

## Part 2b

# Witham proposals

In this section we describe what we think ought to be done to improve the Witham Cycle Network.

There are three main proposals

- Review hazard black-spots
- Develop 3 strategic links for commuters
- Refocus existing plans to get more value for money

### 1 Summary

Hazards need addressing

This step has been ducked in the past. We have identified places of particular difficulty to cyclists which should be looked at to see what measures can be taken to reduce the risk.

Main routes need developing

We have identified three routes which would increase the amount of commuter traffic considerably. These are:

- Hatfield Peverel - Maltings Lane development - Park
- Refurbishment of the rail trail through to the Catholic bridge
- Conversion of footpaths to Silver End

Plans so far available for the Maltings lane development show the wrong sort of facility in the wrong place and no actual provision for routes into town. This is an essential matter.

Better use of resources

There should be a willingness to look at making small improvements on a pragmatic basis rather than having to embark on major projects. The purpose and benefits of these projects appears not to have been thought through. Simple things as signs, dropped kerbs and proper vegetation control can make a big difference.

Dealing with the backlog of design mistakes

Errors have been pointed out in the previous sections and illustrated in section 3. These issues of poor design and implementation need addressing as these are weak links in a chain.

## 2 Why current plans are defective

If we look at the existing network we find some defects in details which show that there is poor detailed design. These have been referred to in part 1. In summary:

- Routes stop short of roads
  - See part 3 for examples
- Excessive and self-defeating junction engineering
  - Bridge Street crossing - Needs turn prohibition removing
  - Guithavon valley double junction needs re-designing

If we look at the way cyclists are encouraged we see

- Lack of signs
- Lack of maintenance
- Unnecessary restrictions
- Traffic engineering for cars without thought for cycles

If we look at the plans described in the Braintree District Transportation Strategy we see in section 6.3/Witham : "... and to encourage the maximum use of public transport, cycling and walking..." and later in the same section "*The continued implementation of the footpath and cycleway network in the town, particularly to link residential areas with key destination such as railway station, employment areas and the town centres.*" However when we look at the proposals we find they don't come anywhere near addressing these aims:

Proposals	
Chipping Hill to Church Street/Cressing Road.	A route chosen for scenic value rather than utility. Doesn't address any large centres of population without alternative routes. No reference to crossing Chipping Hill to join with the existing riverwalk. A route on the other side of the river would serve Flora Road estate and is much more suitable for conversion into a route for cyclists.
Spinks Lane - Hatfield Road Estate	Primarily a school feeder. Unsuitable for night time use.
Motts Lane bridge	Why is a lot of money being spent looking at this when none has been spent on the basics of signing the existing routes through it and Cuthroat lane.
Cuththroat lane	There is hardly an urgent need for work here as the path is adequate for shared use as it stands.

Missing	
Any reference to access to the industrial estates	
Fixing the no-through-ways for cyclists	Blocking off Guithavon Street and failing to provide access from Newlands Precinct to the west is hardly improving links to the town centre.
Any reference to the impact and methods to deal with the Maltings Lane development	Amazing!
Any proposal for improving access to the Railway station	So why put it in the policy statement.
Any reference to hazards and dealing with them.	

The implementation of the policy statement quoted above is a complete flop because:

- *residential areas* - Missed opportunities
- *railway station* - Nothing significant
- *employment areas* - Nothing
- *town centre* - Failure to address access issues

There is a worrying lack of focus on where limited funds can be spent for maximum effect. This is hardly surprising when the basic thinking has not been done. Schemes proposed are seen as manageable chunks that ought to be useful but being seen to be doing something seems to be more important than investigating the value of the scheme.

### 3 Hazard review

Some parts of a journey are more dangerous than others. While accident statistics are a definite indicator of a hazard they cannot be used on their own because of

