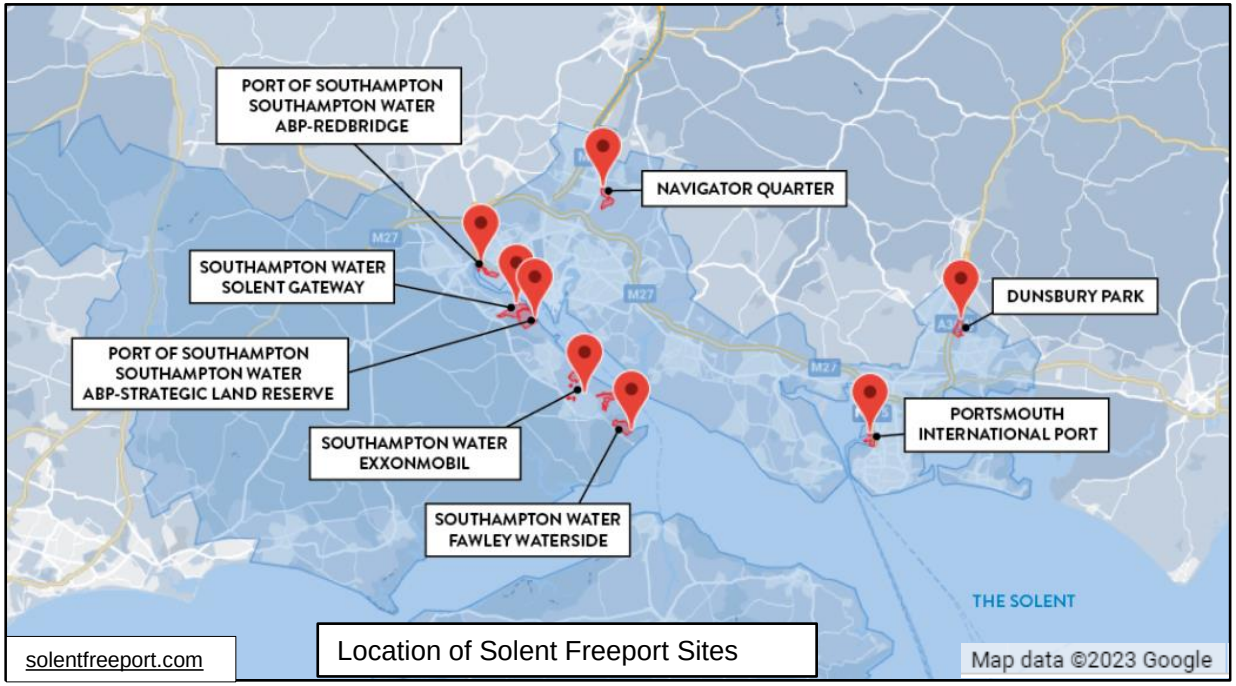
A326 (North) Large Local Major Scheme

1. Introduction

The A326 is the only major route that connects communities to Southampton, the M27 and provides access to the New Forest. Vehicles experience delays on a regular basis. The road can also act as a barrier to people walking and cycling across it.

Significant growth potential in the Waterside, with several large development sites identified in the local Development Plan and the **Solent Freeport**, as shown in the map below.

Hampshire County Council (HCC) has adopted a NEW **Waterside Transport Strategy and Action Plan** in November 2022. The Strategy sets out how HCC aims to deliver transport improvements over the foreseeable future. Part of the Strategy Action Plan includes A326 improvements, as per the map on the next page.



solentfreeport.com

Location of Solent Freeport Sites

A326 improvements are a key enabler of other measures in the wider area, by encouraging more vehicles to use the A326 it reduces traffic on parallel routes, such as those through the New Forest National Park and through Waterside communities.

HCC is already bringing forward improvements for Waterside bus users and people walking and cycling. These are funded by the DfT's **Transforming Cities Fund**. They include the Eling to Holbury Cycle Route, Bus priority improvements at Rushington Roundabout, and Bus priority improvements at the A326 Marchwood Bypass merge near Hounsdown.

A326 (North) Large Local Major Scheme

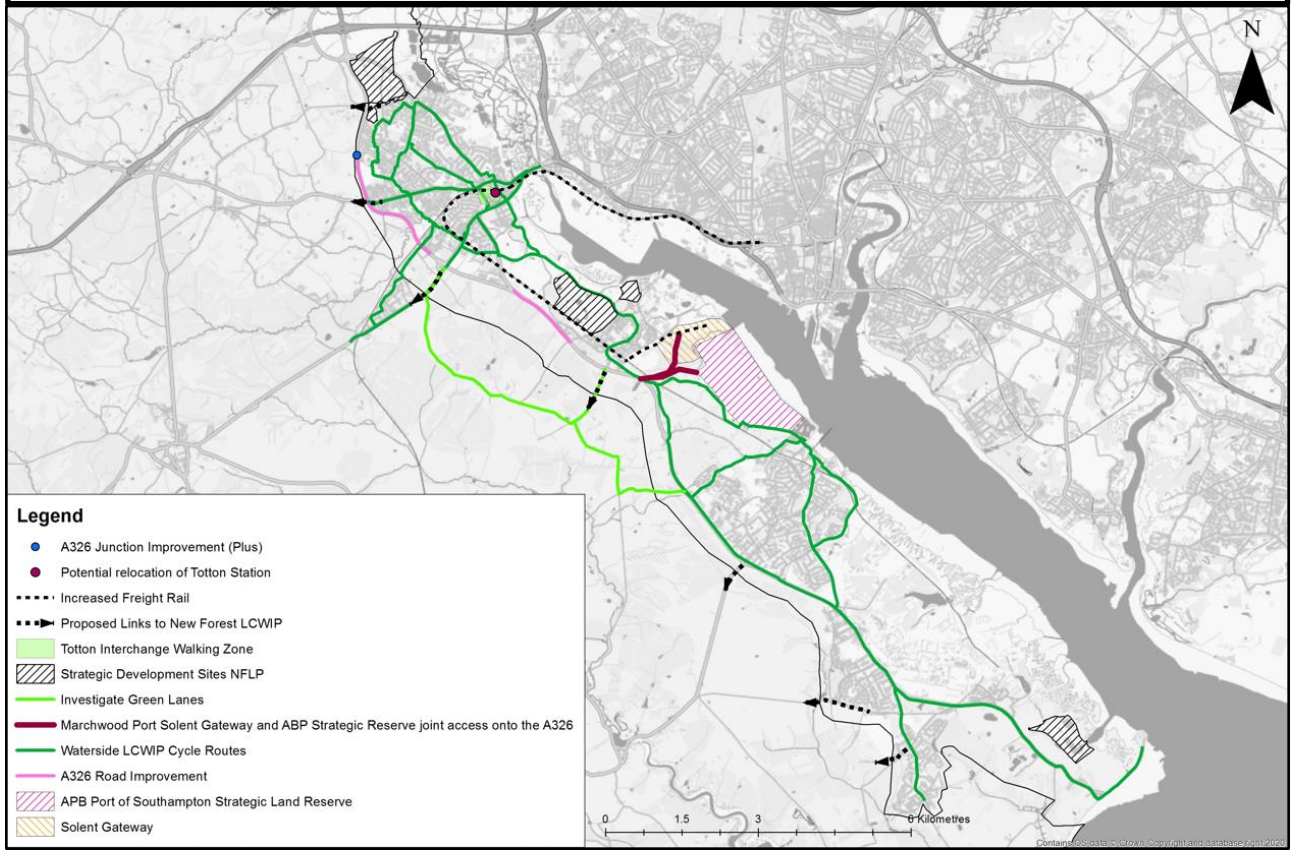
2. Background

Following a call for schemes by Transport for the South East (TfSE) in 2019, HCC put forward improvements to a north section of the A326 between west Totton and Applemore. This was prioritised by TfSE and submitted to Government, and in March 2020 HCC were invited to submit an initial business case for funding from the DfT **Large Local Majors** fund, which is a national funding programme.

The scheme **objectives** are to:

- enhance accessibility for all users of the transport network including people not driving;
- address traffic congestion and journey time delays along the corridor;
- enable economic development along the corridor;
- minimise the impact on the New Forest; and
- complement other investment in the area, in order to deliver wider benefits for local communities, businesses and visitors.

Waterside Transport Strategy: Base Strategy – Plus Scenario



A326 (North) Large Local Major Scheme

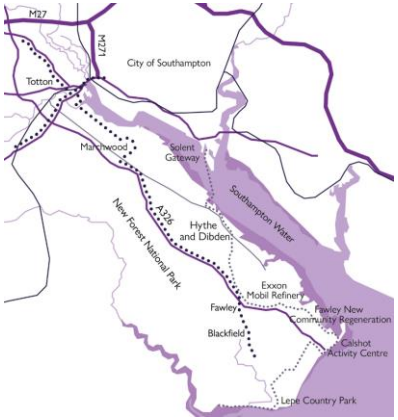
3. Context

Waterside Vision

The Waterside is situated on the west side of Southampton Water and is home to nationally significant infrastructure and industrial assets which play a critical role in the UK economy. The main settlements in Waterside sit in a special environment between Southampton Water and the New Forest National Park.

The Waterside Vision is an ambitious plan to support the growth of the economy and provide much needed homes, but deliver this in a way that enhances the sensitive environment of the area. The vision is a public-private consortium supported by Hampshire County Council, New Forest District Council, New Forest National Park Authority, the Solent Local Enterprise Partnership and major landowners.

