



Hardwick Road Restoration Project

Phase 1



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Introduction

The section of Hardwick Road, from the eastern side of Whitchurch-on-Thames, South Oxfordshire, to the gates of Hardwick Estate, is an important feature of our local environment. It is part of an ancient routeway above the Thames floodplain, it takes the traveller through charming countryside at the foot of the Chilterns scarp, and its verges and hedges are rich in plant species and other wildlife.

It carries only moderate numbers of vehicles, but is highly valued for leisure purposes and much used by walkers, runners, cyclists and riders.

Whitchurch-on-Thames Habitat Study Group (WOTHABS) group believes that this area has deteriorated in recent years, and without action will lose more of its special character. Our aim is to act to restore and protect it as a beautiful route for recreational users, and as a rich and vibrant wildlife habitat.

Purpose of this document

The purpose of this document is to describe two key areas of concern and possible remedies - these are the carriageway and safe off-road access.

For the suggested actions, the first requirement would be to consult with and gain the support of each of the relevant landowners and managers.

1. The carriageway

Current situation

Additional passing places are being developed by passing traffic which is forcing a 2 way use of this road by using the verges to the detriment of the road surface and walkers. The size and number of the passing places has increased markedly in recent years.



Unofficial passing place with road edge damage. Note the shallow entrance angle caused by vehicles gradually moving over without stopping, rather than turning into a lay-by. This is typical of the unofficial lay-bys. Similar erosion is occurring on the embanked section where for example the concrete fire hydrant marker which was on the road edge near Shepherds Close was lost in 2010.

Vision / benefits

Restore the verges to make a consistent width, single carriageway road with clearly defined and maintained passing places at appropriate places. This would result in less risk of carriageway damage, safer pedestrian access to Hardwick Estate and traffic calming by single lane working.

Next steps

OCC consultation on what can be done regarding road edge management (Highways and Conservation departments), and closely involving the local landowners in any site meetings.

2. Off-road access

This section looks at how we can create safe off-road access on the south side of Hardwick road from the village to the gates of Hardwick Estate.

Current Situation

The $\frac{3}{4}$ mile route along Hardwick Road from the village to the gates of Hardwick estate is an extremely popular route for walkers, cyclists, and runners. The 2009 Village plan specifically recommended that a footpath be installed on the south verge of the road.



While the road is not busy from a traffic perspective, cars can travel quite fast and safety of walkers and cyclists is a concern, especially for families with children. Many people already use the verge to walk and run on, at least when cars are passing. There are some stretches of the road where trodden paths exist of varying quality but require walkers to cross from the north to south side several times.



These photographs show sections of the uneven path on the south side and the more even-surfaced path on the north side. In future, it should be possible to walk on the south side for

the whole length of the road without crossing thus reducing wear to the more bio-diverse north verge.

Vision

Continuous safe off-road access on the south side of Hardwick Road from the village along Hardwick Road to the gates of Hardwick Estate, connecting the pavements in the village with the miles of recreational walking, cycling and bridle paths available on Hardwick Estate.

It should be possible for walkers to stay on the south side verge for the full length of the road avoiding the need to cross the carriageway. At present, there are two main sections where it is not possible to walk on the south side due to the trees and shrubs growing close to the carriageway – these are the short stretch at the entrance to the village and the longer stretch near the Hardwick Estate gates.

A feasible and attractive solution to one or both of these sections would be to clear a ‘tunnel’ between the trees and make it even underfoot for safe walking.

Next Steps

1. Seek agreement and active support from local landowners and managers, and the Oxfordshire County Council.
2. Perform feasibility study of implementing two sections of new path, one at the narrows at the village entrance and the other at the Hardwick Estate end, including evaluation of options and costs for implementation and maintenance.
3. Secure necessary funding from the County Council or other funding sources.
4. Implement and maintain the two path sections.