

SUSTRANS Rangers

Recommendations for Panshanger Park

Supported by Friends of Panshanger Park

Introduction.

SUSTRANS is a charity which promotes Sustainable Transport especially on dedicated routes known as the National Cycle Network (NCN) and has a policy of connecting housing, public transport hubs, schools, employment sites and other routes to this network. The nearest Route to Panshanger Country Park is Cole Green Way, Route 61. Seven SUSTRANS Rangers and Supporters visited Panshanger Country Park on 11 June 2015 and were allowed into some areas not normally open to the public by kind permission of LafargeTarmac.

The landscape is particularly important and is designated grade two star by English Heritage due to the designs and works by Capability Brown and Humphrey Repton. That by Repton can be seen in a book known as the Red Book which is available in Hertfords Archives and Library Service (HALS). The high Heritage Values of this Park make it truly exceptional. There is a Management Plan for Panshanger Park but it is decades old and the areas, habitats and recreational needs have changed since then. We understand that a new plan is being prepared and hope that this contribution from us will be opportune in making an input to the plan.

The group were impressed by the size, landscape diversity, wildlife interest and recreational potential of Panshanger Country Park. The River Mimram is a superb resource, arguably the best chalk stream north of the Thames which still has a population of wild trout and grayling. They saw considerable potential for through Routes, Circular Routes, Linkages out of the Park and to the NCN. The landscape is strongly undulating with a mosaic of woodland, grassland, arable and wetland habitats. There are areas beyond the sound of traffic which makes it a valuable area for walking, picnicing and cycling. However, most of our attention and comments were directed at cycling which is our area of interest and expertise.

Through Routes.

A strong case can be made for the need for **through** routes linking :

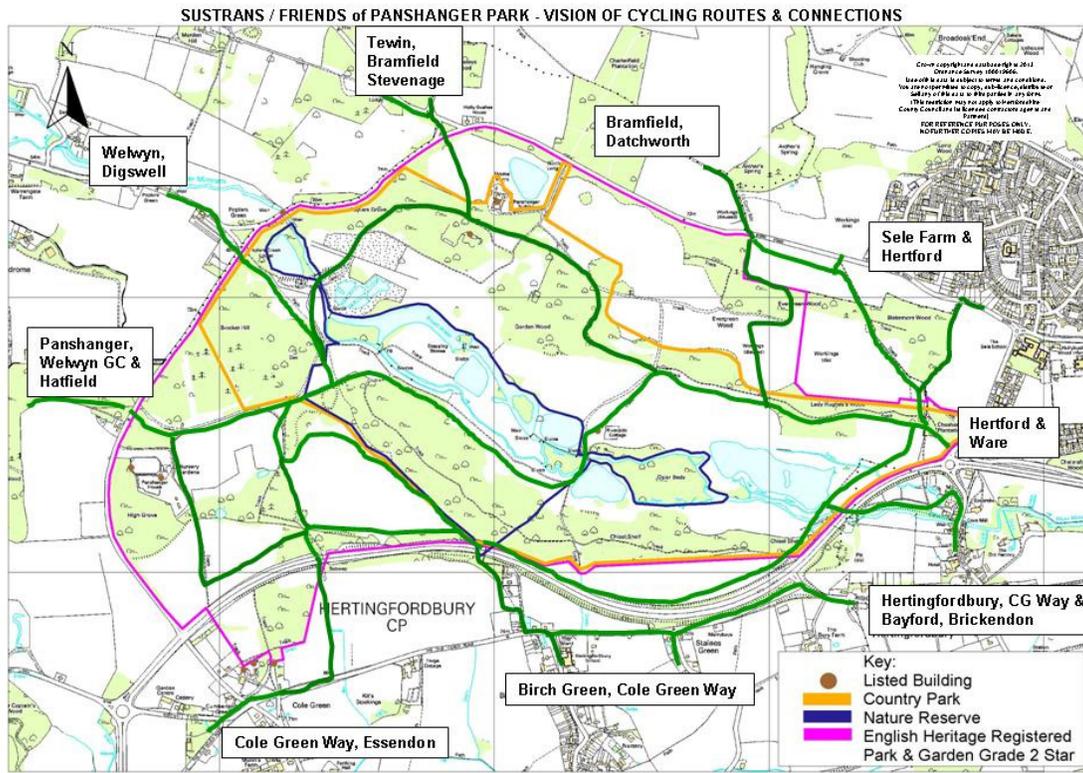
Hertford, Digswell, Old Welwyn

Hertford , Panshanger and Welwyn Garden City. This would be the main east-west route.

Hertingfordbury via Mary Purver Path and on to Welwyn Garden City

Cole Green Way, existing A414 underpass, Cole Green, Tewin and Bramfield. A north-south route.