The benefits of the Waterside Vision include up to 6,700 new jobs (with a significant proportion in the Waterside area) and unlocking over £3billion of private sector investment in the area. Investment in the A326 corridor will reduce congestion and better connect the Waterside with the wider area and make it easier to cross the road on foot, by cycle or on horseback.

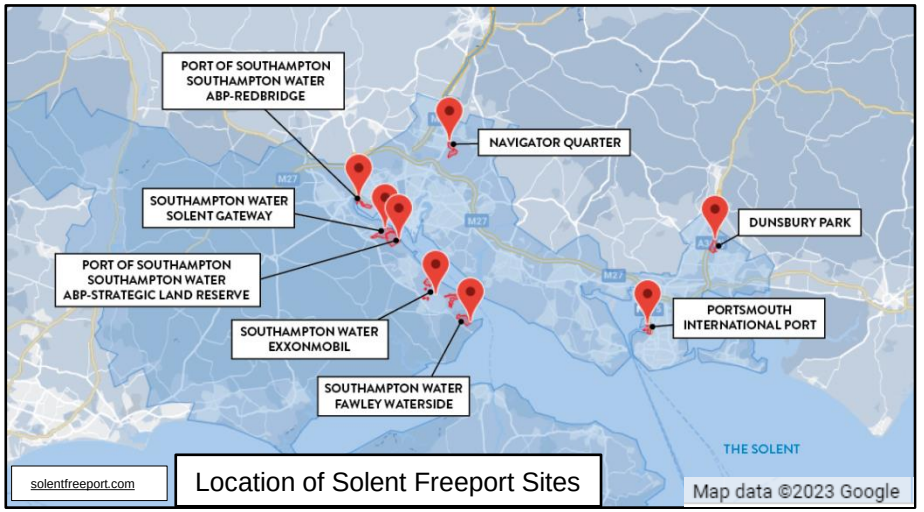


Solent Freeport

Solent Freeport is an area designated by the government that will benefit from incentives to encourage economic activity.

The outer boundary of the Solent Freeport reflects the well-recognised economic area of the Solent region, as well as including transport routes critical to the area's economic prosperity. The boundary of the Solent region along with the location of the Solent Freeport sites are indicated on the map below.

Freeports operate with both 'tax' and 'customs' sites. Tax sites offer occupiers business rates relief and other incentives to support capital investment, skills and employment. Business rates growth generated at the tax sites can be retained locally and reinvested in the area. Customs sites help enable the tariff-free movement of goods for both export and import through simplified customs procedures.



A326 (North) Large Local Major Scheme

4. Scheme Timeline and Rationale

Scheme Timeline to Date

- **Autumn 2017**: HCC Waterside Interim Transport Policy Position identifies A326 improvements as a medium/ long term priority to help address existing congestion and help facilitate planned development in the Waterside.
- **Summer 2019**: HCC submits Expression of Interest for A326 North improvements to TfSE for submission to Government.
- **March 2020**: HCC invited by DfT to work up a Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) for Large Local Majors (LLM) funding.
- **Summer 2021**: Public engagement on three potential options for improvements, ranging from low scope/cost, to high scope/cost.
- **Summer 2021**: HCC submit SOBC to DfT with assessment of the three options.
- **November 2021**: A preferred scheme option (Option 2) is approved for further development by HCC's Executive Lead Member for Transport.
- **March 2022**: SOBC approved by DfT and development of the feasibility design for the preferred option commenced and has now been completed.

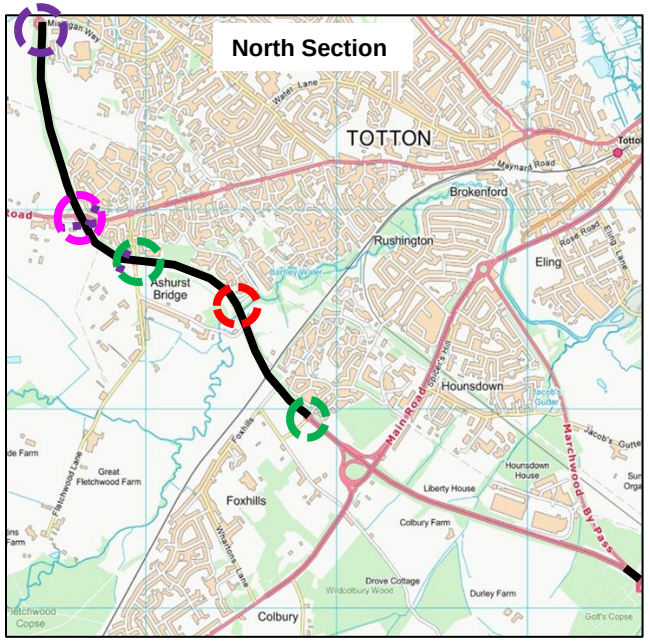
What will the Scheme Deliver?

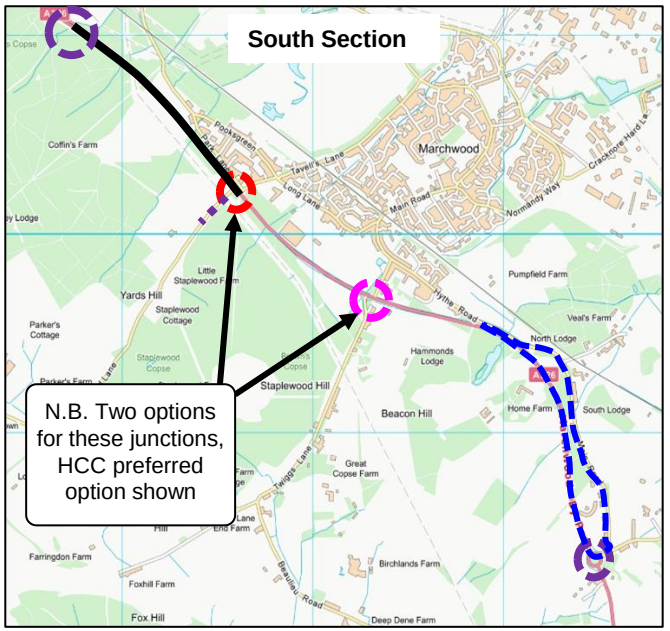
- Increased **traffic capacity** on the A326 that results in less journey delay and a **redistribution of traffic** back onto the A326 and away from other parallel (less suitable) routes, such as through the National Park and Waterside communities.
- **Reduced severance** for pedestrians and cyclists **c**aused by the road due to **new crossing opportunities** and improved access into the National Park from Waterside communities.
- **Enable other measures** in adjacent areas as outlined in the Waterside Transport Strategy, to capture the benefits of traffic redistribution e.g. improvements for people walking and cycling in the Waterside communities and within the National Park, such as greenways or through traffic restrictions.
- An overall minimum **10% improvement in biodiversity**, through both mitigating the impacts of the scheme (re-providing what is lost) and then providing a further 10% uplift, in line with Biodiversity Net Gain requirements.

A326 (North) Large Local Major Scheme

5. Preferred Scheme Overview

The preferred scheme has a '**North**' section, located to the west of Totton, and a '**South**' section, located between Hounsdown and Dibden, as shown below:





Key

- Widening on approaches
- New traffic lights
- Left-in / Left-out only
- Bigger roundabout
- Road widening
- New Crossing
- Cycle provision options

- Circa 2.5km of widening to provide a new dual carriageway between Michigan Way and Cocklydown Lane.
- Circa 1.5km of widening to provide a new southbound lane between the A326 merge at Hounsdown and Staplewood Lane.
- Improvements or modifications at nine junctions.
- Four new controlled crossings and retention of existing crossings/ subway.
- Four structures including two new bridges.
- Circa 1.5km of improved facilities for cyclists between Marchwood and Main Road.

The scheme will be developed during the next stage of design and this engagement is an opportunity to influence this

A326 (North) Large Local Major Scheme

6. North Section: Michigan Way Junction to A336 Ringwood Rd Junction – Proposed Changes

To the north of Michigan Way the A326 is already a dual carriageway.

A326 Michigan Way (Morrisons) roundabout

New Dual Carriageway

Widening on the western side of the road, in order to reduce the impact to properties on the eastern side.

New Dual Carriageway

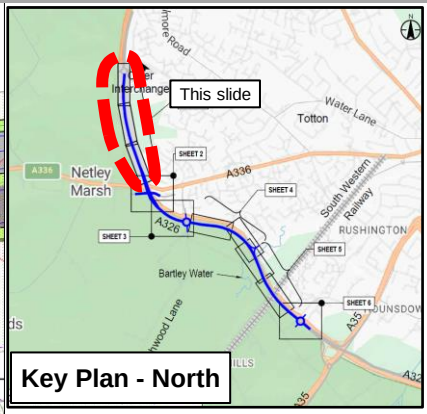
Wide existing highway verges and embankments along this section, due to land being safeguarded for future widening when the Totton Bypass was built, some of which will be used by this scheme. Trees are less mature along most of this section.

Dickens Dell

New Dual Carriageway

A326 Approach to Ringwood Rd (A336) junction

Work in Progress Design



Key

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- Existing trees/vegetation to remain
- Existing trees/vegetation to be removed
- New verge
- New carriageway
- Existing carriageway
- New pavement or cycle path or paved area
- Indicative new drainage pond
- Indicative new embankment
- Indicative reinforced earth embankment

A326 (North) Large Local Major Scheme

7. North Section: A336 Ringwood Rd (Netley Marsh) Junction – Proposed Changes

View looking towards roundabout from opposite Goodies

A326 towards Michigan Way & M27

Road widened to the west to retain the tree buffer for houses to the east.

