

## Agenda item 5

For decision - Adopt the cycle path from Weylands to Coalash Lane

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### Summary

This report proposes that FTC applies for planning permission on behalf of Frome Missing Link for the section of cycle path between Weylands and Coalash Lane near to Jacks Lane.

### Background

Frome's Missing Links (FML) started informally in 2010 and registered as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) in Jan 2016.

Frome's Missing Links campaigns for better and safer walking and cycling routes in Frome and better connections to neighbouring towns and villages. The goal is to develop traffic-free routes with gentle gradients suitable for all ages and abilities – including specifically to fill in the sections of national cycle routes that are currently still dangerous for riders.

Sustrans route 24 through Frome involves several steep hills on public roads with no pavements or verges so Frome's Missing Links aims to create more family-friendly routes and is doing this by campaigning, commenting on planning applications, and raising funds to build these routes.

When it became clear that Sustrans was no longer fundraising for new sections of construction but rather had to focus on maintenance of the existing routes, Frome's Missing Links was persuaded to take the step of registering as a CIO itself to pursue these goals for construction of the missing links in the local area.

FML has a competent team of trustees, including an award-winning engineer who has worked on a variety of construction projects including the by-pass around Frome; an experienced hydrologist with many years' experience with the planning process; a qualified accountant and two trustees are currently working in the cycling industry in managerial capacities.

Alongside the fundraising and public awareness functions, FML has a very active volunteer team who meet most Fridays and devote time to clearance, ground preparation and tasks such as lifting old rail sleepers from an unused section of railway.

The Friday team of volunteers is made up of, in the main, retired men who have worked in local development, planning, construction or environmental projects. All of them are registered Sustrans Rangers and have undertaken some specific construction training such as safe use of mechanical rollers. This dedicated team have demonstrated that FML have the skills to construct a path (short of asphaltting it) once they have permissions in place.

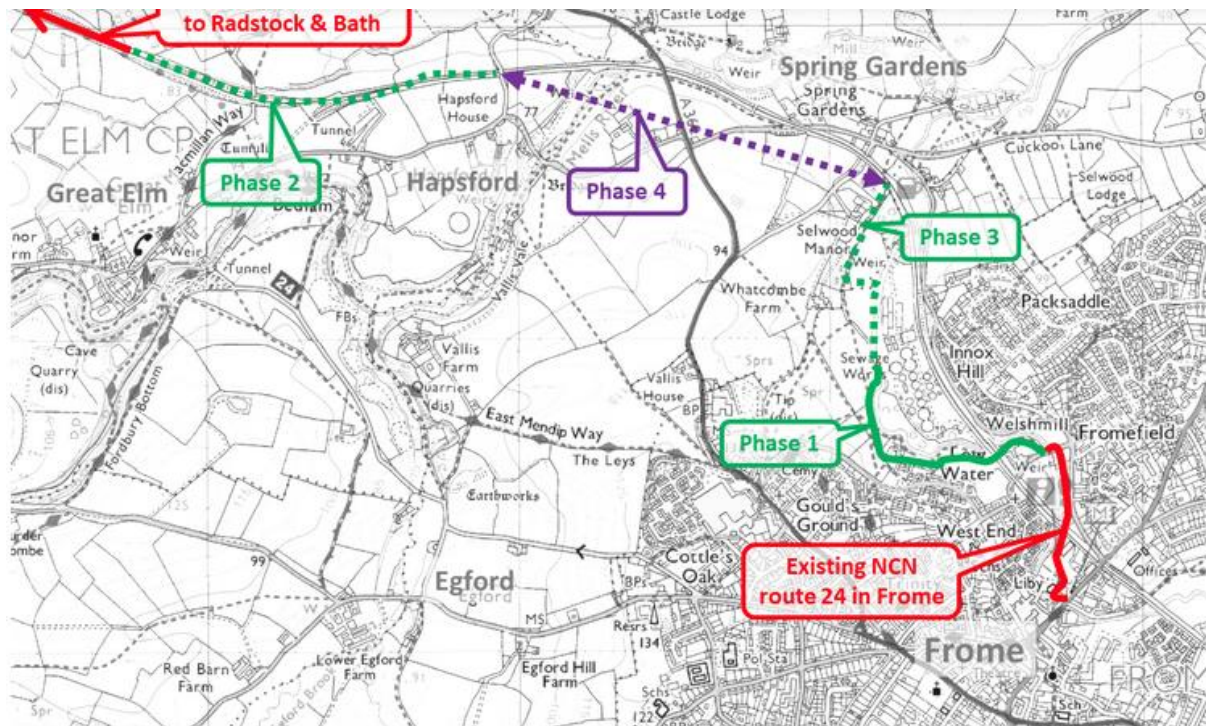
This volunteer component is not fully sufficient to deliver a cycle path fit for purpose but does reduce the cost considerably.

