

FCRA Working Paper

Issues on access paths around Christchurch Civic Offices land sell-off

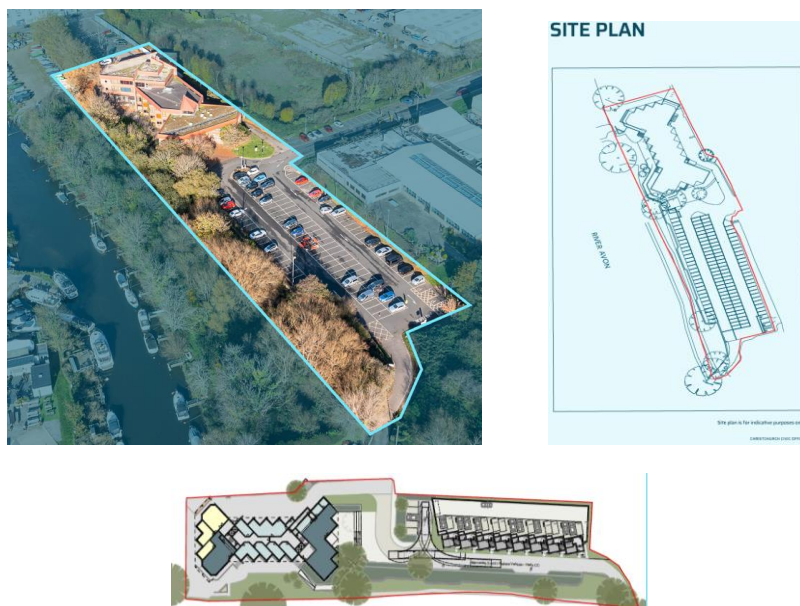
The Friars Cliff Residents' Association have identified concerns with the sale of the civic offices and the impact on the adjoining public footpath and associated footways. BCP Council is requested to urgently review and clarify whether there are issues and respond on the way forward.

The current position

The existing public footpath adjoining the civic offices site is clearly shown **WITHIN** the civic office site boundary as follows.



If, as shown, the footpath is just inside the council offices boundary, it will be important for the new owner to know they will need to maintain the footpath right of way. The sales brochure gives no indication this, as below:



An additional point regards the two associated ‘footway/multi-use paths’¹ crossing the site. One path connects the footpath at the mid-point of the site to Stony Lane South, and the other connects the footpath at the south end of the site (the car park adjacent to the former golf course) to the 2RM leisure centre and beyond as below:



If these walkways (dotted red) are lost, then the route to go from Stanpit and 2RM sports club to Christchurch town centre would of necessity be southwards on a lengthy route through the old golf course to meet up with the (solid red line) footpath, and the same backwards. This creates a much longer route that is not in any way accessible for a wide variety of users such as cyclists, disabled users, those with childrens buggies etc. Accessibility and mobility then become a significant issue created by the sell-off of the site.

To look at this more broadly, the public benefit of the footpath and the two footways is considerable because all three routes are used by pedestrians, cyclists, runners, walking groups, parents with children’s buggies, disabled users and more. Each of these routes is used in different ways:

- The footway nearest the civic offices is regularly used by cyclists and those accessing the 2RM car parks as it safely connects directly to Stony Lane South and beyond.
- The footway nearest 2RM (south side of the car park) is used by virtually all users to access the 2RM entrance, the car parks and Christchurch town centre.
- The footpath, where it enters the old golf course and onwards along the riverside is used mainly by those taking a river walk, visiting the SUP Store shop and accessing the park area on the former golf course for dog walks etc.

So, each of these routes is well used and is important in its own way, and they all perform an important, long term, public access function.

From a legal perspective, the public **footpath** has legal force as a public right of way even after sale, so presumably it must in continuation be preserved as such. However, it is believed the two **footways** likely have no legal force, but they are as equally well used as the footpath. **So, how does BCP/CTC view the future for these routes, and how would the issues of use and access be expected to be tackled by the eventual purchaser?**

¹ footpathmap.co.uk/

For example, a potential risk is that if the new owner of the council offices and south car park decides to erect a fence all the way around the new property, then all three of these footpath/footway access routes will be severely limited or negated for use. There would be huge public access difficulties.

Added to this is concern over the material condition and route of the footpath itself on the west side of the wall bordering the civic offices and south car park. The path is slippery, hazardous, muddy and floods at high tide, and floods even occur far across into the car park itself. At best this is hazardous, perhaps even dangerous. The photographs below and at the appendix show this:



Road Access

From a different viewpoint, the CBRE sales brochure shows in it's 'art of the possible' drawing a vehicular access through the site to the SUP Store and nearby marina. This is surely a mandatory requirement, and a consideration is whether the way forward for the footpath and two footways around and across the site could be considered in conjunction with the vehicular access to provide a holistic solution:



‘Sustrans’ Designation

It must also be noted that the same footpath/footway discussed in this paper is part of the **Sustrans² designated national cycle network ‘route 2’** as shown below.

Route 2 marks a near continuous cycle route along the entire UK south coast, and for this area is shown (marked blue and orange) firmly **INSIDE** the sales site, bordering the inside of the car park wall and around the outer edge of the south-side car park and then passing the rear main entrance of 2RM:



Sustrans is quoted as: ‘custodians of the National Cycle Network, covering over 12,000 miles of signed paths and routes for walking, wheeling, cycling and exploring outdoors. The National Cycle Network provides a vital backbone to the country, connecting communities to each other and helping neighbourhoods come to life’.