Birch Green, bridge over A414, Riverside cottage, to B1000 and bridleway to Bramfield. A north-south route



— Dual purpose paths/cycleways, linkages/directions to settlements and other routes shown. Routes subject to landowner approvals and required consultations.

Circular Routes

There is a considerable demand from inexperienced cyclists, young people and their parents for the opportunity to drive to an area with their bicycles on the back of the car, ride on safe tracks for an hour or more and return their bikes to the car to drive home. Panshanger Park offers excellent opportunities of this nature. However the Thieves Lane car park is not ideal as it is sloping and has steep slopes leading up beside Lady Hughes Wood and down to the Osprey Lake. These are not ideal for young inexperienced riders.

We considered the Car Park by the stables or a new one on the 'settlement lagoon' when available in the future to be more suitable as they are flatter, there is more space and they have safer access for vehicular traffic. This area could make an excellent CYCLE HUB.

We have some concern about the route leading north-west from the Thieves Lane car park (see Map) which is proposed to run alongside the B1000 and then to join the bridleway north of that road. We believe that to use the permissive footpath within the park to be preferable and then to make a new exit onto and across the B1000 further west emerging opposite the existing bridleway leading to Bacons Farm, Bramfield and Tewin.

Access Points

Whilst motorists are currently restricted to Thieves Lane Car Park as their access point we agreed that there were as many as eleven points where cyclists and walkers could enter the Park (see map). Whilst these vary in their safety of approach they make the park potentially accessible to a large number of residents of East Herts and Welwyn-Hatfield. They also make possible routes combining cycling within and outside the Park.

We considered the type of style or gate and noted that there was a wide range in use in the Park. Our preference is for one which is also suitable for people with mobility problems and horse-riders. The type of gates with a high handle might be appropriate. It is desirable for it to be possible to leave them open when cattle or sheep are not grazing in adjacent fields or grassy areas.

SUSTRANS target is for cyclists to be able to cycle continuously without getting off their cycles. Ideally routes should be safe for youngsters of about 13 years upwards to ride without accompanying adults.

Surfaces.

The surfaces in the Park are varied and currently suitable for most mountain bikes and some hybrids. They are quite rough and steep for road bikes especially those with narrow tyres. We had one puncture during our tour. We think that main routes should be given some improvement involving the use of 'hoggin' where necessary. (Hoggin is a material with a range of particle sizes which when compacted gives a smooth, permeable surface). We believe that LFT could source such material locally by screening sand, gravel and a little clay from its local operations.

In some areas there are large round pebbles which are mobile, quite treacherous for cycles especially on steeper slopes and for descending travellers.

There is a very slippery section of path near Lady Hughes Wood beside Thieves Lane Car Park. It is steep and seems to be on an area where the soils have a fairly high clay content. An alternative route should be investigated .

Conflict.

Conflicts arise where participants are not considerate to other users. Sadly some motorists, cyclists and even walkers can be inconsiderate. One way of avoiding conflict is to segregate users where the risk of conflict is greatest. We consider this to be on the steeper slopes and suggest that cyclists going downhill in particular are given the opportunity of using a section of parallel path. If this forms a dogleg it can be favoured by cyclists going uphill too. For example, there is an opportunity to do this near the Butterfield Path in the western part of the Park (see map).

We examined the path in the Central Valley, just south of the River Mimram where the public are currently excluded. We discussed the wildlife in this area and its importance for Water vole in

particular. Some of the group were familiar with this species and its ecology and failed to see how cycling on the track near this river would cause any problems.

If large numbers of mountain bikers were to use the Park it might be worthwhile to consider a separate area where routes were marked out for them, on steep slopes in woodland for example, in the same way as there is a special area for the Forest School. This is not a priority at this stage

Conclusion.

Panshanger Park is a very beautiful area with a wealth of opportunities for low-intensity outdoor recreation. Just as 'Parkrun' (Saturday mornings) has been successful and has attracted participants who have improved their fitness and caused no insurmountable problems so the Park offers tremendous opportunities for cycling both for 'through' users and those preferring circular routes.

Currently we are witnessing a marked increase in people using cycles to get to work, go shopping and for their recreation. At the same time the number of cars on our roads has been increasing and on local country lanes motorists are travelling faster and frightening people from using cycles. Areas such as Country Parks provide an opportunity for cyclists to enjoy themselves, hone their skills and explore new areas.

The financial resources needed to bring the paths and infrastructure up to standard are not excessive and we hope this opportunity will be seized and look forward to an increasing level of cycling participation in the Park in years to come. We would be pleased to help further towards this goal.

Thank you for reading our summary and considering it.

Hertfordshire Sustrans Rangers.