

The background of the slide is a landscape photograph showing a valley with rolling green fields, a line of trees in the distance, and a clear blue sky. The foreground is dominated by dark, bare tree branches.

ATKINS

National Cycle Network Route 21 Northern Extension

Feasibility Study

On behalf of
East Sussex County Council

FINAL REPORT

CLIENT

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File ref: P:\GBLOW\LEGE\PLH\Landscape\Projects\5035032 - NCN21 Cuckoo to Forest Way\05 REPORT

Cover illustration: View West, looking towards the Low Weald from the Cuckoo Trail.

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INTRODUCTION

Atkins was commissioned by East Sussex County Council (ESCC) to carry out a feasibility study of options for the extension of the National Cycle Network (NCN) Route 21 between Heathfield and Mayfield and to investigate any additional routes linking the Cuckoo Trail and the Forest Way.

The submission as required by ESCC is in the form of a report on the feasibility of the NCN Route 21 Northern Extension. This report concludes at Work Stage B as defined by the Landscape Institute Stages of Work, and includes alternative solutions, technical and financial implications, and advises on the need to obtain planning permissions and other statutory requirements for implementation.

The project was commissioned in late 2005, with initial site visits, consultation and appraisal processes being undertaken through the early months of 2006. Although the brief at award of contract did not include public consultation, the design team has taken steps to include residents and local stakeholders by continuing communication. This has had a positive contribution to the holistic strategy employed in the compiling this report and it recognises the importance of community involvement and participation.

The lead consultant team has followed the Cycling Infrastructure Design Process as described in *Policy, Planning and Design for Walking and Cycling* published by the Department for Transport (DfT). The associated documents also published by the DfT, *National Cycling Strategy, Cycle Audit and Review* and *Guidelines and Practical Details* have also informed the process and conclusions. These documents set standards for the planning, design and implementation of an NCN route. For clarification, the NCN routes are developed and co-ordinated by the sustainable transport charity Sustrans.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of a study to examine the feasibility of East Sussex County Council's proposals to upgrade the existing 'interim' National Cycle Route 21.

The report aims to take a balanced and holistic view of the constraints and offer practical solutions. A multi-disciplinary team consisting of consultants in Transport Engineering, Planning, Landscape, Ecology and Heritage contributed to a qualitative matrix that compares like for like principles that contribute to a successful cycleway. These are then reviewed to determine the most favourable option with combined safety and minimal environmental disturbance as key priorities. This approach to safety is based on NCN aims, previous studies and the condition of the existing route, whereas the approach to minimal environmental disturbance is as a result of the legislative and physical context of the study area as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, an environmental designation restricting development that may normally be permitted.

Section 1 of the report details the approach and methodology, describing the general principles for assessing good cycling infrastructure, and then details the tailored principles used in the qualitative matrix.

Section 2 sets NCN Route 21 within an international and national context of cycle routes and introduces the opportunities and constraints that present themselves for this study.

- Provide an international and national cycling asset.
- Provide a local transport corridor

- Promote access and enjoyment of the countryside for recreational users.
- Ensure heritage of the area is accessed by all
- Increase local revenue with tourism.
- Procedures for implementation can become protracted particularly where CPO's are required.

Several previous studies have assessed the feasibility of linking two strategic off- road routes, the Cuckoo Trail (the southern section of the NCN Route 21) and the Forest Way (a similar off road cycle-way to the north) over the past 11 years with associated public consultation. Difficulties have arisen due to complicated land ownership issues. The focus of these earlier studies and this study has been an approximately 5km section between Heathfield and Mayfield, where conflict has arisen due to landowners rejecting proposals that would cross private land.

The study areas legislative context and physical character is reviewed in Section 3. Essentially this gives a baseline report, reviewing the duties of councils to provide safe modes of alternative transport and highlighting the attributes of this scenic area, which include hilly topography and dispersed historic settlements built around early industries and later, the railways. Additionally, ecologically rich forests, woods and copses, hedges and meadows contribute to a pastoral landscape of mixed farming.

Section 4 begins by looking at the existing route condition and determines that the existing route is unsuitable for the 'design cyclist', which as described by Sustrans is a 'family or unaccompanied child'. It also recognises that the Cuckoo Trail and Forest Way are

assets to recreational users at a national and local level. The desirability to utilise former railways lines being apparent, as the conditions are ideal and they form existing features in the landscape. The routes are wide and level, with gradients of no more than 1:50, they generally run on straight or sinuous lines with no blind spots as radii on curves are greater than 10m.

The feasibility study is in three parts; identification of routes between the Cuckoo Trail and Forest Way, assessment of the feasibility of routes between Heathfield and Mayfield and establishment of alternative routes within the towns of Heathfield and Mayfield.

Section 5 identified routes between the Cuckoo Trail and Forest Way, the preferred route follows the line of the dismantled Cuckoo Line. However to achieve this with the support of the community it would need to be accepted that until there was a stronger strategic case and up to date community consultation showing support for this proposal, the section between Heathfield and Mayfield would not follow this route. It is recommended the Mayfield to Forest Way route/ route corridor should be taken forward to the design feasibility stage which should be co-ordinated with Sustrans and include detailed on- site transport and structural engineering analysis before it is finalised. Once developed, the upgraded route would provide economic benefit through increased visitor spend and social benefits in creating additional recreational opportunities.

Of the several routes studied between Heathfield and Mayfield in Section 6, the preferred routes differ in their constraints and opportunities and in particular

