

City of Durham Trust Bent House Lane Housing Development

Walking and cycling access

Preliminary suggestions in advance of an outline planning application being prepared by Banks Group.

19 November 2020

Footpath improvements

Various suggestions are marked up on the following two maps. The solid lines are already dedicated as rights of way. The dotted lines are not public rights of way and not all are currently in existence as paths.



1 Path along southern edge of Sherburn Road and Woodlands estates

This path is already well used. It could be useful as an off-road route to Laurel Avenue Primary School, in which case a surface suitable for buggies would be required, and perhaps for cycling. There would not need to be lighting for use as a school route as the primary school day starts and ends in daylight. As well as leading to the school, it would offer a shorter route to Pelaw Woods, parts of Gilesgate (via Silver Link Bridge) and the city centre.

2, 3 Paths to connect with Durham City Footpath 90

These paths would link the development with the existing footpath (shown as 7 on the map), allowing some shorter circular walks. The alignment of path 2 follows an existing farm track.

4 New path to River Wear

Provision of this path would require co-operation with the landowner on the other side of the Old Durham Beck: the University either owns or leases the land for playing fields. There is already a footbridge over the beck, but the gate and fence are tied to prevent access at present. If this path linked with Bent House Lane (labelled 9 on the map) as indicated, then people living in the new development could use it as a walking route down to the Rose Tree public house by Shincliffe Bridge.



Photo 1: Existing footbridge over the beck



Photo 2: Part of path between footbridge and River Wear footpath (Shincliffe FP 10)

5 Access to Shincliffe Footpath 18

At four locations on the B1198 there are paths which lead to the old railway line to Shincliffe, now designated as Shincliffe Footpath 18 (labelled 8 on the map). One of them, labelled 5, is directly opposite the end of Bent House Lane, but it is not an officially designated footpath and may require improvement.

A number of longer circular walks are possible by crossing the B1198, but it is a fast road and there is poor visibility at some of the crossing points. Pedestrian refuges at some of these locations (labelled A, B, C and D) would reduce the severance effect of the road. This could be offered as mitigation for the increased traffic on the B1198 which is likely to result from the development.

6, 7 Durham City Footpaths 88 and 90

Both of these footpaths are not well-defined on the ground, and in places are poorly drained. The route of Footpath 90 on the definitive map strikes out across the farm land to cut some of the corners, but this route appears to have been ploughed over and walkers using the path tend to stay close to the field boundaries. Both of these paths could therefore do with improvement.

Footpath 90 leads to the A1(M) tunnel, beyond which the paths continue to the medieval bridge at Sherburn House. This is on the Heritage at Risk Register and urgently requires conservation work.



Photo 3: Poor drainage on track where Footpath 90 leaves Bent House Lane

9 Bridge on Bent House Lane bridleway

Officially the designated bridleway crosses the beck via a footbridge, but this is quite overgrown and is clearly not being used. It might be better to improve the vehicular bridge (which has a poor surface and no parapets) and reroute the bridleway.