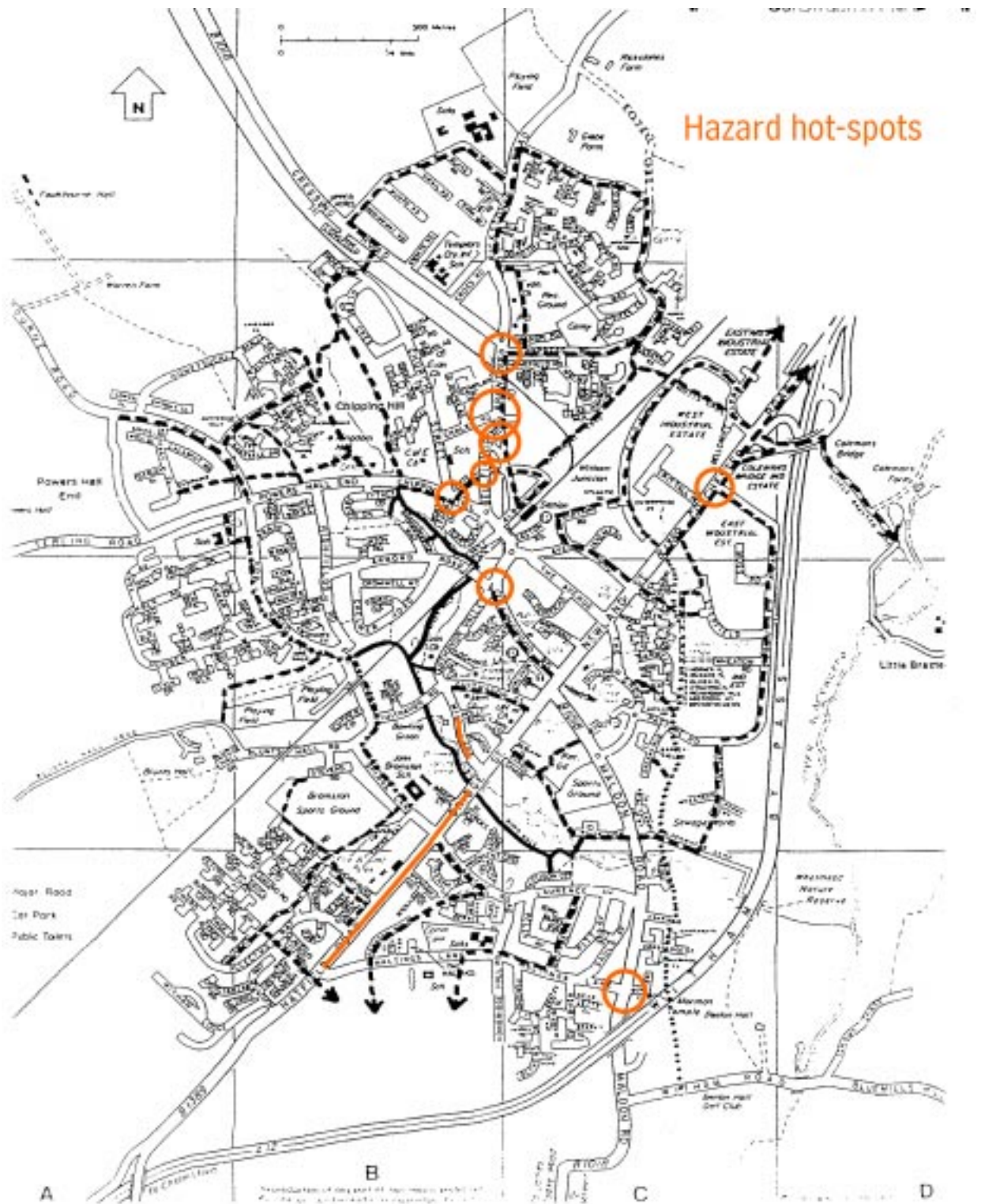
- a) Accidents are under reported by at least 20 and possibly 30 times
- b) There are relatively few to form a comprehensive picture

Therefore we have used local knowledge and knowledge of cycling to compile the following list of hazards.

We are aware that there is no such thing as a hazard free road and that some situations will have to be lived with. However those aren't reasons for avoiding looking at the problems and trying to deal with them.

We would like to see expert evaluation to:-

- a) Assess the hazards
- b) Suggest on-site risk reduction options
- c) Suggest alternative routes



Location	Specific notes
Two roundabouts at junction of Crossing Rd., Braintree Rd. and Cypress Rd.	
RH turn from Braintree Rd. into Chalks Rd.	Need to position in centre well before junction. Many conflicting movements and parked vehicles.
Safeway's roundabout.	
White Horse Lane - (West)	• Combined Jt. with Church St. /Chipping Hill. • Crossing Bellfields
RH turn from Collingwood Rd. into Guithavon Valley	Awkward RH turn on busy road.
Mill Lane	S-bends on road with very little spare width
Spinks Lane junction with Blunts Hall Rd.	RH turn. School commuter route.
Spinks Lane junction with Guithavon Rd.	RH turn just after bend
Approaches to traffic lights at Bridge Street / Spinks Lane / Howbridge Rd. / Hatfield Rd.	Stop-go queues. Overtaking on insider or outside is hazardous
Maltings Lane junction with Maldon Rd	40 mph RH turns
Roundabouts - The Grove	
Colchester Road	Heavy traffic, greasy roundabout, complex junctions, poor maintenance.