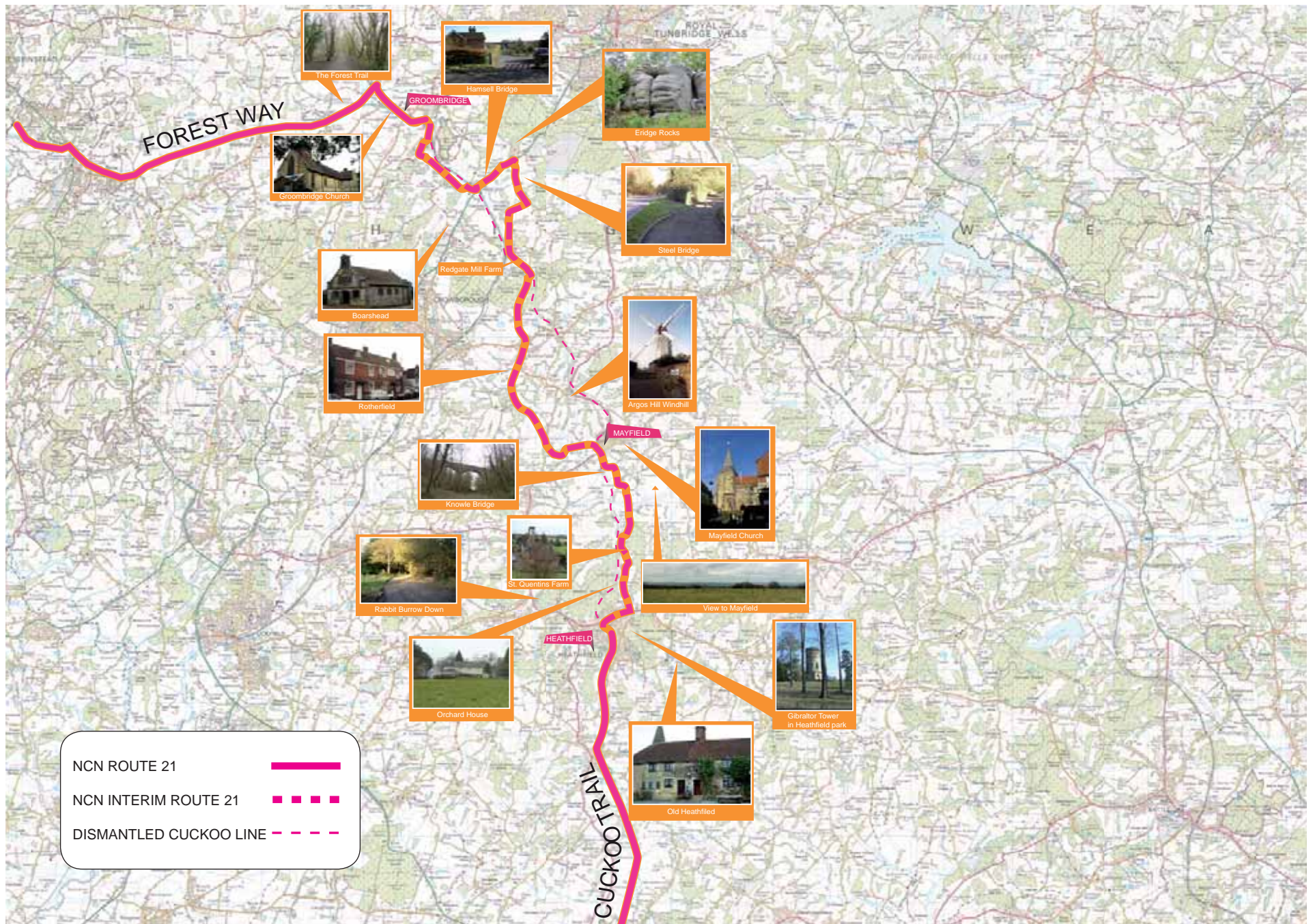
deliverability. Although the dismantled Cuckoo Line has the potential to be the most cycle- friendly, consultation held in 1995 and 2003 has shown there to be little support from current landowners. Consultation should be updated to gather up to date community views. Improvements could be implemented to the existing route that would address current safety concerns, although there remain significant constraints to this route. Therefore it would be advisable to concentrate resources on improving the fuller extent of the route between Mayfield and the Forest Way as Section 5.

Within Heathfield, it was concluded in Section 7 that all alternative routes would necessitate climbing steep gradients; however a preferred route was identified and this should be taken forward to the design feasibility stage.

On the approach to Mayfield the current route on Newick Lane requires more detailed studies to . Consideration should also be given to aligning a segregated route with the A267 when leaving Mayfield. There is little community or technical support for a cycleway to pass through Mayfield, therefore it was concluded that this would be inappropriate at this time.

These strategic towns should however, have upgraded facilities for cyclists such as seating, cycle racks and wayfinding signage. Within Heathfield at the car park where the Cuckoo Trail terminates, and on the outskirts of Mayfield before the route continues its present course or any new alignment.

Sections 8- 9 looks at maintenance, construction costs and typical sections.



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CONTEXT PLAN SHOWING LANDMARKS

SECTION 1: METHODOLOGY & APPROACH

- 1.1 This report aims to take a holistic view of the constraints and offer practical solutions. The approach to assessing the feasibility of the routes has therefore been tailored to reflect the unique obligations and pressures within the study.
- 1.2 Consultants in Transport Engineering, Planning, Landscape, Ecology and Heritage have contributed to the report.

CUCKOO TRAIL TO FOREST WAY

- 1.3 The first part of the study identifies different options for linking the Forest Way and Cuckoo Trail, the scope of this study is to select appropriate routes for further study and has been undertaken as a desk based study with site based assessment to review practicability of potential routes.
- 1.4 Study objectives were as follows:
- Undertake the study with an overall view of improving conditions for cycling and other users within East Sussex.
 - Take into account physical constraints.
 - Look at new route alignment in context of existing route provision.
 - Identify local and strategic opportunities and advantages of routes.
 - Broadly identify on- ground constraints.
 - Recommend a route/ routes for further study.
 - Make recommendations that describe a practical way forward.

HEATHFIELD TO MAYFIELD

- 1.5 The main focus of the study has been the option routes between Heathfield and Mayfield, where a more in depth study methodology has been applied. The team of consultants undertook desk based studies to evaluate the study corridor. A site walkover was then undertaken by all consultants to assess current conditions, sensitivity to change, and advise on areas where further detailed studies would be necessary.

Design cyclist

- 1.6 Within the context of this study the user or design cyclist is an inexperienced utility, commuter and leisure cyclist or a child. These are described as;
- ‘willing to sacrifice directness in terms of both distance and time, for a route with less traffic and more places to stop and rest. They may travel more slowly than other cyclists, may require segregated, direct routes from residential areas to schools, even where an on- road solution is available. Design needs to take account of personal security issues’.
- 1.7 It is also important to incorporate the needs of a variety of users and so fulfil ESCC’s commitment to provide safe and attractive routes suitable for a variety of users such as pedestrians, cyclists, disabled people and horse riders. ESCC are keen to provide traffic-free routes wherever possible or, where this cannot be achieved, create a road environment suitable for use by a family with small children or an unsupervised 12 year old.

Cycle Audit

- 1.8 A Cycle Audit was carried out for the four route options from Heathfield to Mayfield. The principles of Cycle Audits have been used when assessing good cycling infrastructure and are summarised under the following five headings. In order to provide an ideal cycle route, all five requirements must be met:
- Coherence: the cycling infrastructure should form a coherent entity, linking all significant trip origins and destinations; routes should be continuous and consistent in standard.
 - Directness: routes should be as direct as possible, based on desire lines – detours and delays will deter use.
 - Attractiveness: routes must be attractive to cyclists on subjective as well as objective criteria; lighting, personal safety, aesthetics, noise and integration with the surrounding area are important.
 - Safety: designs should minimise casualties and perceived danger for cyclists and other road users.
 - Comfort: cyclists need smooth, well maintained surfaces, flush kerbs, regular sweeping curves, and gentle gradients; routes must be convenient to us and avoid complicated manoeuvres and interruptions.
- 1.9 A separate Safety Audit has not been carried out but cyclist safety has been considered as part of the Cycle Audit.

Qualitative Matrix

- 1.10 The components used in the Cycle Audit also contributed toward a matrix where like-for-like principles are compared and principles not weighted against each other.
- 1.11 The criteria used for the matrix reflect those used in *Cycle Audit and Review* (DfT) and additional criteria that reflect the complexity of the study route. A star rating is awarded for each of the following criteria:

Impact on Safety

There are different ways of interpreting safety in a strategic assessment. For the purpose of this study, for a route to score highly on safety grounds, it must improve the safety of the current situation. This means that routes with an existing (actual or perceived) safety problem will have low scores. If on the current route there is thought to be no safety problem, then provision of a new route cannot be justified purely on safety grounds. Information feeding into this category includes the speed limit, an estimation of actual speeds and an indication of the traffic flow. The traffic counts were very short (5-10 minutes) and most of them were carried out in the inter-peak period. They are therefore used only as an indication. Comprehensive traffic-data would be needed to feed into the decision as to exactly which kind of facility should be provided on any given link.