Photo 4: Vehicular bridge on Bent House Lane bridleway, with puddles



Photo 5: Footbridge on Bent House Lane bridleway

10 Alternative connection to Sherburn House

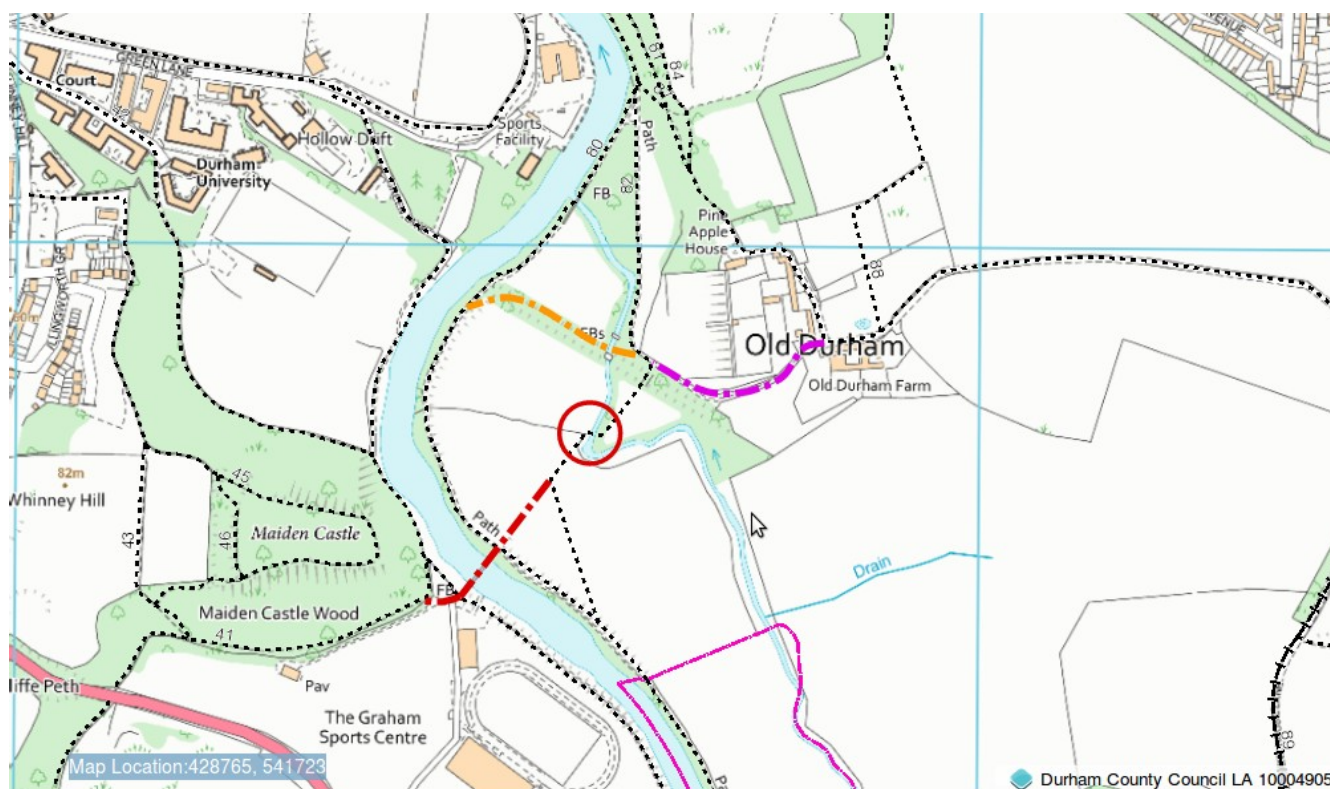
Footpath 90 descends the hill to the beck, and then ascends to reach the tunnel under the motorway again. This suggestion would follow the contours more closely, along the alignment of the former railway line, connecting the proposed paths labelled 2 and 3 from the new development. In terms of priorities, the other paths suggested in this document would rank higher, as they would enable a greater range of new opportunities.



1 Reinstatement of footpath no. 82

This footpath connects with National Cycle Network route 14 close to the orchard at Old Durham, and used to lead to the playing fields and the Maiden Castle footbridge via a footbridge over the Old Durham Beck. The bridge over the beck was closed seven years ago and the footpath has been suspended ever since, but still appears on the Definitive Map.

The following is taken from the Definitive Map of County Durham public rights of way. The red line has been added to indicate the more direct route that could be taken by a restored Footpath 82. The missing bridge is circled in red.



The routes labelled 3 and 4 on the map show that this link would give more direct access to Elvet, the city centre and the University than the Pelaw Woods route.

2 Alternative link

With the Old Durham Beck footbridge unavailable, walkers and cyclists have been using the old railway embankment, with its bridge over the beck, as an alternative. This route could be made more accessible at each end by easing the gradients and landscaping, but the direct route labelled 1 would be far preferable. A footpath connecting steeply with the embankment route just downstream of the bridge has also developed.

Pedestrian highway improvements

Heading towards the primary schools to the west, the main issues for pedestrians are the wide splays on side roads which make crossing more hazardous.

On Dragon Lane it can be hard to cross the two-lane exits from the car parks of the large retail stores. Crossing Dragon Lane itself is difficult except where there are signals at major junctions. This creates issues of severance for pedestrian journeys.

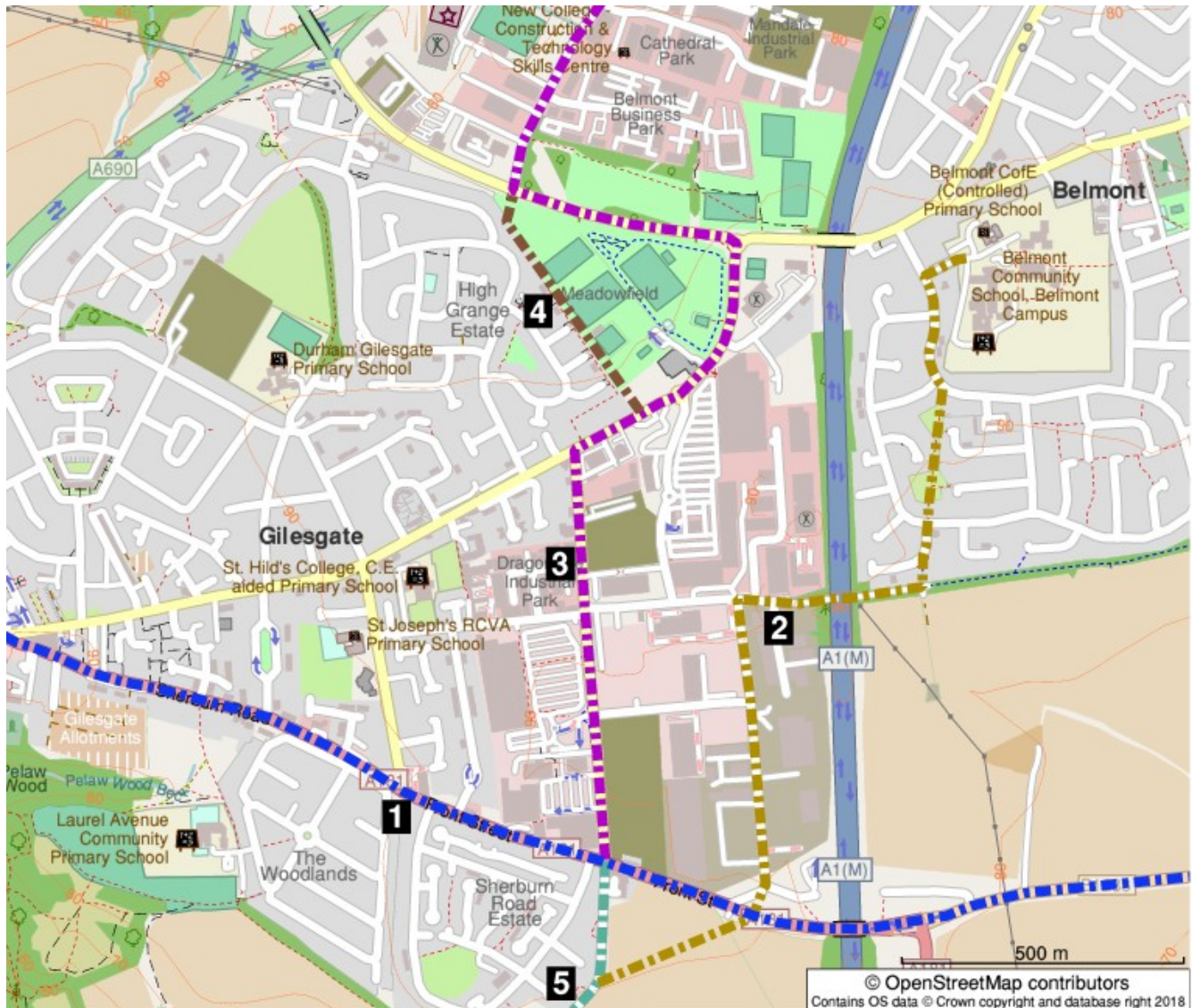
Heading north from the development along Damson Way, which would be the logical route to the shops on McIntyre Way, there is a footway on one side of the road only, and the road has a hostile industrial