## 4 Main route proposals

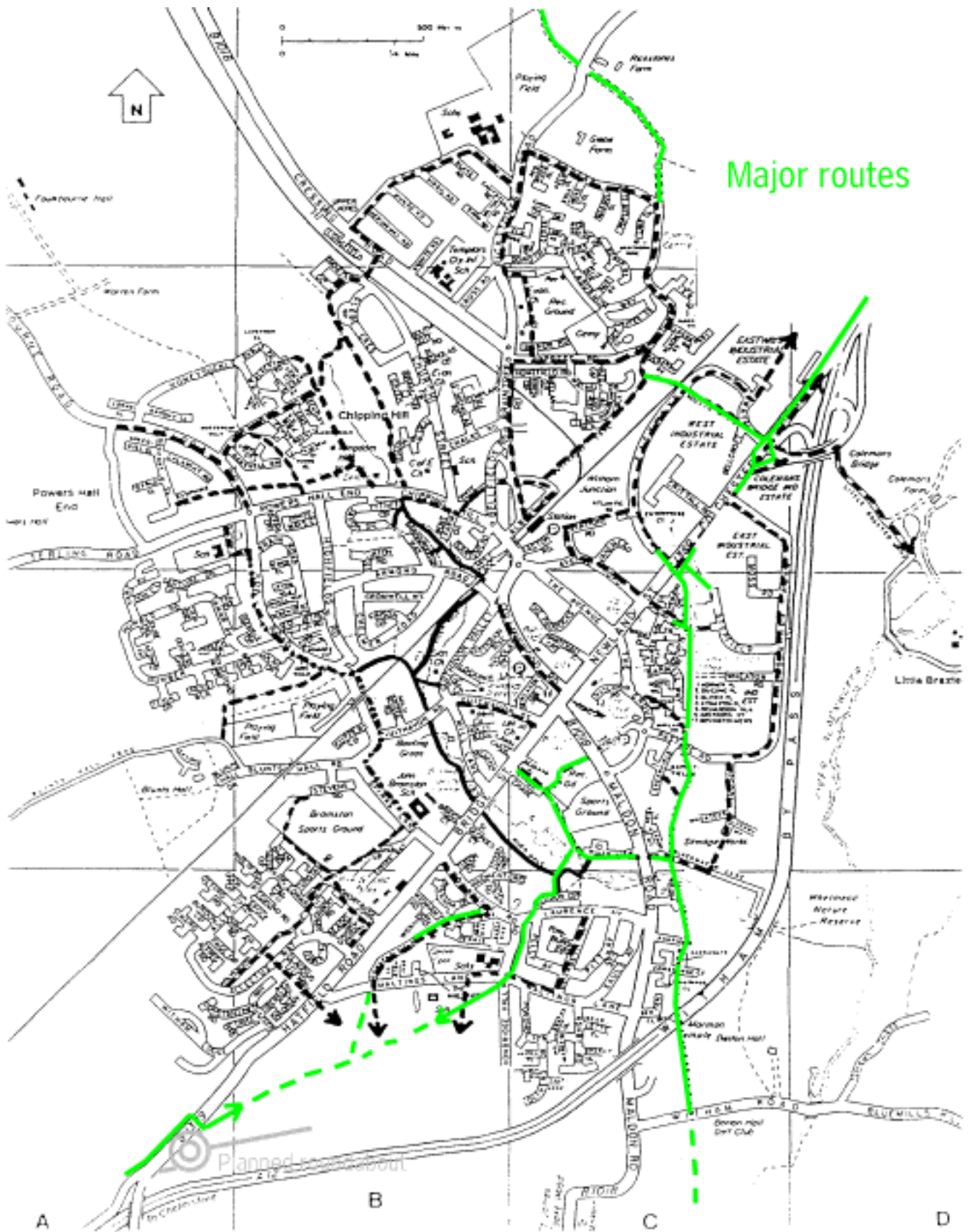
Three main routes have been identified. These

- Join-up
- Are intended for commuter cycling
- Service outlying areas and industrial areas
- Will make many more journeys bike-competitive.