- *** This would be a route which is already very safe (with very low traffic flows and speeds). There would therefore be very little safety benefit in upgrading it to an appropriate cycle route.

- ** A route with this rating could, for example, have high traffic flows but relatively low traffic speeds (e.g. a 30mph speed limit).
- * A route which currently has high flows of fast-moving traffic (where there may also have been recorded accidents involving pedal cyclists). Upgrading such a route to an appropriate cycle-route would be expected to bring considerable benefits to actual and perceived levels of safety.

Comfort

Gradients can be considered as a single determinant in the attractiveness of a route. The gradients on routes are assessed as averages where appropriate, but care should be taken as a route may be 'stepped' in that it has shallow and steep gradients. In this situation an interpretative mark should be applied.

- *** Gentle gradient shallower than 1:50
- ** Gradients between 1:50 – 1:20
- * Gradients steeper than 1:20

Strategic Value

A route with high strategic value will typically be one that connects together two or more key settlements. Alternatively, it may provide a 'missing link' between two other routes thereby creating links between a number of settlements. Low scoring links will be those that are on the periphery of the network.

- *** A route that connects several links in the network or connects together two or more key settlements.
- ** A route that connects smaller settlements or joins a small number of minor links.
- * A peripheral route that feeds into the main network.

Public Transport

This measure quantifies the degree to which each route links to public transport facilities. However, the focus is on public transport that permits cycle carriage, and for which the bicycle is often used as a feeder mode (i.e. rail). Bus stops are not included as local buses do not generally carry conventional bicycles and, due to their lower speeds, are a less attractive mode than the train for combined bike/public transport trips.

- *** This would be a route which connects directly to a rail station.
- ** This score would be awarded to a route which passes fairly close to a rail or bus facility.
- * This would be a route which neither runs close to nor in the direction of a rail or bus facility.

Education

'Safer routes to schools' are high on the sustainable-transport agenda and any routes which provide a useful route to a college, primary or secondary school will score highly in this category.

- *** A route awarded three stars will be close to, and lead directly towards, a secondary school or college of further education.
- ** This score would be awarded to a route which is likely to attract some cyclists but the numbers will be limited due, perhaps, to its distance from a school or the fact that it runs in an orbital rather than radial direction to the school.
- * This route would be considered too far from a school/college to attract any related cycle-trips.

Commuting

The journey to work is highly suited to cycling (reflected in the fact that it is the most common journey purpose for all cycle trips). Any network which seeks to increase overall levels of cycling should make sure that it provides safe, attractive and direct routes to main centres of employment.

- *** Three stars would be awarded to a route which links directly to an employment centre (e.g. a town centre or an industrial estate).
- ** A two star rating would be awarded to a route that does not directly serve an employment centre but may connect a residential area to a route that leads to an employment centre.
- * A one star rating would be for a route which is unlikely to attract any commuter trips due to the orientation of the route or the distance from a town centre.

Retail and other (non-commuter) utility journeys

If the level of cycling is to increase, routes to key transport destinations should be provided. In recent years, it is utility cycling that has been neglected in favour of leisure cycling. The assessment priorities for the network must therefore reflect the need to encourage people to switch modes for everyday journeys (e.g. to shops and other utility destinations such as libraries, leisure centres, health centres, pubs etc.).

The ratings for 'retail and other utility journeys' are similar to those of the commuter ratings (see above) with three stars for routes which directly serve the relevant destinations. This rating is generally assumed to follow the 'commuter' criterion with higher scores awarded for routes that lead to town centres.

Recreation

Links scoring highly for this category will be those which encourage sustainable access to leisure areas as well as links which intrinsically encourage leisure cycling.

- *** This would be for a link that provides direct access to a leisure cycling destination.
- ** Two stars would be awarded if the link provides a route in the direction of (but not actually to) a leisure cycling destination, or if the link has some intrinsic value as a leisure cycling facility.
- * One star would be awarded for a route which neither leads to a leisure cycling destination nor has any intrinsic appeal as a leisure route.

Attractiveness

This is a measure of the likely appeal of the route to users. 'Attractiveness' is largely based on the quality of the scenery that the proposed cycle route passes through. It also includes an allowance for directness and gradient, with steeper gradients and indirectness reducing the level of attractiveness. Traffic conditions have a limited influence on this criterion because it is assumed that an 'appropriate' cycle facility will be provided so that traffic conditions will become acceptable. However, the noise from a heavily trafficked road will remain, regardless of the type of cycle facility provided, and therefore will impact on the overall level of attractiveness.

- *** A route which is visually attractive, direct, has low levels of motorised traffic and a gentle gradient.
- ** This might be a route through a housing estate which has lower levels of traffic than a main road but does not have any scenic appeal.
- * This could be a heavily trafficked or indirect route, or a route with a steep gradient or unattractive scenery.

Character

The local character and sensitivity of a route will be a determinant in its suitability. The impact that the proposed cycle route will have on this route is considered under this criteria. Scale, materials, street furniture and context are considered as a whole to award points.

- *** A route which will enhance the existing character, either rural community provision or urban transport facility.
- ** This might have scenic appeal and the route would not detract from the existing character.
- * This would be a route that is unattractive in terms of its inappropriate scale, setting or materials to existing character.

Heritage

This criterion is used to assess the significance of a route historically. It allows values to be gained for local heritage, if a route passes near a key landmark or feature it will score higher marks. Landmarks and historical interpretation can add much depth to a recreational route; it will also suggest that there may be cases for creating spurs to include heritage areas in recreational rides.

- *** A route awarded three stars will be close to, and lead directly towards, a key landmark or site of historical interest.
- ** This score would be awarded to a route which is likely to attract some interest in its proximity to a key landmark or site of historical interest, although a detour in order to reach the site is likely.
- * This route would be considered too far from a key landmark or site of historical interest to attract any related cycle-trips.

Deliverability

An approximate rating for the ease implementation of each link is provided. The deliverability for any given link would depend on the traffic environment e.g. vehicle flows, vehicle speeds and the proportion of HGVs. Without this information, the deliverability ratings were estimated from site visits which established the speed limits, approximate vehicle flows and proportions of HGVs.

- *** A score of three stars will normally mean that a link would only require signing to bring it up to an acceptable standard for a cycle route. The traffic environment along such a route will typically be one of low vehicle flows and speeds.
- ** A score of two stars will be awarded for routes that require some engineering measures. This might involve the upgrading of a footway to a shared-use facility or a pelican to a toucan crossing, or the provision of a cycle bypass through a road closure.
- * A one star rating would mean that the link would require the construction of a new off-carriageway cycle facility.

