

HarBUG Response to Cycle Route Study Focus Group Session

Please find below a formal response to the Science Vale cycle route study focus group, held on 17th and 18th February.

Our main area of interest are routes to the Harwell Campus, but we have commented on all options. This is to ensure a network of cycle routes, that meets the needs of cyclists in the Science Vale, is realised.

1. Option 1 – Wantage to the Harwell Campus.

Our preferred option is route 1C. Initially the route would follow option 1B from Wantage through Ardington and then cross over to 1C for the rest of the route.

At the meeting, the chairman of West Hendred parish council stated that there was a real option of a northern route around the churchyard.

Guy Wilkin from HarBUG has carried out an assessment on the route options, (independently of the focus group), and option 1C was the best option.

We understand that there is local political backing for option 1A, the A417 route. This option is not the cyclist’s choice and we don’t believe that it would achieve the aim of encouraging more people to cycle to work. It is not a direct route to anywhere and would be very expensive for little benefit. A good quality alternative cycle route, such as 1C, would reduce the need to cycle along the A417, provide a more direct route to the Campus and would directly connect the villages along the A417.

We are pleased that LSTF funding will be used to rebuild the route immediately west of the Harwell Campus, and for repairs along the rest of the track.

1. Option 2 – Wantage to Milton Park.

Our preferred option is route 2D. The route provides good connections from Grove and Wantage and initially follows the route of the old Wilts & Berks Canal. This would leave a future option of continuing a cycle route along the towpath to Abingdon. The route uses an existing bridge under the railway and runs parallel to the railway to Steventon. It would connect the MEPC Steventon Storage Facility to MEPC Milton Park.

The route from Steventon to Milton Park is already used by cyclists and could be upgraded and re-surfaced at an early stage.

1. Option 3 – Abingdon to Milton Park

This route would also act as a first stage of a route from Abingdon to the Harwell Campus. Our preferred option would be 3C, using the national cycle route 5 out of Abingdon and going through Milton Park, connecting to the Backhill Tunnel under the railway. It is the most direct route and brings the cyclist to the centre of Milton Park. Links through Milton Park will need to be improved.

Option 3B is also fairly direct, it uses minor roads, but due to their proximity to Milton Park is busy with fast traffic.

1. Option 4 – Abingdon to the Harwell Campus.

We would like to champion two options on this route.

Abingdon is further away from the Harwell Campus than either Didcot or Wantage / Grove, and many cyclists currently use option 1A, as they commute using road bikes.

We would like to see measures implemented to ensure that there is space for cycling on the main carriageway along this route, so that is safe for cyclists to use now and in the future. We were disappointed that no space for cycling was allocated in the designs for the Steventon Lights to Featherbed Lane junction upgrade.

Option 4C picks up from option 3C at Backhill Tunnel. This would allow commuters from Abingdon the option of a mostly off road route. The route also interconnects Milton Park and the Harwell Campus and links the new Didcot Valley Park developments with the Harwell Campus.

1. Option 5 – Didcot to the Harwell Campus.

Option 5B is the preferred option, along with the Sustrans route 544. Option 5B is the fastest and most direct route, connecting with the soon to be upgraded Winnaway.

This route has the potential to increase cycling to the Campus by a significant amount. However the viability of this route is seriously under threat from the housing developments on the Wantage Road and the plans for a ‘not fit for purpose’ shared use cycle path.

The new Great Western Park spine road junction has grown from the original plans and will soon be a major traffic junction with the focus on motor vehicles.

HarBUG urges the County Council, District Councils and Developers to re-evaluate the designs and proposals for this stretch of road, and build in space for cycling to the ‘Best European Practice’ as has been stated in the Oxfordshire LEP economic strategy for the Science Vale.

On Sustrans route 544, the route is existing although there are sections of the route that need to be addressed with capital expenditure:

* The Hagbourne Hill track between the A34 Bridge and the A4185 is an unbound Limestone grit surface. It is currently very badly potholed. It has been repaired a couple of times over the past 10 years but this does not last very long due to the farm and access vehicles using it. Our proposal is to build a Tarmac cycle path either to one side of the track or in the centre, where vehicles would have to straddle the path.
* Chapel Furlong in Upton has a similar surface and suffers from excess surface water and farm vehicles, where the cycle path joins from the old railway. Our proposal is for a similar path to that proposed above with improved drainage.
* HarBUG had hoped that Chilton Road from Upton to Hagbourne Hill would be closed to motor traffic. This now appears not to be the case. We have previously put forward ideas to make the road safer for cyclists and we would like to re-propose these:
  + Remove the centre line and advisory cycle lanes added to either side of the carriageway.
  + Introduce a weight and axel width limit on the road. All larger vehicles (except for farm access) routed via the upgraded Hagbourne Hill.
  + Introduce a 40mph speed limit and 30mph in Upton village.
  + Fit rumble strips or other traffic calming measures in the central part of the carriageway.
  + Re-design the junction at the top of the Chilton Road and Hagbourne Hill, so cyclists can cross over safely. The Hagbourne Hill will become a lot busier, so crossing this junction will be an issue.
  + Provide a safe crossing point on the A417 in Upton.



Example of Road with Centre Line Removed

We are pleased that LSTF funding is being used to repair parts of route 544 throughout its route.

1. Option 6 – Didcot to Milton Park

Either option 6A or 6B are direct routes. Option 6A is existing and a good route, but is too narrow along its whole width. Option 6B offers the chance to have a new wider path on the power station site, but may need a crossing on the new Science Bridge road whereas 6A would run under the bridge.

The main problem with the route is the Power Station Roundabout. We don’t believe surface level crossings on the arms of this junction would be practical for cyclists or road users. At a recent meeting of Didcot Cyclists a proposal was put forward for a raised junction over the roundabout, fed from elevated cycle paths fed from railway bridges. Sustrans route 5 would be diverted via the new junction rather than running through Southmead Industrial estate.

1. Option 7 – Abingdon to Culham Science Centre

Option 7B is the most direct route and connects well with Abingdon using Sustrans route 5. A new bridge would be needed to cross the Thames and ideally a new ‘cycle gate’ access to the into the Culham site.

1. Option 8 – Didcot to Culham Science Centre.

Option 8B & 8C provide the most direct convenient routes. Both will need to cross the Thames. In both cases the route through Didcot needs to be upgraded, especially at two key points; the tunnel under the Northern Distributor Road, which is shared with a stream and Cow Lane Tunnel.

Could option 7 & 8 been connected to make a new Abingdon to Didcot cycle route?