The routes proposed are

- 1 **Hatfield Peverel** : Alongside A12, through new development, into town centre via the park.
- 2 **Rail trail** : Bridging the Brain and refurbishing the old railway to a junction at the Catholic bridge.
- 3 **Silver end** : A quiet road route to Rickstones road then upgraded cross-country footpaths.





Note. "Trail" is used here to indicate a non-tarmaced surface with extra consideration for recreational users and trying to avoid intrusion into the natural environment.

### 1 Hatfield Peverel

#### Reason

- a Hatfield Peverel is within commuting distance of Witham so is an ideal opportunity for traffic reduction through promoting sustainable transport.
- b The large developments at Maltings lane (800ish houses) have no traffic free routes into Witham town centre. The two roads available are busy already and will be busier (6000+ additional car journeys) with the extra housing and have hazards.
- c By linking with the riverwalk it will
  - 1 Improve the utility of the riverwalk by providing radial access into the centre of town.
  - 2 Use the riverwalk to link up with the rail trail and so provide a continuous route from south west to north east

#### Outline

A route designed as much as possible for 20 mph cycling from Hatfield Peverel, alongside the A12, from 'Lynfield Motors' by dedicated route through the new Maltings Lane development to join Maltings Lane at the junction with Howbridge Rd. By dedicated route via Pattison Close into the park crossing the riverwalk route. Thence branching to Newland St and Maldon Road by shared use paths.

#### Detail

- a As part of the proposed link road a dedicated (NB not shared use) path to be provided on the north side of the A12.  
**The Government's preferred route with shared-use path on the south side is not acceptable because**
  - 1 There would be two (three counting access to Maltings Lane development) busy roundabouts to be negotiated.
  - 2 The width would not be sufficient for high speed cycling. (The record of the Highways Agency on keeping down vegetation is not good.)

As a short term measure the existing path on the north side could be modified for shared use, but a dedicated path with more separation from the carriage way is required for safety.
- b The dedicated path will have to be carefully arranged at the Church Nurseries laybys.
- c The dedicated path to continue on the North/West side of Hatfield Rd. (B1389) until at least past the major roundabout being proposed as entrance to the Maltings Lane development.
- d A lights controlled crossing to be provided to take the route from North side to south side of Hatfield Rd.

- e A dedicated cycle route to be provided through the Maltings Lane development to Maltings Lane junction with Howbridge Hall Rd. Attention must be paid to visibility so that cyclists can see and be seen in good time appropriate to their speed. Frequent give-ways are not acceptable. If part of the route is on estate roads then the path should be 'in-the-road' and not 'on-the-pavement'

**Immediate action required**

If action is not taken now to get this route designed into the Maltings Lane development (and plans so far available show no signs of cycle-only or high speed routes) the route becomes irrevocably broken.

- f(1) Between Maltings lane and Pattison Close a new path to be constructed on the East verge of Howbridge Road. This would cross Laurence Avenue with a joint pedestrian and cycle crossing.
- f(2) An alternative route would be via Maltings Lane and Elizabeth avenue, across Laurence Avenue onto the riverwalk. This is less desirable than f(1) because
  - 1 There is a large detour (ie won't be used) for people travelling from the Bridge Street and northwards area.
  - 2 The Laurence Avenue/Howbridge Road junction is a suitable place for pedestrians to cross.
- g The river to be crossed by a flat bridge of much greater width than the existing humped bridge.
- h(1) The existing pedestrian-only route into the park alongside the recreation grounds needs opening out, illuminating, straightening and converting into shared use.
- h(2) An ideal and idyllic alternative would be to route a cycle only route 100 metres upstream of the existing humped riverwalk bridge. This would cut through the natural area and could be constructed as a 'trail' rather than a tarmac thoroughfare. This alternative should be looked at so that the environmental impact can be assessed.
- i Fork the shared use paths through the park so that one comes out on Newland Street and the other on Maldon Road.