estate feel which will not encourage walking. This is a shame, because the bridleway section of Renny's Lane beyond the A1(M) is an attractive and popular route for walkers.

Cycle path improvements

While many of the footpath suggestions can be achieved through work on land which Banks Group controls, the cycle path improvements often require off-site works. This is to be expected, as people can cover greater distances by cycling so there is a need for a good network in the wider surroundings.

The suggestions are split between two maps.



1 Sherburn to Gilesgate

Heading west from the proposed development the A181 has no provision for cycling. This is a

key route to several primary schools, on Laurel Avenue and Mill Lane. The need for provision of cycling infrastructure is recognised in the Durham City Sustainable Transport Delivery Plan, and therefore the current situation cannot be considered acceptable. A high quality route, conforming to LTN 1/20, is required, with attention paid to access to Mill Lane.

Beyond Laurel Avenue the route is more challenging, but it is one of the two main routes to the city centre. The other, National Cycle Network route 14, is unlit for much of its length and therefore does not support all-year utility journey use because many target users would feel vulnerable after dark.

Between Bent House Lane and the new junction with Damson Way, there is a shared footway/cycleway on the south side of the A181. There is no verge separating it from the carriageway. The development would lead to more foot traffic so the cycle and pedestrian paths may need to be segregated. Taking the route slightly inside the site boundary away from the road would be beneficial: the consultation leaflet shows a green area which could accommodate this.

Heading east, there is a footway to Sherburn on the south side of the B1283, but at the junction with the A181 this switches to the north side. There is no facility for pedestrians or cyclists to cross. We suggest that the route should be connected along the south side of the A181 over the motorway bridge to link with the existing route opposite the end of Damson Way. Signalised crossings should be provided and the design should conform to LTN 1/20.

The existing footway on the B1283 is narrow and of poor quality. A woman using an electric wheelchair, forced to use the carriageway, was killed on this road in 2010.



Photo 6: Junction of A181 and B1283: hostile for walking and cycling

The motorway bridge parapets are too low for safe cycling on the footway, and would need

raising.



Photo 7: A181 bridge over A1(M)

2 Bent House Lane to Belmont Community School

The consultation leaflet showed a cycling and walking route striking out into the development site from the bend in Bent House Lane (labelled 5) towards the Damson Way junction. Unfortunately the land immediately opposite the new junction does not fall under the control of Banks Group. Nevertheless this link will be welcome, but it should be designed to be clear, direct, and to have priority over the access roads within the estate.

Damson Way has recently been upgraded with a shared use footway on the east side, but the footway switches to the west side at the northern end, making the route less than ideal. The junction with Renny's Lane does not accord with the LTN 1/20 design guidance. The section of Renny's Lane from the junction with Damson Way along to the A1(M) underpass is provided with painted lanes on the carriageway. This needs to be considered for improvement also.

This route gives access to the local secondary school, as well as several primary schools in the Belmont estate.

3, 4 Route to Belmont Industrial Estate

The route from the development to the industrial estate is important because this is a local centre of employment. On the way it also links to the main retail provision in the area. There is limited cycle provision on Dragon Lane but the design is outdated and poor.



Photo 8: Dragon Lane cycle route

Beyond Renny's Lane there is no provision. Cyclists have to navigate a signalised crossing and two roundabouts to reach the Belmont Link Road which is a national speed limit road and therefore not considered safe for cycling.