Bigger roundabout rejected as required more land and tree removal.

Pickwick Close

Design adjusted to avoid a Veteran tree located here.

A336 towards Netley Marsh

Ringwood Rd

A336 towards Totton

Ringwood Rd

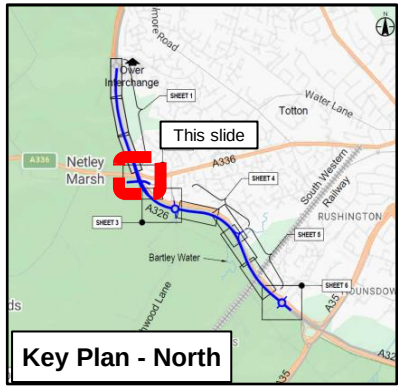
Goodies

New traffic light junction.
No right-turn from the A326 south approach and no left-turn from the A336 east approach.
Both these movements can be made at the Fletchwood Road junction instead.

Two new traffic light crossings to reduce severance and improve access for people walking and cycling between Totton and Netley Marsh.

A326 towards Fletchwood Rd

Work in Progress Design



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8. North Section: Fletchwood Road Junction – Proposed Changes

A326 towards Ringwood Rd junction

Widening on the inside of the bend within highway boundary. Retains the tree screen to houses and doesn't encroach into National Park on the other side of the road.

Hunters Cres

Fletchwood Rd leading to Ringwood Rd

New Dual Carriageway

Bigger roundabout results in some tree loss on the corners of the roundabout.

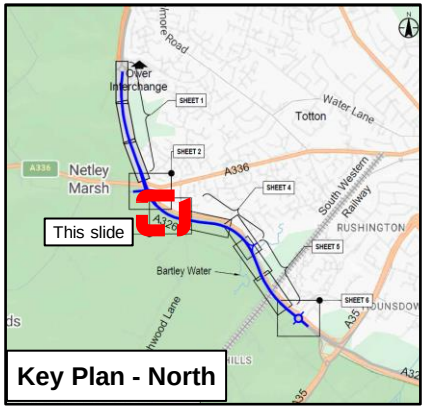
New traffic light crossing to improve access for people walking and cycling to Ashurst Bridge and on towards the New Forest via Fletchwood Lane.

A326 towards Monkton Lane

New and wider sections of pavement on both sides of the A326 to link to and from the new traffic light crossings.

Fletchwood Lane towards Ashurst Bridge

Existing view looking towards roundabout from Fletchwood Lane



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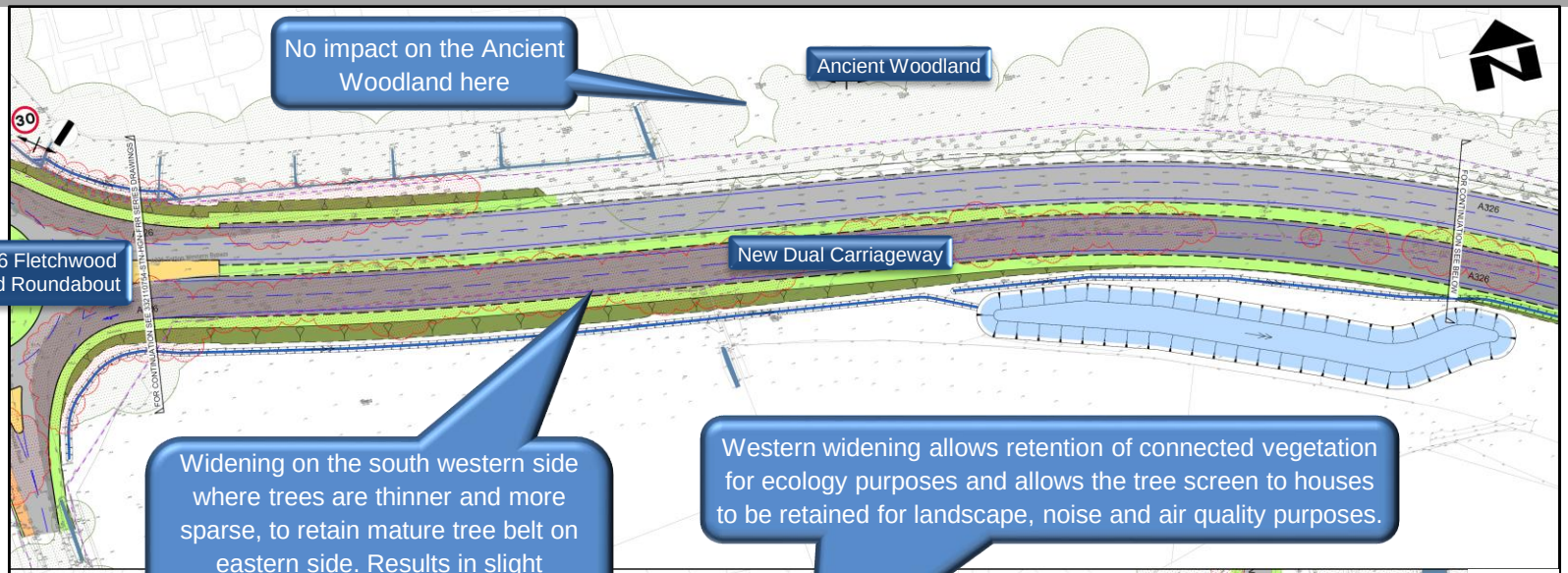
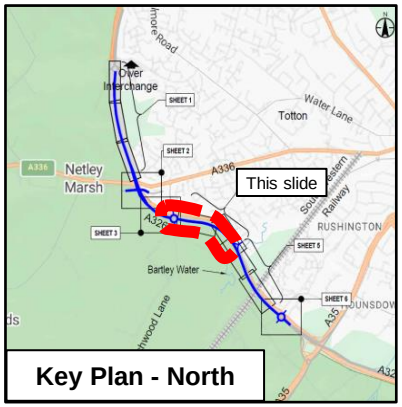
Work in Progress Design

A326 (North) Large Local Major Scheme

9. North Section: Fletchwood Road Junction to Monkton Lane Junction – Proposed Changes





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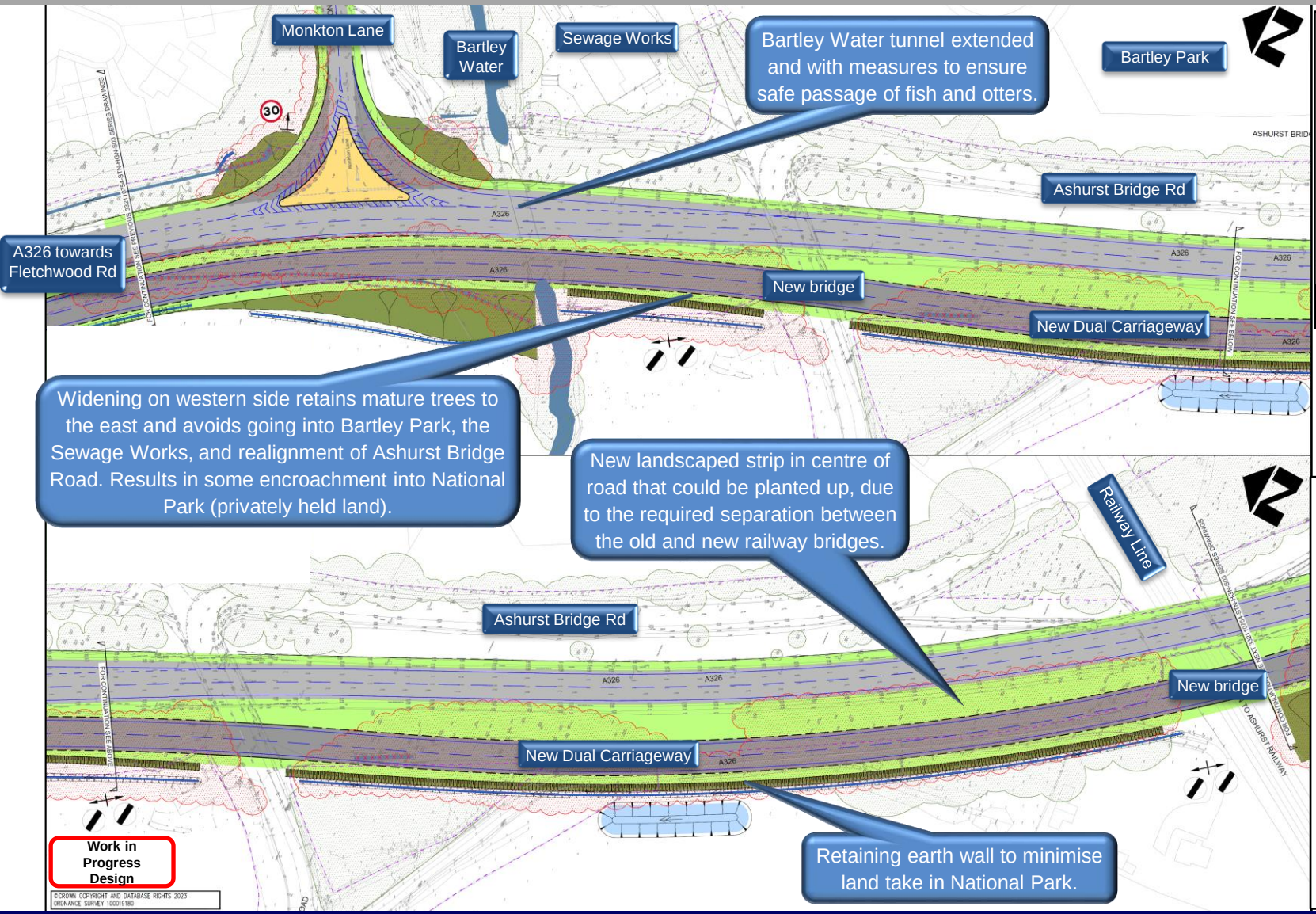
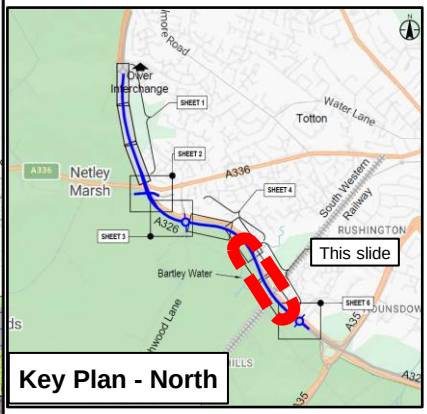
A326 (North) Large Local Major Scheme

10. North Section: Monkton Lane Junction to Railway Bridge – Proposed Changes





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A326 (North) Large Local Major Scheme

11. North Section: Railway Bridge to Cocklydown Lane Junction – Proposed Changes

Widening on western side retains significant tree buffer to houses to east, as eastern widening would mean the removal of nearly all the tree buffer. Results in encroachment into National Park (privately held land) but less tree loss overall as western side is less vegetated.

A326 towards Monkton Lane

New Dual Carriageway

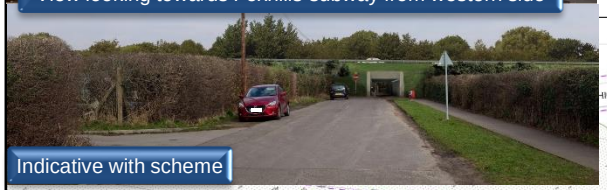
Railway Line

Foxhills

Foxhills subway extended.

Existing

View looking towards Foxhills subway from western side



Indicative with scheme

Cocklydown Lane

No new crossings, due to Foxhills subway being located circa 200m to the north-west.

New Dual Carriageway

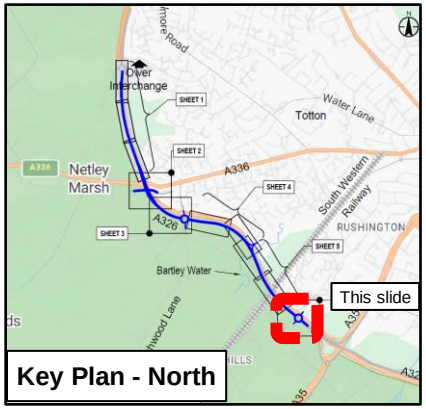
A326 south towards A35 and Marchwood

Bigger roundabout resulting in some tree loss on the corners of the roundabout.

To the south of Cocklydown Lane, the A326 is already a dual carriageway.

Knellers Lane

Work in Progress Design



Key Plan - North

Key

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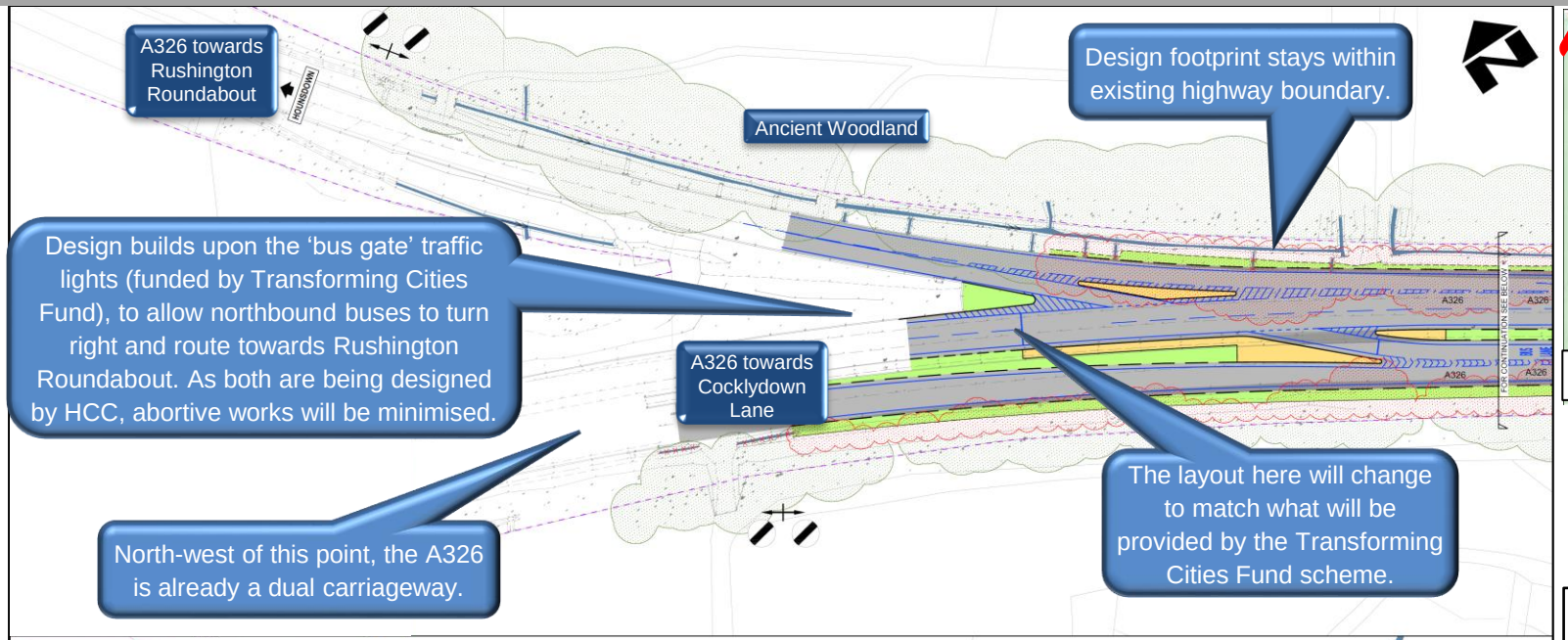
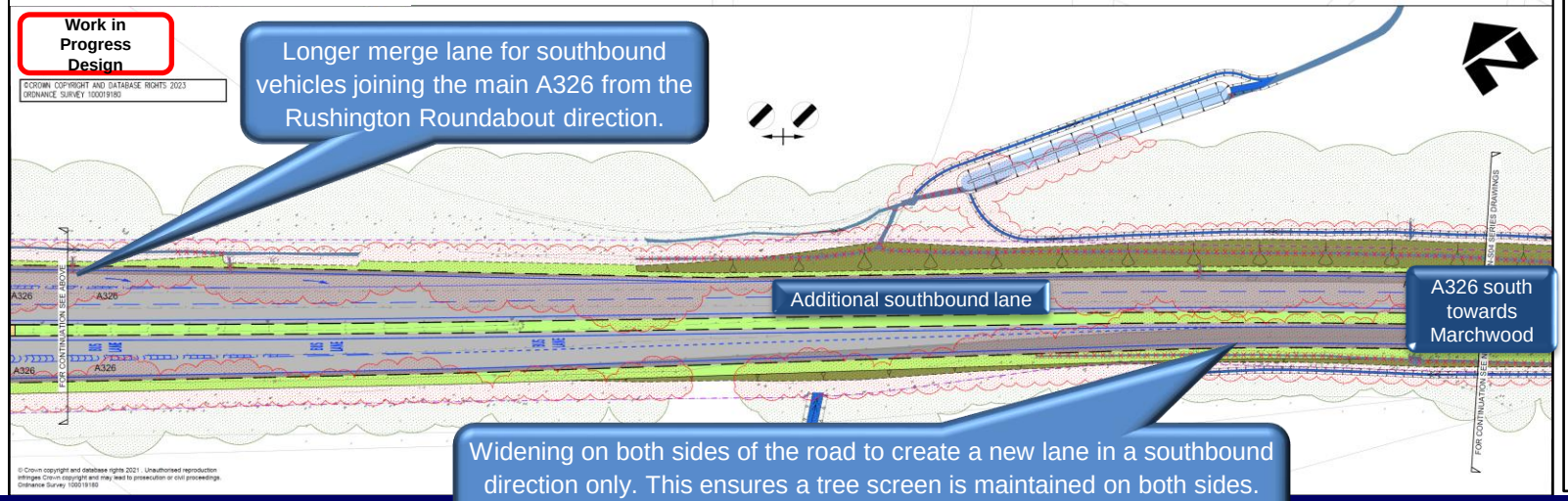
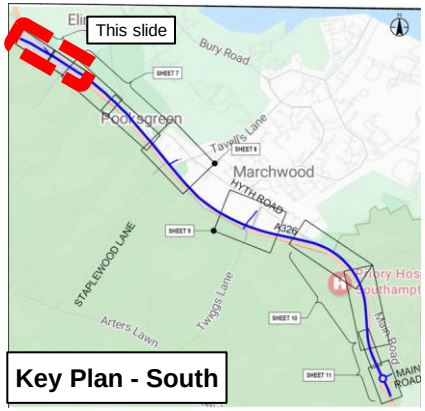
A326 (North) Large Local Major Scheme

12. South Section: A326 Marchwood Bypass Merge – Proposed Changes







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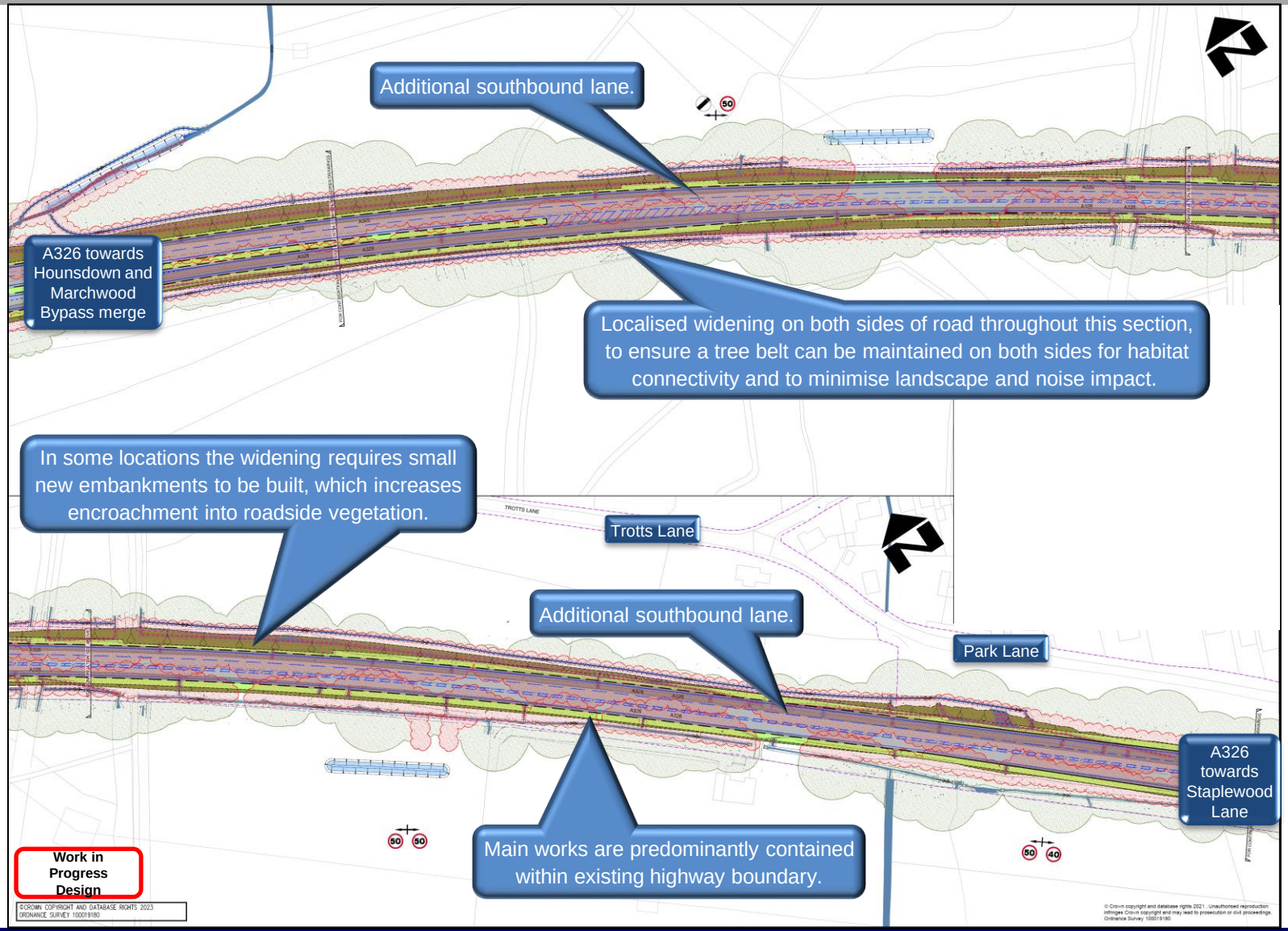
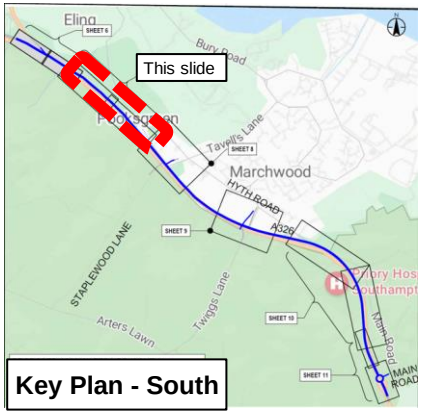
A326 (North) Large Local Major Scheme

13. South Section: A326 Merge to Staplewood Lane – Proposed Changes





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A326 (North) Large Local Major Scheme

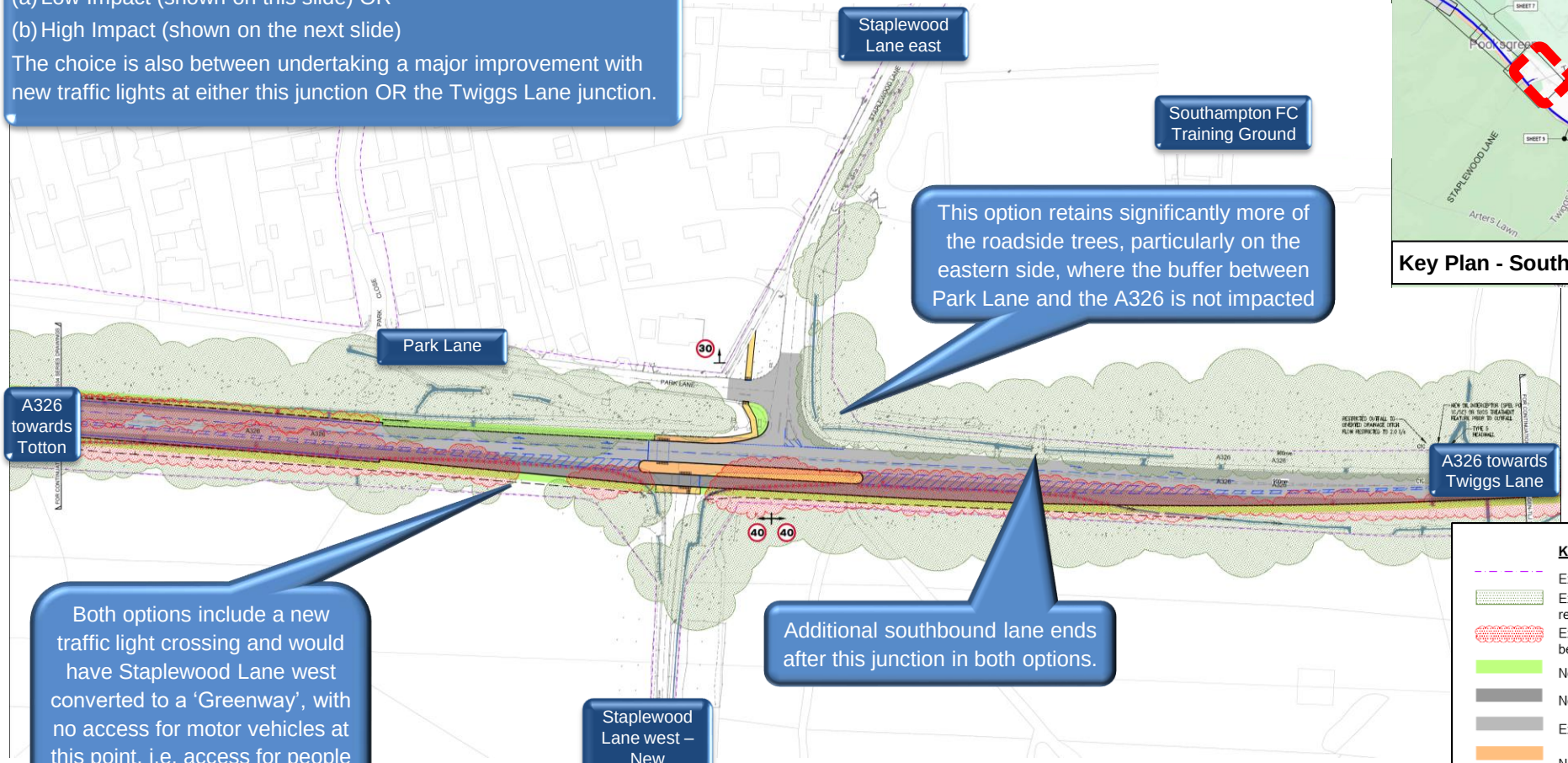
14. South Section: Staplewood Lane Junction Options – Low Impact Option

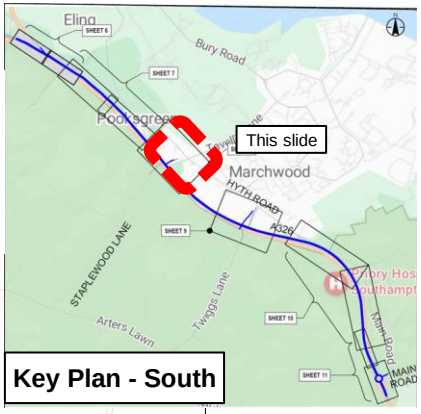
There are two options:

(a) Low Impact (shown on this slide) OR

(b) High Impact (shown on the next slide)

The choice is also between undertaking a major improvement with new traffic lights at either this junction OR the Twiggs Lane junction.