- 1.12 Although the matrix compares like- for like principles, the consultants have contributed to determining the most favourable option with combined safety and minimal environmental impact as their key priority. These key issues were derived from the primary aim of of the NCN regarding safety and from the sites context with an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the details of which are described in more detail in Section 2 & 3 respectively.

SECTION 2: CONTEXT

CYCLING CONTEXT

National Cycling Strategy

2.1 The National Cycling Strategy recognises that important aspects of creating a more cycle-friendly infrastructure are to make existing roads safer and more attractive for cycling, and supplementing them with specific cycle facilities where necessary. Guidelines for Cycle Audit and Review were published in October 1998, jointly by the DfT, Local Government and the Regions and the Institution of Highways and Transportation. The guidelines suggest a systematic process for ensuring that the needs of cyclists are considered in the design and implementation of new highways and traffic schemes.

National Cycle Network

2.2 National Cycle Network (NCN) offers 10,000 miles of audited cycle routes throughout the UK. It is estimated that 75% of the UK population lives within two miles of the Network. One third of the Network is on traffic-free paths, such as disused railway lines, canal towpaths, riversides and parks. The rest of the Network is on quiet minor roads and traffic-calmed streets. These well-marked routes provide leisure opportunities, as well as links into towns for schools, work and stations for cyclists, horseriders, walkers and wheelchair users.

2.3 Three NCN Routes cross East Sussex, NCN Routes 2, 20 & 21. The focus of the study is NCN Route 21, which runs from Polegate in the south to Forest Row in the north, and is approximately 54km long, with approximately 35km already traffic free.

NCN Route 21

2.4 The NCN Route 21 within the study area is a strategic cycle route linking the major journey attractors defined as the Cuckoo Trail and the Forest Way.

2.5 Within this study area, the cycling infrastructure is limited beyond the existing NCN routes, though there are a number of informal circular cycle routes. These routes are predominantly on-road, but also follow existing bridleways, byways and footpaths. Whilst these routes are pleasant and enjoyable for local users, they do not play a strategic role in this study and have therefore not been assessed against NCN guidelines.

Avenue Verte

2.6 There is an additional strategic function of the NCN Route 21, as part of it forms the Avenue Verte; this greenway is an INTERREG funded flagship project which is envisaged to link Paris and London via traffic free or lightly trafficked routes.

Benefits of cycling

2.7 The benefits of cycling facilities are summarised below and are extracted in parts from BUPA and London Cycling Campaign studies.

Health- Everyday cycling, where the exercise leaves you breathing heavily but not being out of breath, is an effective and enjoyable form of aerobic exercise. Cycling reduces the risk of serious conditions such as heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity and the most common form of diabetes.

Better air quality- Cycling is a pollution-free, environmentally sustainable mode of transport which makes negligible contributions to congestion.

Reducing noise pollution- Motorised road transport is a major source of noise in the environment, while cycling is virtually silent.

Reducing danger- By lowering motor traffic we can reduce the levels of real and perceived risk for those on foot and travelling by bike.

Access for all- Increasing access to the countryside increases awareness ecology, history and rural matters.

Decreasing social exclusion- Lowering levels of motor traffic also prevents people being cut off from essential facilities and services including shops, health facilities, parks and friends and family. Reduced costs to society The Prime Minister's Strategy Unit has put the cost of physical inactivity at around £2bn per year, with around 54,000 lives lost prematurely.

Statutory Procedures for Implementing a Cycleway

- 2.8 Once a preferred route has been selected the cycleway would be established by under the Highways Authorities statutory powers. Implications as a result of planning permissions, land ownership and environmental designations are outlined below.
- 2.9 Minor changes to provision on existing Public Byways and Bridleways would not need Planning Permission.
- 2.10 Where realignment or even road widening is proposed on private land, a Public Path Order would need to be served by the local authority. This would include publicity, objections, and representations made and affected landowners and occupiers informed. If there are objections there will be a Public Inquiry. Local authorities may consider establishing the order with a Compulsory Purchase Order.

Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO)

- 2.11 The legal costs of CPO's is considered specialist and does not form part of the scope of this study. However as a general guide to principles when planning to apply for a CPO for recreational purposes, the following should be considered:
- Planning Permission must be in place prior to application.
 - If there are objections the Planning Application, there is likely to be a Public Inquiry.
 - For a successful CPO the applicant must prove there is no alternative route.
 - The benefits of proposal must be demonstrated
 - Every m2 applied for must be proved to be absolutely necessary.
- 2.12 Compensation is based on the planning land value or permissions that would be granted for that land in the absence of any proposals. The claim would not take into account loss of visual amenity. Severance and noise are not considered valid claims for cycleways.

SUMMARY

NCN Route 21 is an internationally and nationally strategic route.

NCN Route 21 needs to take account of a variety of users.

Cycling has numerous health, economic and environmental benefits.

Proposed routes that cross private land require agreement from landowners or would require a series of criteria to be met to establish a CPO.

PREVIOUS STUDIES & BACKGROUND

2.18 Several technical studies of potential cycle routes between the Cuckoo Trail and Forest Way have been undertaken in the last 10 years, and these are summarised below.

Sustrans

2.19 In 1995 the off- road cycle route called the Cuckoo Trail was completed. It ran between Polegate in the south and Heathfield in the north on the dismantled railway called the Cuckoo Line. Sustrans then compiled a report to assess potential routes north of Heathfield to Groombridge.

2.20 Groombridge was used as a strategic linking destination as it is where the Forest Way terminates. The Forest Way is also an off- road cycle route on a dismantled railway line running from East Grinstead in the west to Groombridge in the east. Linking these two off- road routes would therefore be desirable.

2.21 The Sustrans report identified the disused Cuckoo Line north of Heathfield as the most advantageous route, however as parts of this route are now in private ownership it outlines the negotiations and permissions that would be necessary for this route to be implemented.

2.22 The report also identifies an alternative or parallel route comprising of bridleways and minor roads as a short or medium term solution.

2.23 For different implementation options the report gives a rough idea of clearance and surfacing necessary, construction costs and funding sources. The Sustrans report also suggests that improvements should be made to the current termination of the Cuckoo Trail in Heathfield.

2.24 As a result of this report, consultation was undertaken in Mayfield and Rotherfield on the proposed northern extension; the route proved to be unpopular. The focus of this unpopularity has been the section of the route between Heathfield and Mayfield and the option of passing the route through Mayfield High Street.

Babtie

2.25 In 1996 ESCC commissioned Babtie to compile a report looking at alternatives for extending the Cuckoo Trail north of Heathfield. This report is more detailed and assesses consultation results, Planning Policy and Guidance and wider route options.

2.26 Babtie assessed ten routes in terms of safety comfort, coherence, attractiveness and ease of implementation. Babtie lists Pros and Cons of three of the most suitable routes and took these forward to public consultation.

2.27 Broadly, Route One starts to the south of Heathfield, travels to the east of Heathfield Park, uses Scotsford Road to approach Mayfield it then meets the disused railway line north of Mayfield and generally follows this line, part on, part off- road through to Groombridge. Route Two travels through the centre of Heathfield where it picks up Marklye Lane, Newick Lane into the centre of Mayfield. It then follows a similar route to Route One until Redgate Mill Farm where an alternative more northerly route is shown. Option Three generally follows the disused Cuckoo Line.