## Phase 3 – Whatcombe to Spring Gardens

On the west side of Frome the missing link is between Great Elm where the popular off-road Colliers Way finishes and joins back to a public highway and Frome town centre, a total of 5.72km. Phase 1 (Welshmill near Frome centre to Whatcombe) was completed a few years ago with various grant funding (including FTC) and voluntary effort. The section following on from this – Whatcombe to Spring Gardens – is the section for which FML is now wishing to develop.

The time since section 1 was constructed has been used liaising with the landowners, arranging for a footpath diversion and undertaking preparatory work marking the route and beginning tree planting along the boundary of the path to be. All this has been done entirely by volunteers.

The proposals will extend the path along the river before re-joining the existing path beyond Whatcombe Farm. This next section of path will be based on a leasehold arrangement with the landowners, very similar to current arrangements in situ along Phase 1.



## Benefits

The section is completely off road and will avoid a dangerous and hilly stretch of busy road, creating safe and level access to popular town amenities at either end, notably the very popular pump track at Welshmill and two popular arts venues; Cooper Hall at the Spring Gardens end and the Cheese and Grain in the town centre. It will also get FML another step towards creation of a fully off-road route to the national cycle network linking to Radstock along the Colliers Way and in turn, Midsomer Norton, Bath, Bradford on Avon and Bristol. It will offer a new resource for people wishing to learn to cycle. It is a natural extension from the extremely popular pump track and play area at Welshmill.

The path will be 3m wide, with accessible gates and entrances fully operational by anyone in a wheelchair, mobility scooter, with limited abilities, on horseback or on a cycle. It will be much more attractive to families towing children in trailers or cycling with a mixed group of people with different abilities.

There are clear health and environmental benefits to the community. Frome Medical Practice is very keen to recommend that patients take up safe cycling opportunities as part of their social prescribing that is becoming a steadily more important part of their practice.

As a link into the national network, it will eventually aid leisure tourism enhancing all who visit this part of Somerset and also increase economic benefits to local cafes, accommodation providers and retailers. Government sponsored research carried out by Dr Adrian Davis in 2010 demonstrated that for every pound invested in cycling in the UK in 2010, there was an economic benefit of £19.

### Next Steps – Planning Permission

FML continues to have a very close partnership with Sustrans, who will eventually adopt the completed links on route 24. However, recent funding cuts mean that Sustrans are currently unwilling to act as the ‘applicant’ for new planning applications generated by FML at this time but will act as an ‘agent’.

Landowner permissions for Phase 3 are all now in place and an official footpath diversion has been arranged with Somerset County Council. FML have pledged to take on the future maintenance of any paths that they are able to create but feel that it would be more appropriate for Frome Town Council to become the ‘applicant’ and for FTC to submit the planning application for this section of the path.

FTC already has an agreement to maintain the path along Welshmill through to Weylands on behalf of Sustrans. If FTC become the ‘applicant’ they will in theory be continuing this arrangement along the extended path to Cooper Hall. FTC also has the resources to look at the long-term maintenance of the path and the capacity to bear the responsibility for public liability insurance.

FML will pay any planning fees and associated costs incurred by FTC during the planning process.

### Recommendation

FTC agree to be the ‘applicant’ on behalf of FML for the Phase 3 development outlined above.