Key Plan - South

Key

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Work in Progress Design

A326 (North) Large Local Major Scheme

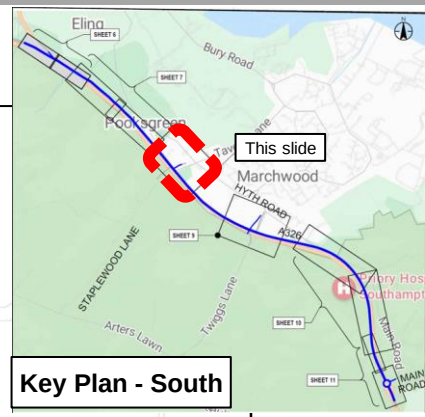
15. South Section: Staplewood Lane Junction Options – High Impact Option

There are two options:

(a) Low Impact (shown on previous slide) OR

(b) High Impact (shown on this slide)

The choice is also between undertaking a major improvement with new traffic lights at either this junction OR the Twiggs Lane junction.



View looking towards A326 from Staplewood Lane west. View would be similar in Low Impact Option, but without loss of trees in background

Key

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A326 (North) Large Local Major Scheme

16. South Section: Twiggs Lane Junction – Proposed Changes

There is a choice of two options:

(a) Low Impact OR

(b) High Impact

In this case, the **Low Impact** simply involves retaining the existing junction layout. If the High Impact option is preferred at this junction, it would mean the Low Impact option being taken forward at the Staplewood Lane junction.

Hythe Road

Twiggs Lane east into Marchwood

Southampton FC Training Ground

Twiggs Lane realigned through land owned by Southampton Football Club, allowing for creation of a new 'all-moves' traffic light junction. It will also create a new area of public space in front of Marchwood Infant School.

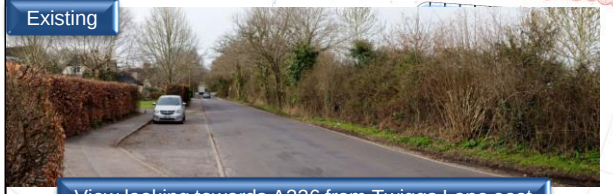
No Ancient Woodland in the vicinity of this junction. The County Council's preference is to provide a major improvement at this junction, with the Low Impact option at the Staplewood Lane junction.

Marchwood C of E Infants School

A326 towards Staplewood Lane

A326 towards Dibden

Existing



View looking towards A326 from Twiggs Lane east

Indicative with scheme

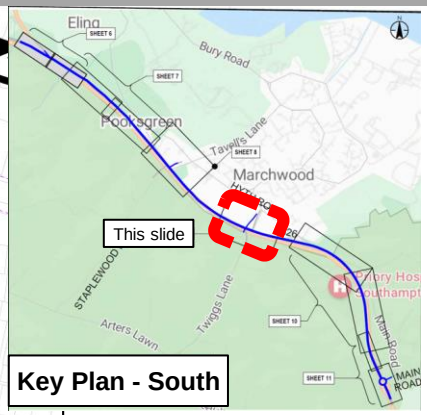
Existing traffic light crossing moved north.

Layout for this new area is indicative as options are under review and will be determined in close consultation with representatives of the school.

Twiggs Lane towards New Forest

High Impact Option

Work in Progress Design



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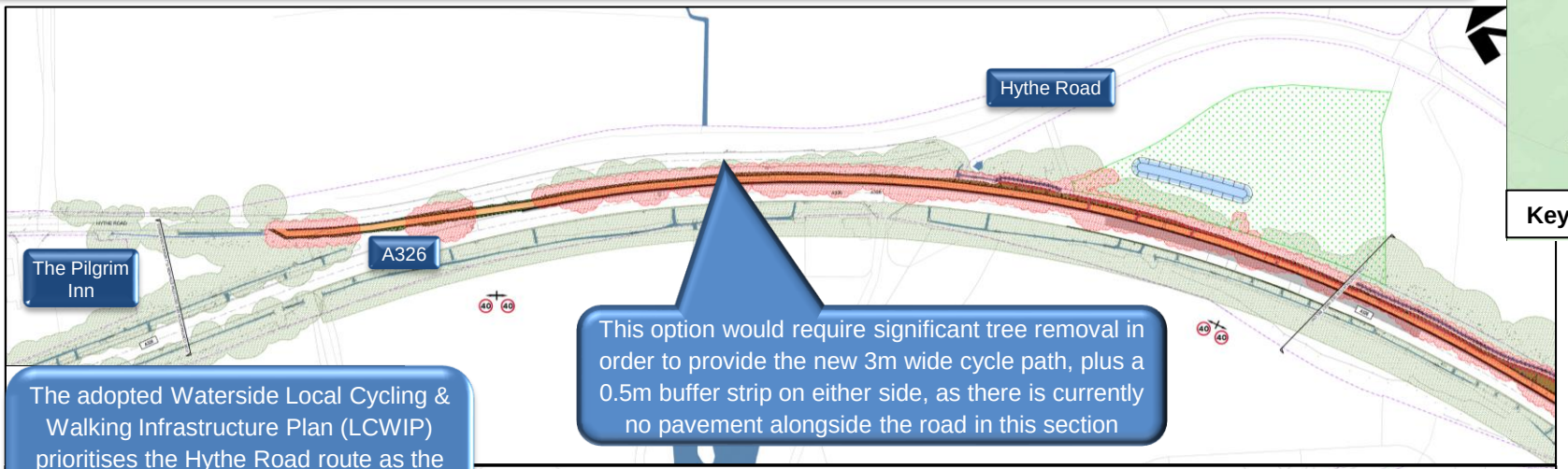
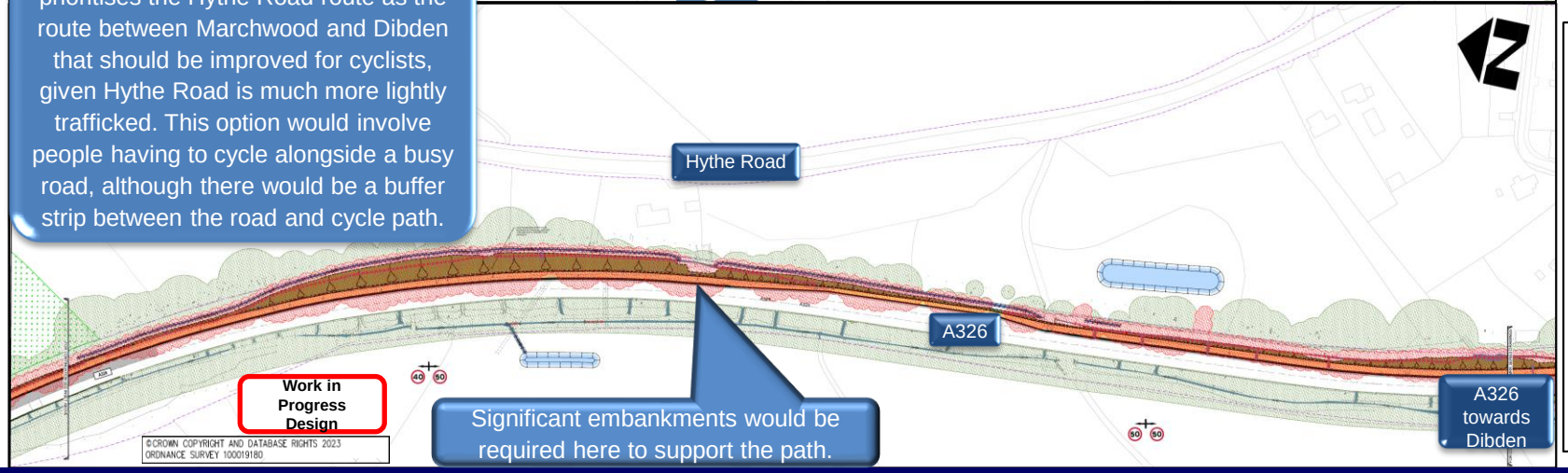
A326 (North) Large Local Major Scheme

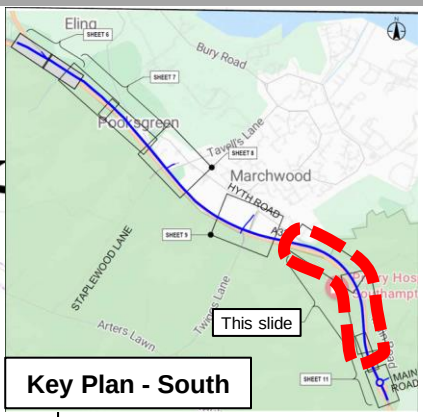
17. South Section: Cycle Route Options – Marchwood to Main Road Junction: Option (a)

The choice for cycle improvements between the southern edge of Marchwood and the Main Road junction is whether to:
(a) Provide an off-road cycle path alongside the existing A326, (**as shown on the design drawings below)**; OR
(b) Provide measures along the parallel section of Hythe Rd to make on-road cycling better (**as shown on the next slide**).



The adopted Waterside Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) prioritises the Hythe Road route as the route between Marchwood and Dibden that should be improved for cyclists, given Hythe Road is much more lightly trafficked. This option would involve people having to cycle alongside a busy road, although there would be a buffer strip between the road and cycle path.





