

West Hill Village Hall Trustees (VHT) + West Hill Parish Council (WHPC)

Findings from Public Consultation on the proposed new pedestrian link from West Hill Road to the Village Hall

This report covers

1. Consultation methodology and Results
2. Feedback from people in support of the proposal
3. Concerns from people opposed to the proposal, and our response

1. Consultation Methodology

The Parish Council and its project partners the Village Hall Trustees and West Hill Primary School ran a public consultation to assess residents' opinions on a proposed new access path for pedestrians from West Hill Road through to the village hall grounds. The plan design, prepared by PJA Associates, was on display throughout the village, the Parish Council website and printed on the leaflet circulated to households.

The consultation ran for a month between 7 May 2021 and 4 June 2021. Data was collected by a variety of methods:

- An online survey using the SurveyMonkey platform, details of which were on the Parish Council website, accessed via a live hyperlink.
- Leaflets were circulated to every household in West Hill along with the WHPC newsletter with a tear-off form that could be "posted" in a box in McColl's shop.
- Residents could also email the Clerk direct to express their opinions.
- Details of the survey were emailed by the Head Teacher to parents of children at West Hill Primary School.

To facilitate the analysis, paper forms and email comments were input into SurveyMonkey manually. This was so that all the data could be held in one place and easily analysed.

Respondents were asked to provide their name, address and/or email address. This information will not be revealed or linked to any of the comments and was included to ensure that only West Hill residents took part.

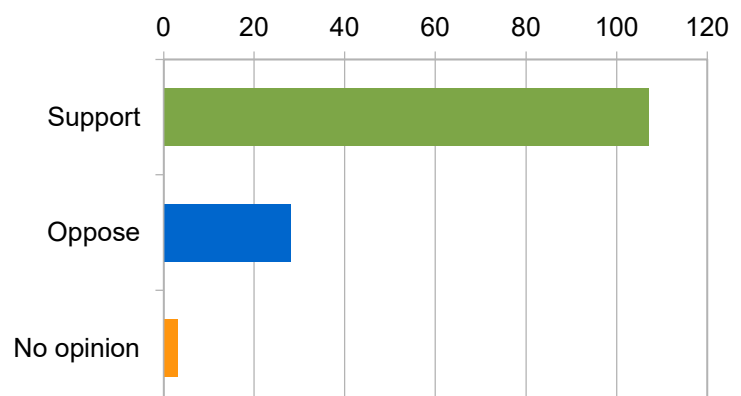
Results

A total of 139 responses were received, with 107 (77.5%) in support, 28 (20.3%) opposed and 3 (2%) indicated no opinion. One respondent skipped the question, but their comment made it obvious that they belonged in the "no opinion" group, so was added accordingly.

Do you support or oppose the proposed path from West Hill Road through to the village hall/school?

Responses	Number	Percent
Support	107	77.5%
Oppose	28	20.3%
No opinion	*4	2.9%
Total	139	

*includes the skip



Finally, respondents were asked to give a reason for their support or opposition. 131 respondents wrote comments – 99 from those in support, 28 from those opposing and 4 from those with no opinion.

All comments were circulated to the joint VHT and WHPC working group. Their meeting of the 24th June 2021 reviewed the comments and residents' concerns, seeking to explore whether there were measures that could mitigate concerns, e.g. illuminated school sign, double yellow lines.

2. Feedback from people in support of the proposal

Excellent proposal, should have been done years ago, will ease congestion at school and encourage walking to school, agree with all 5 objectives, easier and safer route to school and village hall, will enhance pedestrian safety,

Some respondents, though supportive, also expressed concerns about parking in West Hill Road

3. Concerns from people opposed to the proposal, and our response

West Hill Road is dangerous because of speeding vehicles, which do not slow down for the speed bumps. The proposed footpath will be more dangerous than current arrangements.

This section of West Hill Road has a 20mph speed limit, supported by road bumps and a fixed vehicle-activated speed sign. DCC Highways consider this to be a very safe road since the installation of the speed bumps. As part of the planning and design phase, a professional speed survey was carried out which showed an average speed of 16mph, 85th centile 19mph. This evidence does not support the view that the speed bumps are ineffective at slowing traffic.

The current arrangements for pedestrians are not safe. Children and other pedestrians wishing to walk to the school, village hall or play park, must walk further along West Hill Road and negotiate a section of missing footpath which forces them to walk on the road. Residents have reported a series of "near misses" between pedestrians and vehicles negotiating the speed bump where the footpath is narrowest. Crossing McColl's carpark is not safe, and there are known "near miss" episodes. Beech Park and the Village Hall car park are congested at drop-off and pick up times, and there are several recorded "near misses".

The joint working group believe the proposed path will offer a safer route by enabling pedestrians to leave West Hill Road sooner, and to access the village hall and school without coming into conflict with traffic. During pre-application discussions, DCC Highways were happy with the safety aspects of the proposal. An independent Road Safety Audit has been completed, and their recommendations have been implemented. The commissioned reports continue to be available on the WHPC website.

