

For SuSAC 12 Nov: Transport Working Group

DRAFT

Proposed Off-Road Cycleway Shaftesbury-Motcombe

A Sustainable Shaftesbury Advisory Committee (SuSAC) proposal for recommendation for support by Dorset Council and Shaftesbury Town Council

The Proposal

The proposal is for a combined off-road cycleway-cum-pedestrian path linking Shaftesbury with Gillingham via Motcombe with the purpose of improving transport connections in North Dorset in keeping with the latest **Dorset Local Transport Plan** (DLT4), due to be published in spring 2025, by

- providing access to the rail network via the railway station at Gillingham for residents without motor vehicles who live in Shaftesbury
- supplementing the weekday bus service between Shaftesbury and Gillingham currently limited to daytime only, with no evening service for returning commuters and other users and no weekend service

as well as by

- providing a recreational facility for all ages and abilities to enjoy a healthy outdoor activity and to be better able to appreciate and connect to the natural countryside in keeping with the **Dorset Nature Recovery Strategy** (due in 2025) and the **Sustainable Shaftesbury Masterplan 2024-31** (published March 2024).

The Background

The B3081 Shaftesbury to Gillingham road is very busy from motor traffic including numerous heavy lorries which make it dangerous to cycle on, particularly after dark. Shaftesbury residents require a safe route to cycle to Gillingham in order to access that town and the railway network. The safest option is an **off-road cycle route**.

The Rationale

The provision of a safer route for walking and cycling for Shaftesbury residents would have considerable health benefits as illustrated already in Dorset by the good use made of the off-road walking and cycling 'Trailway' route from Sturminster Newton to Blandford Forum which avoids the busy A357 and A350.

The current car-only option between Shaftesbury and Gillingham means that at many times of the day and week Shaftesbury can feel isolating for residents, young and old, and who don't have cars. Improving connections for **active** residents provides an affordable way of connecting to life beyond Shaftesbury, and it could also increase the number of active residents and so create even more health benefits for local people.

Installing such a vehicle-free means of travelling between these two major towns in North Dorset would contribute considerably to a reduction in carbon emissions and meet the commitment of both Shaftesbury Town Council's and Dorset Council's to address the climate emergency.

Existing footpaths and rights of way

Existing rights of way that already provide a potential off-road route for walkers and cyclists are:

- A public footpath between Shaftesbury and Motcombe
- A public bridleway between Motcombe and Gillingham

Connection between the two routes within the centre of Motcombe is close to the mini-roundabout in that village and would require cycling on the not-very-busy road for only a short distance.

The bridleway to Gillingham joins the road through the town adjacent to the ancient site of the Kings Court Palace (O/S Explorer 129) close to the railway station in Gillingham town centre.

For the proposed route Shaftesbury to Motcombe see map attached (map by Bernie Ede)

Discussions already held

The SuSAC working group has the support of Shaftesbury county councillor Derek Beer for the project and is in discussion with the Dorset Council cycleways officer who would also like to see the support of the town council. The national cycleways charity Sustrans is also to be approached for support and advice. Meanwhile an application for funding towards a feasibility study has already been encouraged by a local charity.

Recommendation to Shaftesbury Town Council

Shaftesbury Town Council (STC) is asked to support a request to Dorset Council for a feasibility study to develop an **Off-road Cycleway** between Shaftesbury and Gillingham using existing Rights of Way, noting that charity funding for such a study is very likely to be forthcoming.

John Nelson (lead)
Transport Working Group
SuSAC

5 Nov 2024