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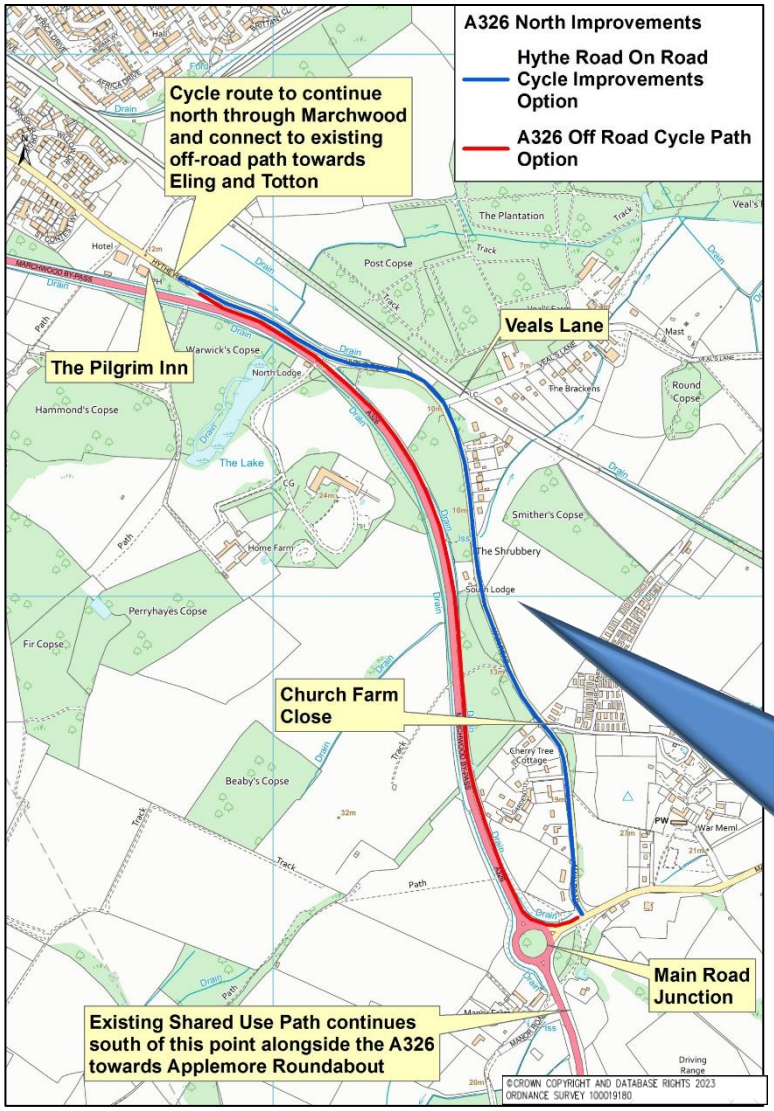
A326 (North) Large Local Major Scheme

18. South Section: Cycle Route Options – Marchwood to Main Road Junction: Option (b)



The choice for cycle improvements between the southern edge of Marchwood and the Main Road junction is whether to:

(a) Provide an off-road cycle path alongside A326, (**as shown on the previous page and by the red line on map below**); OR

(b) Provide measures along the parallel section of Hythe Rd/ Main Rd to make on-road cycling better (**as per this page and the blue line on map below**).

Improvements for cyclists along Hythe Rd would be made possible if the High Impact option was taken forward at the Twiggs Lane junction (see slide 13), which could enable the removal of the weight limit on Twiggs Lane and would reduce traffic flows along Main Road/ Hythe Road.

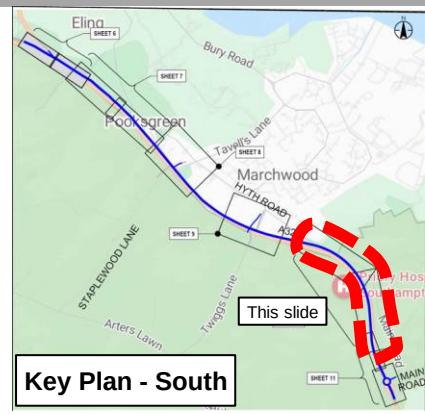
Four options have been identified to improve on-road cycling on Hythe Road:

(a) Close road to vehicles (with or without bus access) at a location TBC but possibly between Veals Lane and Church Farm Close.

(b) Change road to one-way, either northbound or southbound.

(c) Remove centreline and add advisory cycle lanes (could be on their own or in conjunction with other measures).

(d) Provide traffic calming e.g. priority working and build-outs.



The Transforming Cities Fund 'Eling to Holbury Cycle Route' scheme is due to provide some modest improvements along Hythe Road for cyclists, primarily cycle markings on the road and cycle warning signs.

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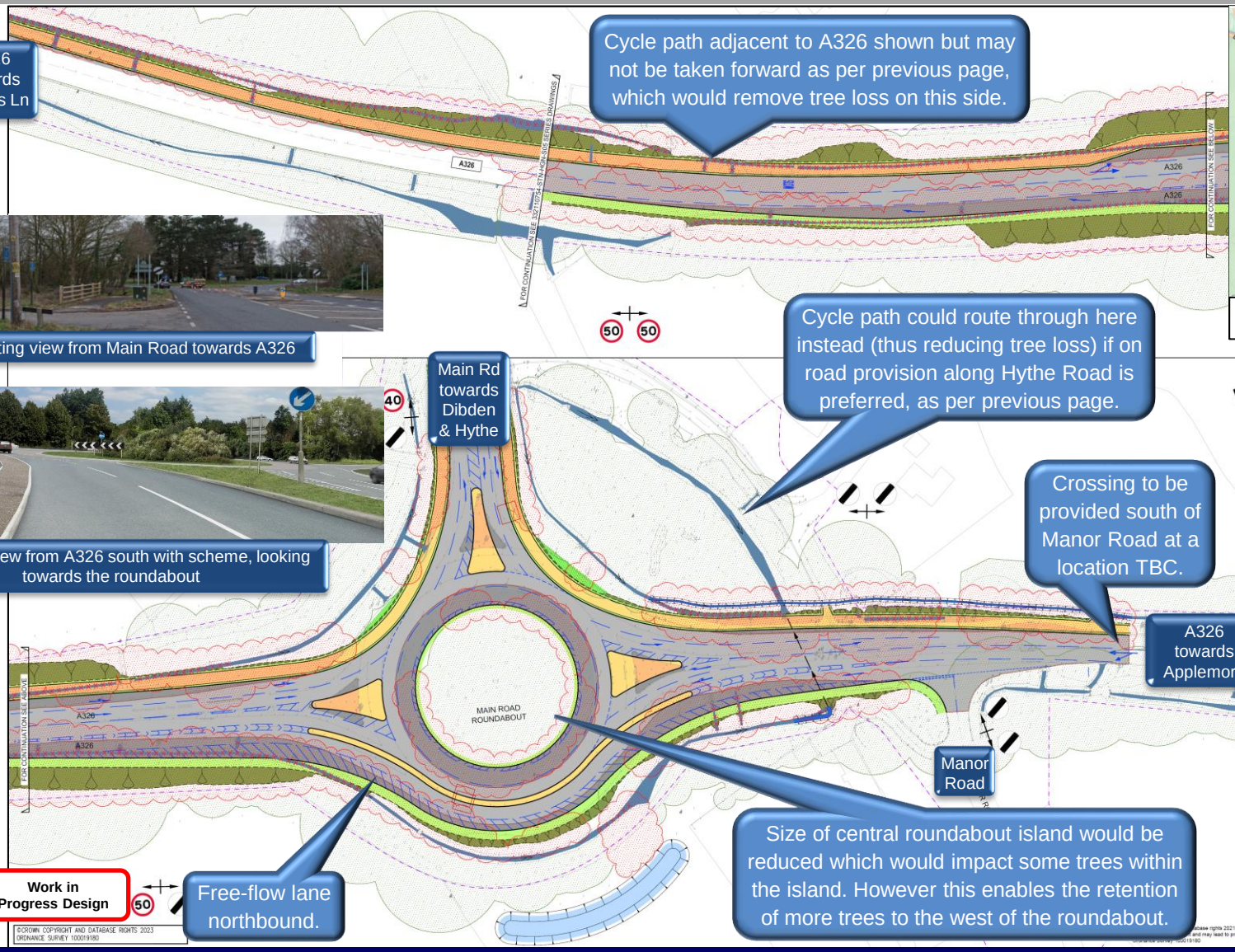
19. South Section: Main Road Junction at Dibden – Proposed Changes



A326 (North) Large Local Major Scheme

20. Business Case - Overview

Forecast Costs and Benefits:

The main benefits forecast to result from the scheme are:

- Faster journeys for all road users including businesses and public transport, resulting from increased average vehicle speeds and less queuing (most significant benefit).
- Vehicle operating cost savings.
- Better highway network reliability due to more capacity meaning less likelihood of delays.
- Wider economic benefits from improved access to employment and increased productivity.
- Reduced severance (the road acting as a barrier to movement across it) due to new road crossings and better access to the New Forest.
- Social benefits to deprived areas in south Waterside resulting from better communication and access linkages in a peninsula type location, where the A326 is the primary link.
- Overall minimum 10% biodiversity enhancement.
- By encouraging traffic to use the A326 (due to increased traffic capacity) rather than other parallel routes, enabling other measures in the wider Waterside to help people walking and cycling.

The main costs associated with the scheme are:

- construction costs and whole life maintenance costs.
- potential for adverse impacts on noise and air quality, although mitigated as much as possible.
- potential for adverse landscape impacts in the shorter-term, but with mitigation over the longer term these would diminish.
- potential for adverse impacts on biodiversity in the shorter-term, but in the longer term a biodiversity net gain plan will ensure the overall impact is beneficial.

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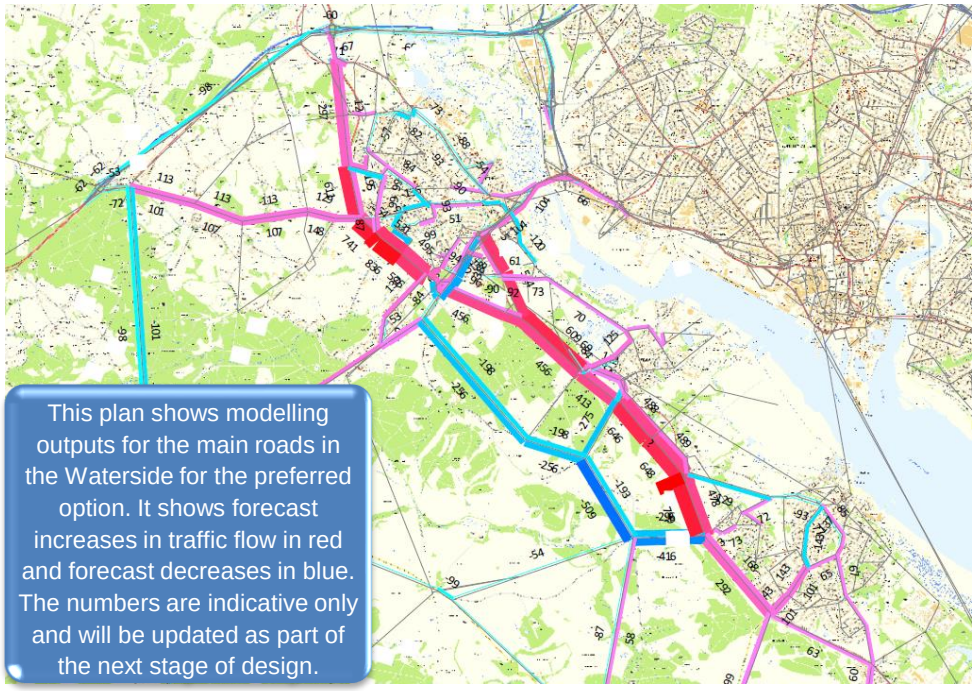
21. Business Case – Other Considerations

Funding:

As part of the Large Local Majors (LLM) programme, the DfT may provide up to 85% of the costs of constructing the scheme, and are providing up to two-thirds of the cost of developing the scheme up to the submission of the Planning Application.

The remaining 15% of construction costs are still to be confirmed and will need to be made up of a local contribution. Plans are in place to assemble this funding.

The cost of the preferred option at Strategic Business Case stage was £85m, but with recent inflationary price increases, the construction cost is now expected to be above £100m. This cost is similar to the costs of other schemes in the LLM programme, which is specifically for schemes of at least £50m in value.



This plan shows modelling outputs for the main roads in the Waterside for the preferred option. It shows forecast increases in traffic flow in red and forecast decreases in blue. The numbers are indicative only and will be updated as part of the next stage of design.

Alternative Scheme:

When the Government approved the first stage of the Business Case they stated that in the next stage of the business case process the County Council will need to assess a lower cost alternative option alongside our preferred scheme. This lower cost alternative is likely to involve junction improvements only and little of the highway widening to provide either a dual carriageway on the northern section or the additional southbound lane on the southern section.

This would be expected to significantly reduce build costs and still deliver some of the benefits.

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22. Environmental Impact - Introduction

Landscape and Biodiversity

The A326 runs through a landscape characterised by pasture, dense hedgerows and woodlands.

Described as a “transitional landscape” between the settlements to the east and the open heath to the west – the impact of the road is currently largely enhanced by its borders of mature trees. The trees together with adjacent embankments provide screening along much of the route.

Within the boundaries of the existing highway there area a range of different habitats including meadow, woodland and scrub. Of particular ecological importance are the Lowland Meadows and remnant Fen Meadows (parts have been locally designated as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation, SINC) and nationally designated as Ancient Woodland.

The New Forest National Park boundary lies adjacent to the west side of the A326, but does not comprise Open Access Common Land in the vicinity of the scheme study area, as the land is privately owned and enclosed.

The following is a summary of key ecology findings to date, with surveys ongoing:

- Great crested newt: Single pond with positive eDNA result. Not directly impacted by scheme.
- Bat roosts and foraging: A large number of trees with roost potential in scheme corridor and two confirmed roosts to date. Eight species of foraging bats identified.
- Dormouse: No evidence recorded.
- Reptiles: Low populations of slow worm, common lizard and grass snake at several places.
- Breeding Birds: Range of species identified including Firecrest and Nightjar in wider area.
- Badger: Surveys are ongoing and results are confidential.
- Invertebrates: Range of species recorded including a number of notable ones.
- Fish: Seven species recorded in Bartley Water including European Eel and Bullhead.
- Otter: Otter spraints identified along Bartley Water.

A326 (North) Large Local Major Scheme

23. Environmental Impact – Other Considerations

A full **Environmental Statement** will be produced for the Planning Application, which will include an assessment of impacts and a detailed mitigation strategy for the following topics:

- Biodiversity
- Air Quality
- Noise & Vibration
- Landscape & Visual Impact
- Cultural Heritage
- Traffic & Transport
- Geology & Soils
- Population & Human Health
- Material Assets & Waste
- Climate Change
- Flood Risk, Drainage, & Water Environment

What is Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)?

It is a strategy to contribute to the recovery of nature when developing land. It is a way of making sure the habitat for wildlife is in a better state than it was before the development. The Environment Act sets out the following key components that are now mandatory as part of the Town & Country Planning Act:

- minimum 10% gain required, calculated using the Biodiversity Metric & approval of a biodiversity gain plan.
- habitat secured for at least 30 years via planning obligations or conservation covenants.
- delivered on-site, off-site or via a new statutory biodiversity credits scheme.
- national register for net gain delivery sites.

Climate Change Impacts:

Overall greenhouse gas impacts from vehicle emissions are forecast to be negligible, as the scheme is largely expected to cause a redistribution of traffic.

Average vehicle speeds are forecast to increase to some extent resulting in increased emissions from cars, but this is balanced by reductions in emissions from freight (due to less queuing and more direct / faster routes).

A reduction in queueing vehicles will be likely to benefit air quality locally.

The Planning Application will include a full assessment of climate change impact, including a carbon management strategy for the construction works. There will also be a Climate Change Statement which sets out how the scheme responds to the principles of HCC's Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan.

A326 (North) Large Local Major Scheme

24. Environmental Mitigation and Enhancement Strategy - Overview

The proposed scheme is being designed to reduce its impact on the landscape, on local ecology and on the wider environment. Some key measures include:

- Carriageway widening to the west side of the existing road (in preference to the east side) to ensure mature vegetation is retained beside the main settlement areas.
- Protection of Ancient Woodland, Veteran Trees and Priority Habitats, e.g. Lowland Meadows.
- Protection of specific flora and fauna, including relocation where necessary.
- A comprehensive landscape and ecological replanting strategy.
- Purchasing land in order to provide additional space for replacement planting and habitat creation (Biodiversity Net Gain, see previous page).

A detailed mitigation and compensation strategy will be developed in tandem with the next stage of highway design, including developing a landscape plan which maximises biodiversity along the scheme corridor. Example measures include:

- Creating species rich grasslands along new verges.
- Maximising the biodiversity value of drainage features as wetland habitat where possible
- Planting thousands of native trees and shrubs on new embankments and verges.
- Provision of acoustic fencing and green walls.
- Protecting the passage of fish and otters through the re-designed Bartley Water culvert tunnel.
- Restoring and improving the management and biodiversity of Designated Woodland and Grassland sites within the wider A326 corridor.
- Investigating opportunities to work with the New Forest National Park and New Forest District Council to fund or deliver appropriate schemes that they are developing/ promoting.

A326 (North) Large Local Major Scheme

25. Next Steps / Contact Us

June / July 2023	• Public Engagement period
August '23 to Spring 2024	• Engagement feedback analysis/ Preliminary Design/ Planning Application preparation
Spring 2024	• Submission of Planning Application & Outline Business Case
Autumn '24 to Winter '25	• Detailed Design & Full Business Case preparation (Subject to Planning & Outline Business Case approval)
Winter '25 to Summer 2026	• Procurement period followed by Full Business Case Submission and review
Autumn 2026	• Start of Construction (Subject to Final Business Case approval). Circa two years to build.

We need your feedback to inform the next stage of the scheme design.
Please visit the scheme webpage for the full Information Pack and accompanying survey, along with a fly-though video providing an overview of the scheme design:
hants.gov.uk/a326
or by using the QR code:

Feedback from the engagement will be reported back via an HCC Decision Report in November 2023, together with how the feedback is being taken into account. The same report will seek approval to submit a Planning Application for the scheme, likely to take place in spring 2024.

To record comments related to the scheme please complete the survey via the details above. You can also contact us with any concerns or comments in the following ways below:

Email: major.schemes@hants.gov.uk

Post: Strategic Transport,
Hampshire County Council,
The Castle,
Winchester SO23 8UD

Telephone: 0300 555 1388