The map shows a suggestion for a route (labelled **4**) that would cut off the corner and lead more directly to the industrial estate spine road. The optimum route would require land acquisition and so would be difficult to achieve. The main link road will need improvements to enable access from Carrville and Belmont in any case. One option is to use the alignment of Belmont footpath no. 6, away from the link road.



1 Bent House Lane to Shincliffe

For connections south from the proposed development the Bent House Lane bridleway is the obvious route. It is also a potential route to the University's Mountjoy campus via the A177 and Shincliffe Peth. The section along the B1198 is unsuitable for cycling, being a national speed limit route. A dedicated bidirectional cycle route needs to be provided on the north side at least as far as Bent House Lane. On an older edition of the Durham City cycle map the County Council advised cyclists to use this section in an eastbound direction only.

2 National Cycle Network route 14

As noted already, the NCN 14 is unlit for most of the route into the city centre, and it is hard to see how this could be lit sensitively given the importance of the area as part of the inner setting of the World Heritage Site and a dark corridor for wildlife. This means that this route will not be suitable all year round for all target users, because of the perceived vulnerability at night time.

There is a locked gate across the access road at Old Durham, near where the label “2” appears on the map. While people riding ordinary bicycles can get round the end without dismounting, non-standard adapted cycles, tandems and trailers cannot easily navigate this barrier, which may also cause difficulties for mobility scooters and larger prams or buggies. This is likely to be an equalities issue. Unfortunately there is no straightforward solution, because the barrier helps to reduce the anti-social nuisance from motor scooters, motorbikes and quad bikes which is a persistent problem around the Pelaw Woods and Bent House Lane area.

These issues reinforce the need to provide a safe cycle route on the A181 towards Gilesgate and the city centre.

Summary of cycling routes

In most directions from the proposed development the current provision for cycling, if any, does not comply with the current guidance in many respects. If the issues are not addressed this will suppress the take-up of cycling as a travel option from the new development, and the site will not fulfill its potential as a sustainable urban extension of the city.

Surfaces and lighting

In our meeting with Banks Group, the issue of path surfaces was briefly mentioned. Crushed magnesian limestone can be used as a self-binding surface treatment, but on paths with a greater gradient, or which are likely to be used by cycles (officially or informally) the surface can quickly degrade and a bound or metalled surface would be necessary.

Most of the footpaths will be used primarily for leisure, and metalled surfaces would usually be considered inappropriate in a rural setting. Drainage and composition of paths will need to be addressed in some locations: Footpath 90 has been mentioned particularly. If there is insufficient attention to drainage, then paths can easily become a watercourse during heavy rain, scouring any unbound surface. With the high proportion of clay in the Durham soils, over a few years this can lead to paths becoming impassible to all but determined users.

A higher quality surface will be required on routes that might be used for utility journeys. For example, the route along the southern edge of the existing housing estates in the direction of Laurel Avenue Primary School may merit a surface which is suitable for use by prams and buggies.

As there is a persistent problem with anti-social use of motorbikes and quad bikes in the area, care will need to be taken in the design and surfacing of any new paths to prevent abuse where possible and to minimise the damage that would be caused.

Main cycling links should preferably have smooth machine-laid surfaces, though if the location is deemed sensitive there are alternatives to black asphalt: the County Council has laid an unobtrusive but good-quality surface on Frankland Lane, for example.

Lighting paths in the green belt would be a very contentious issue. Dark corridors are beneficial for wildlife, added to which the setting of the World Heritage Site could be affected. The National Cycle Network route through Old Durham therefore probably needs to remain unlit.

If it is considered absolutely necessary to light any paths, this will have to be designed very carefully, lighting routes as low as possible to avoid any spillage away from the path and using lamps at the blue end of the spectrum to reduce glare. It is possible to design lighting that comes on only when people approach. See the following article about an installation in a Dutch nature reserve:

<https://bicycledutch.wordpress.com/2018/01/09/lights-that-switch-on-just-for-you/>