill to Low Water, Phase 1, was completed in January 2015. We celebrated the opening with a procession of bicycles and scooters, illuminated by hundreds of lights and reflectors.

In June 2016, Frome's Missing Links became an independent charitable organisation, having previously been part of Sustainable Frome and working with Sustrans. As a result, we can now take donations, apply for funding and claim gift aid.

## Next Steps

The current Phase 2 of the project will extend the Great Elm end of the cycle path towards Frome. This will take the path up to Elliots Lane in Hapsford. We have already begun clearing the route. A team of volunteers has removed the old railway track and concrete sleepers from a section of the route nearly a kilometer long. The sleepers have been re-used in a couple of picnic benches along this section. Many dog walkers and cyclists currently drive to the end of the off road route at Great Elm, then sometimes park indiscriminately obstructing farmers' access – completion of the route will reduce vehicle traffic at this point. We have raised about £80,000 from the local community and grants towards the completion of Phase 2. Raising this money has shown there is strong local support for the project which is helping Sustrans to find funding from other sources. We hope to complete Phase 2 by December 2018.

The next section, Phase 3, from Low Water to Coalash Lane will extend the path from the end of Phase 1 and enable a traffic free route from the town centre to within one mile of Phase 2. We are looking to build this section of path as part of a "Walkers are Welcome" initiative, which might also enable a circular walking route through our path and the community owned "Whatcombe Fields". We currently have owner's permission for part of this phase, but need to complete our negotiations with two other landowners before we can produce detailed drawings and attempt to gain planning permission for this relatively simple stretch to be completed. Most of Phase 3 can be built using volunteer labour – volunteers recently completed a 150 metre stretch of path at Coalash Lane for a total cost of approximately £2,000. Phase 3 could be started before Phase 2 is completed but will depend largely on funding and circumstances on the ground.

A major element of our project is community involvement. This is, in itself, an innovation, a project that came out of the local community and supported by them, by basic volunteers, professionals, and local business to do something for their community that national charities and statutory authorities seem unable to because of financial restrictions. For example, Phase 1 was opened on 31 January 2015, for which the group won the £10,000 People's Grant, organised by the town council and voted for by all the resident of the town; and were also awarded a £75,000 Mendip Legacy Grant. Additional funding was raised with a Neighbourhood grant from the local Housing Association.

More recently we were awarded £500 through the town council's Participatory Budget scheme for a 'Travel to School' initiative, which successfully involved eight local schools in a week-long walk, cycle or scoot to school challenge, with additional 'Dr. Bike' maintenance sessions and safe riding skills training. As a consequence of this initiative, significantly more students cycled to school and a further £1,400 was raised towards our projects.

FTC Rangers have also supported the project in a variety of ways. We have been lucky to have some of them as volunteers on workdays and have benefitted from their expertise regarding landscape issues and loans of tools. Through the excellent work of Chris Stringer and Mike Gerrard we were recently able to organize training for two volunteers alongside the Town Rangers at a reduced cost, which will enable FML volunteers to use heavy construction equipment in future. In return, FML volunteers have recently cleared vegetation along Feltham Lane and made repairs along the Welshmill path.



We also have the services of a volunteer land agent, donations of materials from local businesses, concessionary rates from local consultants if they cannot do pro bono and amazing local support from the general public. The fact that this is a project that Sustrans, having run out of funding, see as a way forward to complete the missing links in the NCN is also quite innovative.

However, there are still some considerable obstacles. Our short-term aim is to complete Phase 2 and Phase 3. We believe that we can raise funds for the physical completion of the path through several means. We will continue to fund raise and apply for grants wherever possible. Our biggest expenses apart from construction costs will be for professional hire such as legal fees and planning permission costs. To help pay for this we are looking for support from local authorities and interested parties. For example, we believe that there may be



considerable sums of money available from the local quarries via S106 awards. To access these funds, we will need the support of the parish councils and MDC.



## Summary

Completion of the Missing Links is a long-term aim and we hope to make significant progress on Phase 2 and Phase 3 in the next twelve months. On completion of all permissions it will be possible to create a graded gravel footpath, which could act as an interim thoroughfare until eventual funding is secured to tarmac the surface at a later stage. FML will continue to raise funding for the scheme and will continue to involve volunteers in construction where possible. Sustrans will adopt the finished cycleway and ensure its continued maintenance.

However, progress towards our goals requires professional fees for aspects of the work that cannot be done by volunteers. For example, to divert a footpath and to access land belonging to network rail requires the services of legal eagles, land agents, local authorities and engineers. All of these people cost money. It is with these professional costs in mind that we are approaching local councils for help.

## Recommendations

1. Continue to support in principle the overall aims of Frome's Missing Links
2. Take the lead on the Application for Planning Permission once suitable plans have been generated and agreed
3. Support where possible the Frome Missing Links' funding efforts.
4. Continue to support Frome Missing Links volunteers through training and loans of tools where mutually beneficial.