2.28 The report looks at other key destinations such as Bewl Water and Wadhurst and identifies possible routes to these key destinations. These are not assessed in consultation.

2.29 Route One and Two resulted in being most popular; this has been interpreted as being due to land owner opposition to Route Three. The results of the consultation also showed that routes through Mayfield were unpopular.

2.30 The Babtie report concludes that further consultation would be necessary and there would be adequate funding to progress the scheme on a national and local level.

Owen Williams

2.31 Owen Williams have undertaken three studies for ESCC.

October 1998 Feasibility Report for Northern Extension of the Cuckoo Trail

May 1999 Feasibility Study of Traffic Calming and Displacement of Traffic

September 1999 Preliminary Design of Traffic Calming

2.32 Feasibility Report for Northern Extension of the Cuckoo Trail

This report details alternative routes from Newick Lane to Mayfield, routes through Mayfield and routes to Town Row. There are summaries for each route which identify technical constraints; primary constraints are the lack of a safe route through Mayfield, hedgerow clearance and road widening necessary to accommodate a cycle lane on Newick Lane, lack of available road width on old A267 towards Argos Hill and traffic alignment conflicts in Town Row. The report suggests further investigation of traffic calming proposals for Newick Lane, alternative routes through Mayfield and a crossing facility in Town Row.

2.33 Feasibility Study of Traffic Calming and Displacement of Traffic.

The report identifies traffic calming measures between Old Mill Farm on Newick Lane and West Street in Mayfield that would make the route less attractive to through traffic and consequently give the most protection to cyclists. Of four measures identified, priority workings on straight sections was favoured as it caused minimum displacement and limited traffic calming at bends to include anti-skid coloured surfacing, white lining, cycle signing and carriageway logos. The priority workings would be applied to the whole length of Newick Lane; five would fall within the NCN Route 21 length. Cyclists would bypass these measures via either cycle slip or carriageway cycle track.

2.34 Preliminary Design of Traffic Calming

The report gives preliminary design proposals for Newick lane, Station Road, Love Lane, Scotsford Hill Five Ashes and Piccadilly Lane; these are a co-ordinated approach to facilitate either the introduction of cycle friendly measures on, or the closure of Newick Lane. Preliminary designs include build outs, footpath widening, raised tables, marker posts, red surfacing and cycle symbols and traffic signs across the different routes. With regards to Newick Lane they still result in a discontinuous dedicated cycle route.

ESCC

2.35 2003 Consultation

Due to the controversial nature of routes between Heathfield and Mayfield, ESCC held further consultation on possible routes between Heathfield and Mayfield.

Different options were given for a route through Heathfield, of which the most popular passed through the Millennium Green, then along a private section of the dismantled railway, meeting Marklye Lane via drive and public footpath.

Two options were also proposed for the route through Mayfield of which the most popular bypassed the village and went along the A267.

SUMMARY

Off -road cycle route northern extension from Heathfield to Mayfield on dismantled Cuckoo Line proposed by Sustrans.
Proposed route in private ownership and proves unpopular with landowners.
Alternative route identified and consultation results in a marginal preference for alternative route.
Alternative route passes through Mayfield and is partially on- road requiring traffic calming.
Passing route through Mayfield unpopular and unsafe.
Preliminary traffic calming proposals designed for Newick Lane.

SECTION 3: FRAMEWORK

LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

- 3.1 The study area falls under East Sussex County Council with administrative boundaries defined by East Sussex County Council, Wealden District Council, Heathfield & Wealden Parish Council and Mayfield Parish Council.

PLANNING CONTEXT

National Planning Guidance

- 3.2 Recent National Guidance and advice to local authorities has been focused on reducing the need for vehicle use and the promotion of cycle use as an alternative. Within the current Planning Policy Guidance and Statements (PPG/PPS) there is considerable advice supporting cycling in all its forms. This advice has also been embraced in Local Plans and Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG's).
- 3.3 The Government's White Paper on Transport makes it clear that development plans should give better protection to those sites and routes (both existing and potential) which could be critical in developing infrastructure to widen transport choices.
- 3.4 PPG13 Transport states that "in conjunction with work on the local transport plan, review existing provision for cyclists, in order to identify networks and routes, including those to transport interchanges, along which the needs and safety of cyclists will be given priority, and set out the specific measures which will be taken to support this objective. Generally these routes will use existing

highways, but may also include the use of redundant railway lines or space alongside canals and rivers. Linear parks in urban areas may often provide opportunities for cycling routes"

"Where appropriate, assist in the completion of the national cycle network, and additional key links to and from the network, as well as promoting local networks."

- 3.5 PPG17 Sport and Recreation states that Local Authorities should "promote accessibility by walking, cycling and public transport, and ensure that facilities are accessible for people with disabilities"

"Rights of way are an important recreational facility, which local authorities should protect and enhance. Local authorities should seek opportunities to provide better facilities for walkers, cyclists and horse-riders, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks."

- 3.6 PPG3 Housing states that "better integration is seen as a key element in supporting more sustainable travel choices and in reducing the need to travel"

- 3.7 PPG12 Development Plans states that in Development Plans, overall objectives should include targets, for example on traffic reduction, increased use of public transport, cycling and walking"

It states that where planning authorities wish to safeguard land for a future transport schemes (e.g. a new road, rail link or restored canal), "they should do so through a proposal in the local plan. When the precise route of

a particular proposal is known at the time of preparation of the plan, this should be clearly shown on the proposals map as the route to be safeguarded"

Regional Planning Guidance

- 3.8 As is the case with the National Planning Guidance, the Regional Guidance aims to promote the use of cycle travel as an alternative to less sustainable travel as well as promoting cycling as a family leisure activity, along with new cycle routes.

The relevant regional guidance and SPG's are:

- East Sussex Cycling Strategy.
 - East Sussex and Brighton & Hove Structure Plan 1991–2011.
 - Wealden Local Plan.
 - Heathfield – Local Area Transport Strategy - January 2004.
 - The High Weald AONB Management Plan 2004 (a 20-year strategy).
 - Heathfield Town Centre Environment and Design Guidance.
 - East Sussex Cycling Strategy.
- 3.9 The East Sussex Cycling Strategy aims to "establish a culture where cycling as an everyday mode of transport for utility and recreational purposes is accepted and actively encouraged by the provision of a high quality infrastructure and pro-cycling environment". It states that "when off-road cycle routes are designed, other vulnerable road users such as pedestrians, disabled and horse riders will be consulted and provision for such users will be made where it is considered practical without compromising the scheme objectives."

“Bridleways (and other rights of way) will, where appropriate, be constructed and maintained to a standard suitable for cycling.”

“As part of traffic management schemes appropriate measures will be provided, wherever practical, to improve cyclists’ safety and give cycles greater priority over other traffic, in terms of access and journey time, on all roads with significant cycle flows or significant potential cycle flows.”

3.10 The Wealden Local Plan was adopted in December 1998 and covers the period up to 2004. The Local Plan Review is required to address the needs for development up to 2011.