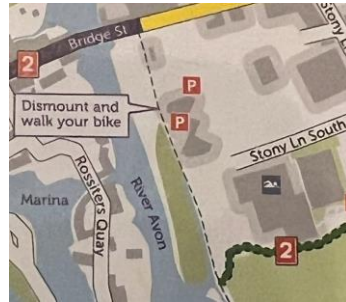
So clearly, any ring-fencing of the sales site will interrupt the Sustrans national cycling network. For this area Route 2 is supported by many signs on lampposts around the car park:



² <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/national-cycle-network/>

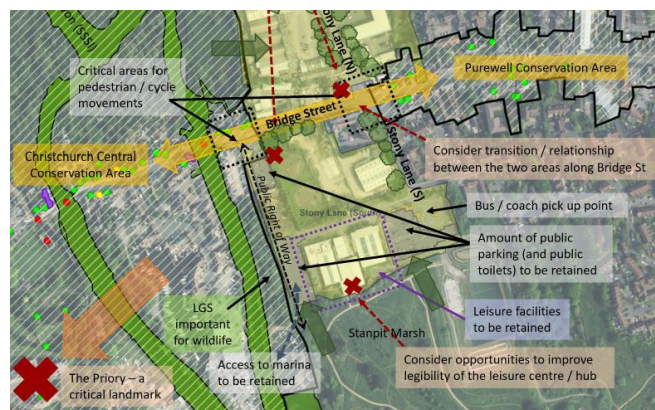
BCP Cycle Routes

BCPs own cycle route maps also show the same Sustrans Route 2 described above in its route maps:



Christchurch Draft Neighbourhood Plan

The Feb 2025 draft revision of the Neighbourhood Plan appears at odds with the issues raised above in terms of car parking and access routes for pedestrians and cyclists: In relation to the Draft NP pages 56 & 57, pedestrian and cycle connections within and through the area will need careful consideration. The existing public footpath to the western edge (that runs from Bridge Street past the slipway and between the former civic offices and river, and onto Stanpit Marsh and Little Avon Marina) is an important route that needs to be retained. See Map 6. This also forms the critical connection across to the 2RM leisure centre and beyond:



BCP Draft Local Plan

The BCP Draft Local Plan, Part 2 – Ward Policies (SD1b - P10) states that any development proposals in the 2RM area must:

- Retain the Two Riversmeet Leisure Centre with sufficient parking to support its operation.
- Provide permeable site layouts with pedestrian and cycle links between Bridge Street and Two Riversmeet Leisure Centre.

The draft also cites the need to explore opportunities to enhance the public realm and improve pedestrian and cycling infrastructure and safety at/around Stony Lane and Stony Lane South.

Further to this, Draft Local Plan Policy **NE7** states ‘the potential new development must contribute to the provision of high quality public open space, which includes this existing public right of way’. Failure of BCP to ensure the ongoing public right of way might prejudice the sale and any planning

application for development. As an aside it is a criminal offence, under section 137 of the Highways Act 1980, to obstruct the whole or part of the width of a public path. **What uncertain position does this create for a future purchaser of the site?**

As observations:

- **How can Policy P10 be adhered to with improved infrastructure if some of the infrastructure is potentially being removed?**
- **Failure of BCP to ensure the ongoing public right of way and routing to/from 2RM leisure centre and beyond might prejudice the sale and any planning application for development.**

Way Forward

In the public interest BCP/CTC councils cannot neglect consideration of the points raised in this paper prior to the sale and offloading of the civic offices and car park site. In the first instance, BCP/CTC addressees are requested to:

- Confirm the exact line of the footpath in relation to BCP maps and the sales documentation as there is ambiguity between them.
- Confirm that the southern boundary of the site being sold allows space for the marked footway/path from 2RM centre to the SUP centre to remain, ie that that footway path (east-west) will continue to link up with the public footpath (north-south).
- Place a covenant into the sales agreement to protect the public footpath and two public footways.
- Ensure the purchaser has an indefinite obligation to preserve pedestrian public access along the two footways (red dotted lines circled black on the above screenshot).
- Ensure the footpath is upgraded and maintained to the extent it can be safely used year-round by all users (pedestrians, cyclists, runners, walking groups, parents with children's buggies, and disabled users). There would need to be some clearing of vegetation and laying of an appropriate base to support this.

As a final question: What can be done to add a condition of sale to the civic centre/car park site to reroute, or provide a safer right of way, to the footpath and two footways described in this paper so that full access, as clearly required in the draft LP and NP, are maintained?

Appendix

Additional photos and information

No usable footpath outside the raised zig-zag:



The footpath disappears completely where it is supposed to start after the zig zag and alongside the civic offices:



An ill-defined part of the footpath starting to emerge at the end of the civic offices:



The very poor footpath, unmaintained, near the civic offices and car park wall:



Towards the end of the car park – impenetrable and unpassable:



Public footpath view rearwards to the civic centre – a messy, unsafe public hazard:



Footpath crossing the access to the SUP Store, and proceeding onwards to the river view and old golf course areas:



This is where the footpath first turns back to 2RM – at the bottom of the old golf course, 143 metres along the muddy track from the south car park:



No cross-connection path from the footpath to 2RM OUTSIDE the civic offices/car park sell-off site:

