

## **SOUTHAMPTON COMMONS & PARKS PROTECTION SOCIETY**

### **20/00255, widening Lovers Walk, The Common Addition to SCAPPS objection, responding to submission of amendments**

1 SCAPPS sustains its objection (14 March 2020). The application was made two years ago. The applicant's statement of 22 December 2021 does not resolve and remove SCAPPS' objections. The application should be rejected and proposals for Lovers Walk reviewed.

2 Much has changed in the two years since the application was submitted. Segregated cycle lanes have been installed on The Avenue, parallel to Lovers Walk south. It seems there's lasting change to work and travel after covid; significantly for this proposal, the University has changed how it arranges and timetables student contact. Covid led to increased recreation use of The Common, and intensified appreciation of the importance for health and well-being of access to natural, green spaces.

3 The applicant's 22 December 'Additional information', and other material submitted in December, include no image showing what the widened path would look like and no assessment of effect on landscape character and appearance, despite damage to landscape character and appearance being a reason for objection. No decision should be made without that information.

4 SCAPPS was not alone in objecting because of damage to landscape character and appearance. Many representations the Planning website categorises as 'Support' express reservations about avoiding damage to landscape and wildlife. The City Council's Parks and Open Spaces Manager objected because 'The footpath proposed is of a width that is out of character for this part of The Common'. The Urban Design Manager raised concern that no assessment of visual impact had been provided. Since submission of the application, an Inspector's decision letter on a section 38 application on The Common (19 November 2020) included the caution that more tarmac and more signs have an undoubted urbanising effect.

#### **Landscape objection**

5 Lovers Walk winds attractively through a natural, mainly wooded part of The Common. It was carefully designed and laid out to enhance that setting – it follows contours and is of a width proportionate to its setting. More or less doubling the width of the northern section would make it look more like a road than a woodland path. A wider path, 1422 sq m more tarmac, would, visually, have an undesirable and unavoidable urbanising effect.

6 The Design and Access Statement's only reference to impact of the proposed development on landscape character and appearance is at the end of paragraph 3.7 headed Appearance – 'With the existing path also being tarmacadam, it is considered that the visual impact of a widened path will be minimal', with no explanation of what was taken into account in reaching that conclusion.

#### **No proven 'need'**

7 A casual visit will dismiss misapprehension Lovers Walk is thronged with pedestrians, with cyclists weaving among them. Pedestrian flows are modest, and exceed cycle traffic. At the time the application was made, the one section with higher use (for a brief period on days in University term-time) was from Highfield Lane to the University steps. That pattern has changed with change in the way the University arranges student contact; timetabling no longer results in large numbers simultaneously converging on Highfield Campus. That section of Lovers Walk is closely paralleled by Furzedown Road; a cycle lane could easily be marked on the highway reducing cycle use on Lovers Walk.

8 SCAPPS objection challenged assertions of high volume of traffic and claims of ‘conflict’ and ‘congestion’. No new, post-covid, figures of pedestrian and cycle use and purpose of journey (‘through-travel’ versus recreation) have been submitted. Lovers Walk is a path in a tranquil, natural part of The Common. Many users, walking or on cycles, are there to enjoy a green space. Their enjoyment should not be compromised by widening the path, damaging landscape character and appearance, for the supposed benefit of cyclists on through-journeys and to advance a misplaced notion of promoting ‘green commuting’.

9 Since the application was submitted, cycle lanes have been installed on The Avenue. The applicant acknowledges the southern section of Lovers Walk is closely paralleled by the new segregated cycle lanes on The Avenue, and signs will encourage cyclists to use The Avenue in place of Lovers Walk south.

10 Much of the 22 December ‘Additional information’ tries to give assurance cyclists on shared use paths will respect other users, and tries to explain the changing policy context of the City Council’s Cycle Strategy and its proposals for the SCN5 cycle corridor. SCAPPS remains concerned by shared-use paths in parks being signed as part of these strategic cycle network routes. Paths in parks are not suitable for high-speed commuter type cycling. Lovers Walk is, first and foremost, a path in a park. Its use by cyclists on through-journeys is subsidiary. Widening would not resolve inherent conflict, and could make it worse by encouraging cycling at higher speed and with an exaggerated sense of entitlement.

### **Review the proposals**

11 SCAPPS asks for the application to be rejected and proposals reviewed. SCAPPS has long asked for improvements to Lovers Walk – but not widening throughout its length. SCAPPS is not opposed to cyclists using the path. The path needs resurfacing and improvement to surface-water drainage; in places that may require reconstruction (at least one culvert needs replacing). There needs to be a commitment to a maintenance regime removing overhead holly and laurel, which shade and darken the path, and to keeping path margins clear of fallen wood and undergrowth. Path margins need, in places, reconstruction to bring them level with the path. A ‘no-dig’ condition may therefore be inappropriate.

12 SCAPPS supports tarmac surfacing of the newly-constructed consolidated-gravel path between Winn and Westwood Roads and reconstruction and widening of the narrow section Oakmount Avenue to Highfield Road and the spur connecting Lovers Walk to the University steps. Widening the entire length of Lovers Walk is unnecessary, will not (as the application claims) make it safer and more comfortable for pedestrians, the majority user of the path, and would damage character and appearance of an attractive and often secluded-feeling part of The Common.

### **‘Mitigation’ proposals**

13 The 22 December document has a section ‘Biodiversity offset area’. The initial application acknowledged the need to compensate for laying an additional 1422sq m of tarmac and for damage to ecology/wildlife. No mitigation was ever proposed in compensation for damage to landscape character and appearance. The applicant is now making no proposals for mitigation in compensation for proposed hard surfacing and in compensation for ecological and landscape damage. SCAPPS rejects as completely unacceptable leaving mitigation as a reserved matter. Determination of the application should be deferred until the applicant has submitted mitigation proposals to be considered alongside the development proposed.