### **Conclusion**

All of this route requires construction. The Maltings lane development is a threat and an opportunity. The threat is that 'cycling provision' will not recognise the need for a high quality cycle-only route and instead provide a shared use solution which shouldn't be needed in a properly traffic calmed estate and is either not useful or causes conflicts between cyclists and other users. The opportunity is section 106 money. It is clear that this route will BE NECESSARY to accommodate residents who need to visit Witham town centre but are, quite rightly, appalled at the thought of dealing with the traffic on Maldon Road and Bridge Street.



## 2 Rail Trail

### Reason

- a The old railway line is ideally suited as a feeder to the industrial estates. This will be used for commuting and so is an ideal opportunity to increase the use of sustainable means of transport.
- b It forms an ideal off-road backbone route for the east side of Witham with opportunities for recreational as well as utility cycling.
- c It forms part of a network with connections to Maldon, Riverwalk, the north end of Newland St. via Chess lane, Colchester Road (and thence Kelvedon) and Motts lane.
- d The Maldon road is busy and will become busier with the Maltings lane development.

### Outline

A lot of this route already exists. However it won't become useful as a major route until it is properly joined-up and improved in places.

Eventually there will be a joining-up of the parts of the old railway to Maldon mostly for the purposes of recreation. The existing trail commences at Witham Rd south of the A12, goes under the A12 and terminates at Constance Close. A segment north from Constance Close to be added with a river crossing. This will join with the existing northern part of the trail at Blackwater lane. The trail from here northwards needs some maintenance but is otherwise fine. Across Pasture road there is an existing hard surface which needs minor maintenance to Chess Lane. The trail to the Catholic bridge needs a new surface to make it acceptable in wet weather. At the Catholic bridge additional access to Colchester road and improvements to Eastways is required.

### Detail

- a A crossing of some sort will be required at Witham Road. This will be the case even if the rail trail doesn't continue on the other side of the road. Care needs to be taken to ensure that there is a sufficient space on either side of the crossing for a bunch of cyclists and pedestrians to wait without spilling onto the road.
- b The existing trail between Witham Road to Constance Close requires very little engineering although a proper schedule of maintenance is required. Hard wearing surfaces should be provided
  - 1 To ramp-up to Witham road to avoid erosion and a stiff clamber suddenly ending on the road.
  - 2 In the tunnel under the A12.
- c New construction in trail or tarmac continuing along the old railway route and crossing the river. This then to re-join the existing formation at Blackwater Lane.
  - 1 The ideal would be to continue the route at the original elevation across the valley. This could be done on a viaduct or embankment. This has the advantage over a 'come down to ground level' scheme of allowing cyclists to maintain a steady

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- pace and avoids the temptation for 'boy-racers' to zoom down the slopes to the distress of other users.
- 2 It has been suggested that the existing Sauls Bridge (Built 1804 and a listed building) could be resited downstream of the present position and used in a more visible position as part of the river crossing. At one time this bridge was being considered for replacement by the County Council but perhaps now a different ethos of heavy traffic management is being used and this is no longer regarded as important.)
  - d A hard surface connection would be made with the Riverwalk, including a much-needed shared crossing over Maldon road just north of Sauls Bridge. This would include a proper ramp to access the trail from Blackwater Lane.
  - e The existing trail north of Blackwater Lane to be refurbished and a proper maintenance scheme introduced principally to control vegetation. In view of the proximity to the industrial area and substantial areas of overgrown undergrowth, security could be a problem. There may be environmental treatments, landscaping, meeting points, picnic area that can be used to improve the area. Lighting may have to be considered.
  - f The crossing of Pasture road needs slight improvements. Hard wearing surfaces at the entrance gates and enough space on either side of the crossing to allow cyclists and pedestrians to bunch without being forced to spill into the road or block pavements or trail. Cyclists would not be expected to dismount.
  - g The existing trail from here to Chess lane is currently various types of hard surface with rampant vegetation. The vegetation needs proper management and the hard surfaces need refurbishment. Efficient lighting is important as this is/will be used by workers at all times of the day who for example work shifts.
  - h At present there are no formal cut-throughs to the Grove Road housing estate to the west. There are however well used informal paths indicating a need. We suggest that a proper connection with Barwell Way is established. This will have the advantage of forming a route via Mayland Rd directly into the Grove Shopping precinct.
  - i Chess lane needs minor works. In the main these are to control vegetation and replace the zig-zag barriers with better engineered versions.
  - j Consideration may have to be given to preventing motorbikes being used on the trail and spurs. This is an issue that needs looking at generally. There must certainly be barriers that prevent vehicular access.
  - k The railway track from Chess Lane to the Catholic bridge is pleasant in summer but suffers from broken glass, poor drainage and no lighting. Commuters who have tried using this route have given-up and now use the roads. We suggest