Policy TR12 states that “in dealing with development proposals the Council will take into account the Cycling Strategy for East Sussex.

One of the main objectives for Leisure and Recreation is to ‘improve access to the countryside’. The plan states that the disused railway between Heathfield and Polegate now forms part of the Cuckoo Trail and that in association with Sustrans they are working to extend the trail northwards to the Kent border.”

3.11 Within Part 2 of the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2004 (Public Understanding and Enjoyment) states under its targets for 2009 to identify five new sites/areas promoting family cycling opportunities and develop key strategic links in the Rights of Way network for all walkers, cyclists and riders.

Local Planning Guidance

3.12 The Heathfield Local Area Transport Strategy aims to “actively encourage a modal shift from car to bicycle and, thereby, contribute to achieving the National Cycling Strategy and Transport Act 2000 targets for cycling” and to “bring cycling to the heart of sustainable development in East Sussex through an integrated approach to transport planning, land use planning, health improvement policies and education”.

3.13 The Heathfield Town Centre Environment and Design Guide states that due to the Cuckoo Trail, and its connection with the National Cycle Network, the town has very good cycle access into the town centre. Every effort should be made to capitalise on this asset, and to encourage cycling in the centre”.

It also states that the Cuckoo Trail should be developed as a means of attracting visitors and patronage, and that this should include:

- Making the link between the Cuckoo Trail and the town centre more attractive;
- Promote the northern extension of the Cuckoo Trail;
- Provide facilities for cyclists to move about and park bikes safely, including puffin crossings and
- Encourage developments that relate to the Cuckoo Trail.

3.14 East Sussex and Brighton & Hove Structure Plan 1991–2011 Policy TR5 is designed to encourage more cycling and provision for cyclists. The safety of cyclists being a paramount factor in further provision.

3.15 Policy TR6 encourages the South Coast Cycle Route, together with other strategic routes, including those which form part of the Sustrans National Cycle Network, to provide high quality predominantly off-road and segregated cycle routes for utility and leisure cyclists alike.

3.16 Policy TR13 encourages the re-use of redundant of disused transport routes for reinstatement of for use by an alternative means of transport. It states that before any development or change is permitted on any such route, including railways and canals, the planning authorities should decide if the route ought to be protected for future use, for example as a recreational route. Only when it is clear those routes are unlikely to be re-used or that a proposed development would not prevent future reuse, should proposals for development and change be allowed to proceed.

3.17 Policy LT15 states that the provision of new recreational routes, which improve access to the coast and countryside for cyclists, walkers and horse riders will be encouraged and supported particularly close to towns and villages.

3.18 Policy LT16 states that the use of public transport and journeys by bicycle and on foot to gain access to the countryside will be encouraged and supported, including implementation of the County Council’s Cycling Strategy.

SUMMARY

Cycle routes are legislated for both nationally and locally.

County and local councils have duties to provide safe modes of alternative transport.

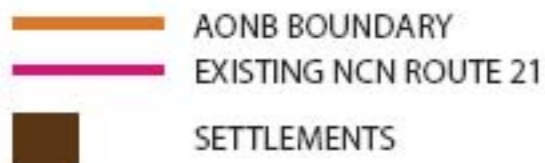
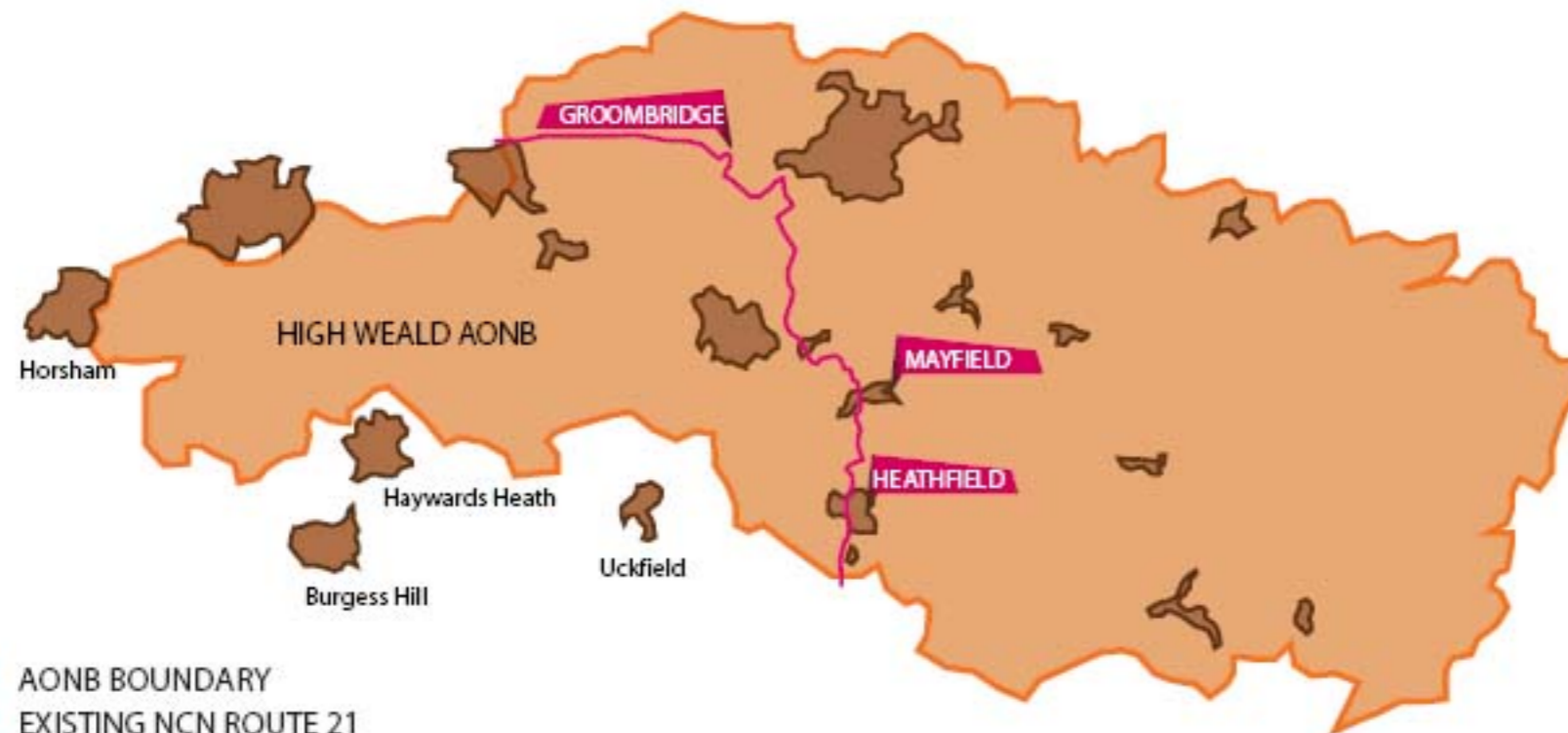
Elevation



EXISTING NCN ROUTE 21



3D VIEW SHOWING TOPOGRAPHY



PLAN OF AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

- 3.19 Study areas are located within the High Weald. The High Weald was designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1983. The term 'Weald' (meaning wilderness or forest, derived from the Germanic word wald) describes the whole area between the North and South Downs. The 'Low' Weald lacks the 'High' Weald's distinctive ridges and valleys. The High Weald was designated an AONB because many of its unique landscape features, which are often characteristic of both the High and Low Weald, have been better conserved in the High Weald.
- 3.20 The distinctive topography of High Weald is formed from sands and sandstones intermingled with clays in the ancient Wealden anticline. This results in a hilly country of ridges and valleys. The major ridges run roughly east to west, and the two main 'Forest Ridges' can be identified.
- 3.21 The High Weald is vegetated with a significant amount of large mixed and coniferous woodland areas, predominantly on hillsides, with other countless small woods and copses, ridgelines and roadside tree belts and hedges, wooded banks and hedgerow trees. Much of the woodland is from remnants of the dense Wealden Forest that gave the area its name. The woodland is interrupted by a patchwork of small fields and farm dwellings across the rolling hills and valleys.