The entrance to the proposed path has poor visibility to drivers coming down West Hill Road

The proposed path design includes a splayed entrance where it meets the pavement on West Hill Road and a metal guardrail preventing people exiting the path straight onto the road. The current School "Wig-Wag" sign will be moved further west along West Hill Road to alert approaching drivers to the path entrance and the presence of school children. The speed limit is 20mph, supported by road bumps and a vehicle-activated speed sign. These measures will all be assessed by the EDDC planning team and DCC Highways who will reject the proposal if they are not satisfied that it meets safety requirements. However, the design has been prepared by an experienced transport planning and engineering consultant well-versed in dealing with these issues.

The money being spent on this should be spent on traffic calming measures throughout the village instead

This project was assessed as the highest priority in the WHPC Traffic Study consultation in 2019. The Parish Council has allowed for this in their budget planning and have reserves set aside for this purpose. The bulk of the cost will be in the construction phase. As the path is on land owned by the village hall, WHPC will work with Village Hall Trustees to attempt to secure grant funding.

The joint Working Group agree that traffic calming is important throughout the village. WHPC have invested in a vehicle-activated speed sign which is regularly moved to locations throughout the village. The Parish Council will continue to look at ways in which we can reduce speeding and work with the county Highways team to achieve this. If, as it is hoped, the proposed path helps to reduce the number

of car journeys to and from the school and village hall, it can be argued that it is making an important contribution to traffic calming.

Village hall users and parents will use West Hill Road, Ashley Brake or Warren Park for parking instead of the village hall car park

West Hill Road will have "School Keep Clear" zig-zag road markings east and west of the path entrance. Some parents may temporarily stop in Ashley Brake or Warren Park to drop children off for school. We hope that parents will show consideration for residents and pedestrians when choosing where to drop off and pick up. The point of creating the path is to encourage more walking to school and less driving, so it remains to be seen how this will work out in practice. However, it does not follow that village hall users will park in side roads when the village hall car park is closer, more convenient and not congested during the day/evenings. The situation will be monitored over time.

It will not lead to increased walking to school or a reduction in car journeys by parents

This is unproven. Residents who said they were in favour of the proposed path, many of whom are parents with children at the primary school, said they would favour walking to school rather than driving because the new path will shorten their route and avoid the dangerous section of missing footpath on West Hill Road and McColl's car park. Of course, parents who do not live in West Hill and consequently drive their children to school, will continue to drive.

There is no need for people to walk through McColl's car park when they can already safely walk around Beech Park, which negates one of the stated aims of the new path

Parents and others, particularly those living on the western side of the village do cut through McColl's car park to shorten their walk to the school, village hall and play park. Pedestrians usually take the shortest route. There are known instances of near-misses in McColl's car park and also in Beech Park and the Village Hall carpark

The planning permission granted for the redevelopment of McColl's shop building includes a permissive path which removes the need to cross their car park

There is currently no indication of when, or if, the redevelopment of the McColl's shop building (aka Potters Country Market) will take place. Even if the redevelopment proceeds, there is no guarantee that the permissive path will be included, and it is not an enforceable planning matter because the car park is on private land. In addition, according to the planning application, the path would be on the same level as the car park – not separated in any way, other than by painted markings, so children and adults using it would still be vulnerable to cars and delivery lorries manoeuvring in the car park. There have been several recent incidents of drivers losing control of their vehicle in the car park, which fortunately have not resulted in pedestrian injury.

It will be unsafe for children to cross West Hill Road if parents park in Warren Park/Ashley Brake

Children already need to cross West Hill Road, so this will make little difference. However, the proposed path will remove them from West Hill Road sooner and avoid the need to negotiate the section of missing footpath which forces them to walk in the road. Children will not cross West Hill Road unaccompanied because the school policy is that children must be collected from the school at the end of the day by a responsible adult. Only children in Y5-6 (9-11 year olds) are permitted to walk to and from school unaccompanied and only if the school has written permission from their parents.

Although the village hall and McColl's car parks are crowded at drop-off/pick-up times, people are aware of the need for additional caution, and there is no through traffic adding to the congestion

The Parish Council, Village Hall Trustees and School Headteacher are acutely aware of the traffic congestion in the car parks and Beech Park which is a risk to pedestrians sharing the space at busy times. The proposed path will remove some of the traffic by encouraging more people to walk.

Children leaving school will run straight into West Hill Road

The proposed path construction includes a metal guardrail on the pavement at West Hill Road covering the whole width of the path which will prevent pedestrians from walking straight onto the road. As stated above, children will not be unaccompanied because it is school policy that they must be collected in person. Parents are responsible for their child's safety.

Prepared by representatives of Village Hall Trustees + West Hill Parish Council
24th June 2021