- 1 Lighting
  - 2 A new surface. The choice of trail or tarmac needs careful consideration. A hard surface has the advantage of being easier to clear of debris and could be 'laid on top' of the existing formation. A 'trail' surface has the advantage of being more in keeping with a green route but may suffer from maintenance problems.
  - 3 A vegetation management policy.
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- 1 Various alterations are required around the Catholic bridge. The purpose of these is to provide a junction with Colchester Road and improve the connections to Stepfield and Eastways.
    - 1 Elevate the path at the bridge by up to a metre. This makes connections easier. All paths in this vicinity to be hard surface.
    - 2 Continue the path under the bridge to join with Eastways.
    - 3 Provide a 'slip path' from the east side of Colchester Road. The ground here is convenient. This path would then connect the main route and the existing (but overgrown) path to Stepfield. There may be potential for extending some cycling facility north east along Colchester road at this point.
    - 4 We would like to see a junction on the west side of Colchester road but the land may not be available. This would have the advantage of enabling cyclists to avoid crossing the road near a hump back bridge.

### **Conclusion**

Much of this route exists already, some of it needs an overhaul. Putting the missing link in over the river is essential if "network" is to have any meaning. Once this link is present it will form a major artery for utility and recreational users. Upgrading the Catholic bridge to Chess lane section will mean that it can be used safely by shift workers and connects the industrial estates here with the housing estates in the north of the town via Motts lane.

## **3 Silver End**

### **Reason**

Silver End is the poor-relation of the surrounding villages as far as transport links is concerned. Cyclist and pedestrians have busy or narrow roads without footpaths and a roundabout route. As Silver End is within cycling commuter distance of Witham we consider that this is an opportunity to develop a sustainable trail on a more direct route so that the dangers of the road routes can be avoided and car use reduced.

Currently the major deterrent of the very busy and unpleasant B1018 route or the less busy but roundabout (and sometimes plagued by reckless drivers) Rivenhall route means very few people cycle to and from Witham. We believe that a traffic free route will be a major stimulus, not just diverting existing cyclists but making it acceptable to many more people particularly the younger and older. Of course every cyclist on this route is one less car on the other routes.

### Outline

All of the proposed route is currently designated as public footpath. The total length described is 3Km.

There is a track leading NW from Rickstones Rd. opposite Rectory lane for about 1.3 Km. A short segment of less than 200m crosses a field then follows field boundary for 300m until a 'T' is made with another track. This track can be followed for a further distance of about 1Km to arrive at Western Lane at the southern edge of Silver End.

This route is pretty level which is ideal for cycling enabling consistently high average speeds to be maintained.

Rectory Lane is ideally suitable for cycling as a very low-traffic road and neatly joins up with Motts Lane and thence to the Rail Trail and Cutthroat Lane.

### Details

Details have not been worked out as we feel it is important to establish the principle, discuss the implication for agriculture and the amount of engineering and maintenance required to make this a quality cycling route.

The principle is significant as this route would be a 'first' for the district - The idea that a cycle route can be created without reference to roads, with the power to unlock frustrated cyclists and with the potential to be a highway in its own right rather than an afterthought.

### Recommendation

- a Partners be canvassed
- b A route be surveyed
- c Landowners be consulted
- d Silver End residents be canvassed to gauge the level of support
- e The technical issues of surfaces for all weathers be investigated  
*Then*
- f A costed proposal with estimated benefits be created which can be put forward for funding.

We feel that the process of justification and review of use in practice could form a model for many other rural routes; and the nature of the issues it addresses makes it an ideal candidate for being a case study.

### Conclusion

This route would be a huge advance in connecting Silver End to Witham.

A cyclist would cover this route in less than 10 minutes at speed and in safety without hills and without traffic. So a typical centre to centre journey would be less than 20 minutes and ideal for commuting. This route would in almost every case be shorter than the alternatives and a lot faster.

This is a route that would generate cycle traffic which is not a very usual thing for cycle routes. It would enable many people who would like to but don't dare or simply don't like the spray and close shaves from vehicles to get to and from Witham in safety.