3.22 Generally within the study areas, the vernacular buildings have a strong character with many fine period houses and farm dwellings. The dispersed historic settlements of farmsteads, hamlets and late medieval villages are characterised by distinctive brick, tile and white weatherboard houses, and oasthouses.

3.23 The study of the Mayfield to Groombridge route shows the typical characteristics as described above. The study of the Heathfield to Mayfield route has been subject to a more detailed approach.

3.24 Heathfield is a small market town, with a population of around 7,050 people. It has a good range of general and specialist shops, schools and local services, generally lining the busy A265 High Street. Although the towns growth was due to industrial development in the C16th and C17th, the character buildings are a result of expansion when the railway came in the C19th. This C19th town centre is surrounded by a band of planned 1980's estate development. The town's elevated setting allows for long-distance views into the surrounding countryside.

3.25 Mayfield is a small predominantly residential village of approximately 1,750 people. Located to the north of Heathfield it has a more picturesque and historic character. The village style shops that line the High Street offer locally based goods and services. Mayfield is also the home of St.. Leonards-Mayfield Roman Catholic girls' boarding school, which has existed for 125 years. The Anglican church is called St.. Dunstan's and both village and church are said to have been founded by St.. Dunstan in 960.

3.26 Located on an elevated position, it affords extensive views to the surrounding countryside, it's landscape setting is as important and sensitive as is it's historic character.

3.27 Heathfield and Mayfield are separated by a patchwork of fields and woodland across rolling hillside. Once linked by the now dismantled railway, the towns are now linked by winding country roads. There are no settlements between Heathfield and Mayfield, but farms and small hamlets punctuate the landscape in between rolling fields and areas of natural heavily wooded and ancient woodland.

3.28 The dismantled railway line which previously connected Heathfield and Mayfield is at odds with the distinctive and prominent hilly character of the surrounding countryside. The railway embankments cut across the landscape in an almost straight line (sinuous) between the two settlements, severing east and west with the embankments and cuttings and providing a level (no gradients steeper than 1:50) surface in contrast to the mosaic of hills, valleys, ancient hedgerows and lanes which run around it.

3.29 The corridors through which the dismantled railway line passed are generally of between 5-10m.

3.30 A large stretch of the dismantled railway is privately owned, and as a result, much is over-grown and inaccessible, often severing a single landowner's property, with the only access from east to west being through the series of privately owned red-brick C19th bridges and tunnels which line the route and give an indication of its fine industrial heritage.

The embankments are often immense in size reflecting the contours of the High Weald.

3.31 The existing route and any proposed routes within the study pass through sensitive environments.

3.32 Although the corridor of significant effects is only likely to be 10m width, the detailed design will need to carefully consider mitigating potential effects such as screening where the route is adjacent to high sensitivity receptors such as residential areas. Existing roads are generally considered as a low sensitivity receptors, however increased signage and road markings will need to be carefully designed and sited to ensure the rural character is retained.

SUMMARY

Proposed routes all pass through Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

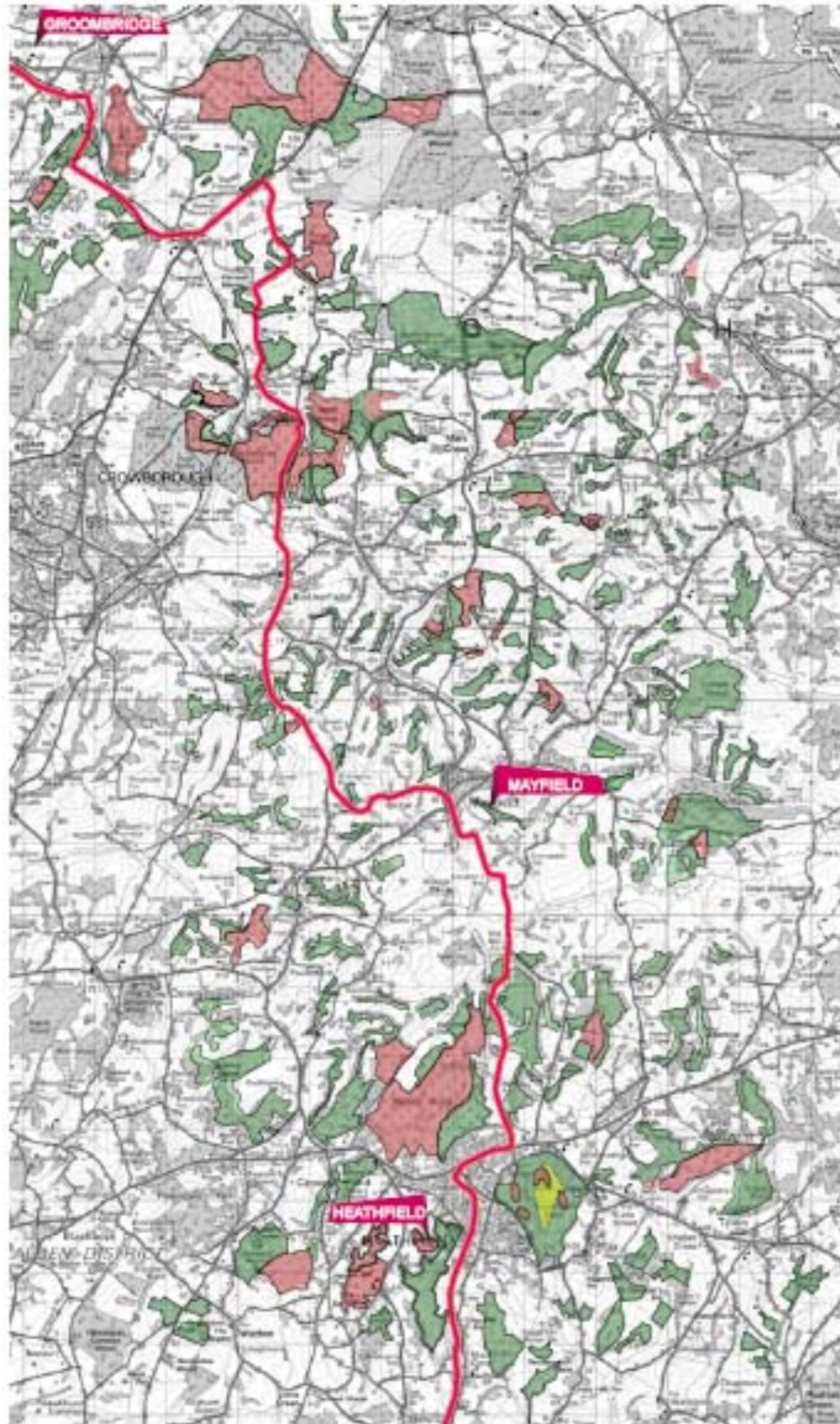
Steep ridges and valleys distinctive topography of area.

Dismantled Cuckoo Line is heavily vegetated and currently inaccessible.

Sinuous lines, level gradients and engineered structures of dismantled Cuckoo Line are distinct in landscape.

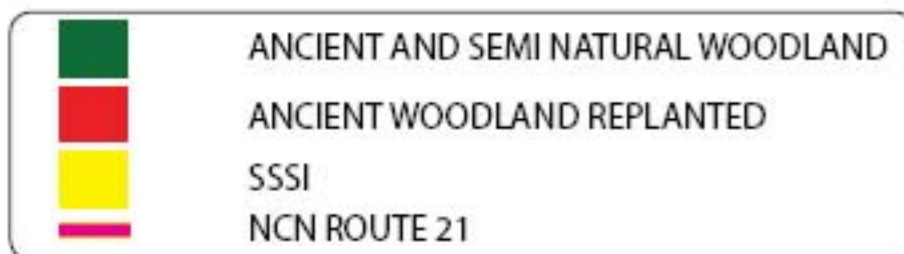
Mayfield has particularly sensitive landscape/ townscape character.

Significant effects are likely to be within a 10m corridor.



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PLAN SHOWING PLANNING DESIGNATIONS



ECOLOGICAL CONTEXT

- 3.33 The High and Low Wealds are ecologically rich areas, with high forests, small woods and copses, and a network of hedges, rich meadows, bordered by species rich hedgerows. It is a pastoral landscape with mixed farming predominating.
- 3.34 The wider study area is covered with significant designated areas of Ancient and Semi Natural Woodland and Ancient Replanted Woodland.
- 3.34 The study area has one site covered by a statutory designation within 1km of some of the route options. This is Heathfield Park Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Heathfield Park SSSI was designated as an example of an ancient Wealden ghyll woodland. The SSSI is over 200m from the southern end of the existing route, which is the nearest point to the SSSI on any of the routes. The SSSI is separated from by the A265. The SSSI is considered to be at sufficient distance that none of the cycle way routes are expected to have implications for the integrity of the designated site.
- 3.36 All the routes pass through areas of identified ancient woodland. Ancient lowland woodlands are a national and Sussex Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority habitat. These areas have been identified on the provisional Ancient Woodland Inventory for Sussex, which is maintained by English Nature. The Inventory highlights sites where documentary evidence suggests there has been continuous woodland cover since 1600. The mapped sites include Ancient Semi-Natural Woodlands, identified on the Inventory as woods that may have been altered by

management but do not appear to have been cleared completely. The Inventory also includes Ancient Replanted Woodland, where the land does not appear to have had any use other than woodland since 1600 but at some point the original native trees would have been cleared and replaced by planted trees. These replanted sites still have a value because of the continuity of use and the potential that, for example, the soil structure may not have been disturbed. However, their ecological value is generally less than Ancient Semi-Natural Woodlands.

- 3.37 Many of the study routes follow existing tracks and bridleways through ancient woodland. Most of the woodland to the west is replanted on an ancient woodland site while that to the east is recorded on the ancient woodland inventory as ancient semi-natural woodland.
- 3.38 The several designations that the route passes through could impact the Planning process and it may be necessary to submit an Ecological Assessment as material consideration. However a full scoping report would be undertaken by the Local Planning Authority. Notices would also need to be served to the Local Authority before construction for proposed hedge or tree removal.

SUMMARY

Ecologically rich area.
Route passes through designated areas.
Permissions will be needed prior to work commencing although these will be deemed permitted if full Planning Permission granted.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

- 3.39 There are no Conservation Areas, Registered Battlefields or Historic Gardens within any of the route corridors or study area. All routes enter and exit the towns of Heathfield and Mayfield within which several sites of cultural heritage have been identified.
- 3.40 The earliest inhabitants in Sussex were hunter-gatherer groups, living in small family communities which moved over large areas in search of natural resources. Important evidence of such people was discovered in Boxgrove, near Chichester, where part of a tibia was found from a species called *Homo Heidebergensis*. Evidence of Neolithic activity has been found locally. The only evidence of Neolithic activity we have within the study area is a polished axe, which was found near the River Rother in Mayfield near route Option D (East Sussex Records Office).
- 3.41 No evidence of Bronze Age (2,000-6,000 BC) or The Iron Age (600 BC- 43 AD) activity has been found within the study area. The first significant evidence of human activity is from the Roman Period (AD 43- 410) as Sussex was an important link for the Romans between the coast and towns further north, such as London. Several Roman trade routes traversed the Mayfield and Heathfield area and some of these later developed into the modern roads we see today (Elliott 1988).
- 3.42 There is some evidence of Medieval occupation though neither Mayfield nor Heathfield are mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1085. The latter did have a church constructed during the Norman period but as it is not mentioned in this survey it is likely it was built after the Domesday survey was conducted.
- 3.43 During the late medieval and part of the post-medieval period iron working created an increase in the local economy in the Weald and many farmers grew wealthy on adding profitable iron working to their farming income. In Heathfield, industries such as brick and tile making, charcoal burning, tanning, mining for the iron industry and the Sussex Chicken flattening industry developed (Chapman 1999, Elliott 1988.).
- 3.44 In the 1880s the railways, for example the Cuckoo Line, as the Tunbridge Wells & Polegate railway line was known, brought new wealth to the Weald. The route of which mostly survives, with earth works and some fine bridge examples. During the C20th, improved roads and the arrival of the motor car made access to and within the Weald even easier. In 1968 the Cuckoo Line closed after major falls in profits due to increasing use of road transport (Elliott 1988).
- 3.45 The history of iron working in the region together with evidence of Iron Age activity in the area suggests there is a potential for further finds related to this period. Any remains associated with iron working would be of local importance.
- 3.46 Given that all the route options are located predominantly within a rural context; in an area where little archaeological investigation has been carried out, there is potential for unknown buried remains to survive. In such areas, remains of any period could be encountered, in particular in areas where medieval and early post-medieval buildings are known. In these areas there is potential for encountering evidence of early farming practices, though the area is not considered to be of high archaeological potential.
- 3.47 While the buried archaeological potential is low, the potential for landscape study and interpretation does exist, in particular in relation to industrial use of the landscape and later post medieval and C20th industrial development such as the railway and the villages connected to it. Future interpretation along the route could be developed from more detailed landscape study along these themes.

SUMMARY

There is potential for archeological finds but significance is low.
Potential for further landscape study and interpretation particularly of the disused Cuckoo Line.

