



Tidbury Green Parish Council

Tilehouse Lane Footway Survey

October 2016

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1.0 Introduction

The Parish Council have had long standing concerns regarding the infrastructure within Tidbury Green. Over several years we have maintained that the infrastructure of the parish is wholly inadequate to meet its future needs and have contested that the present developments are unsustainable. These views and concerns have been shared with Planning Inspectors and with Solihull MBC, however they appear to have received limited consideration and had no impact on the outcome of key planning decisions for Tidbury Green.

The Solihull Local Plan (SLP) clearly states that they will promote cycling, walking, the use of public transport and car sharing to access employment, education, retail and leisure facilities, recognising the importance of the use of sustainable modes of transport.

One of the key challenges identified within the SLP is “increasing accessibility and encouraging sustainable travel”. Specific objectives identified in relation to this challenge include:-

- To improve accessibility and ease of movement for all users to services, facilities jobs and green infrastructure
- To manage transport demand and reduce car reliance
- To enabling and increase the modal share of all forms of sustainable travel.

Policy P7 – accessibility and ease of access, states that access to development from the core walking, cycling, public transport and road networks will be expected to be safe, attractive, overlooked and direct on foot, by bicycle and from public transport

Policy P8 – managing demand for travel and reducing congestion states that all development will have regard for highway safety and that the use of sustainable modes of transport i.e. walking, cycling and public transport shall be promoted and encouraged in all development, by amongst other things ensuring that the routes to the site from nearby services and local public transport stops are good quality, direct and attractive to use for all users.

Prospective developers of land in Tidbury Green have made a great play of the use of cycling and walking as an eco-friendly way of accessing Whitlock’s End train station. This survey addressed to parishioners is however limited to walking.

Tidbury Green Parish Council believes that due to the poor quality of the infrastructure within Tidbury Green a number of the key objectives and policies are not achieved as use of cycling, walking and access to public transport is not considered a safe attractive option to users.

The Parish Council were very disappointed that the section 106 agreements for both Lowbrook Farm and Tidbury Green Farm make no mention of the provision of enhanced footways in the area. In our view this demonstrates that SMBC and developers have applied a very low priority to helping people to walk to public transport sites.

The Parish Council were also disappointed that they were never consulted on the section 106 arrangements or provided with the opportunity to shape the infrastructure and surveys to support the developments in the area and reflect the needs of the community.

We now find ourselves in the position where there will be at least an additional 400 homes built in Tidbury Green, almost doubling the number of homes within this once semi-rural village. This development will inevitably contribute significantly to the volume of local traffic. We are therefore genuinely concerned that the infrastructure of the parish is wholly inadequate, unattractive to users, and of greater concern, unsafe in parts.

We therefore felt that it was appropriate to seek the views of local parishioners to ascertain their opinions and any concerns that they may have, to ensure that the Parish Council is representing their views, and that, where appropriate, our community's views can be put forward as one substantial voice. We chose Tilehouse Lane as the first priority, as it is the key route to Whitlock's End train station which, based on views of the developers of both sites, will be utilised by people joining the community to walk to the train station and make use of public transport, rather than relying on driving, which supports one of SMBC's defined key aims.

The focus of the survey is very much on the safety of the route, as this is the Parish Council's prime concern. If people do not consider the route to be safe, its attractiveness to users is severely limited and this constrains accessibility to the key public transport facility of Whitlock's End train station. Once again these factors of safe and attractive use to all users and accessibility to public transport are key elements of the SLP and its aims.

The survey questionnaire consisted of 13 questions to ascertain the frequency parishioners walk this route and whether they regard the infrastructure to be acceptable for the purposes of safe passage.

For the purpose of obtaining views, the route was split into three sections. For each section participants were asked to rate the section using a one to five scoring system with one being very secure and five dangerous. A marking was sought for each under the following conditions:-

- Walking alone
- Walking with a partner
- Walking in a group
- Walking with a child
- Walking with a child in a pushchair
- Passing an on-comer.

Parishioners were advised that when considering their assessment of the safety of this route or road crossings, they should include consideration of width and quality of footway, proximity to the road, perceived speeds and tonnage of traffic, cutting back of hedges, street lighting in hours of poor light, and the necessity for people to step into the road for whatever reason.

Parishioners were also asked to grade the four key crossing points at the Lowbrook Lane/Tilehouse Lane crossroads to access the route, again applying the same grading system and applying the assessment criteria defined above.

The purpose of this report is to evaluate the responses received from those parishioners who participated in the survey and present the findings.

2.0 Findings

2.1 Responses received

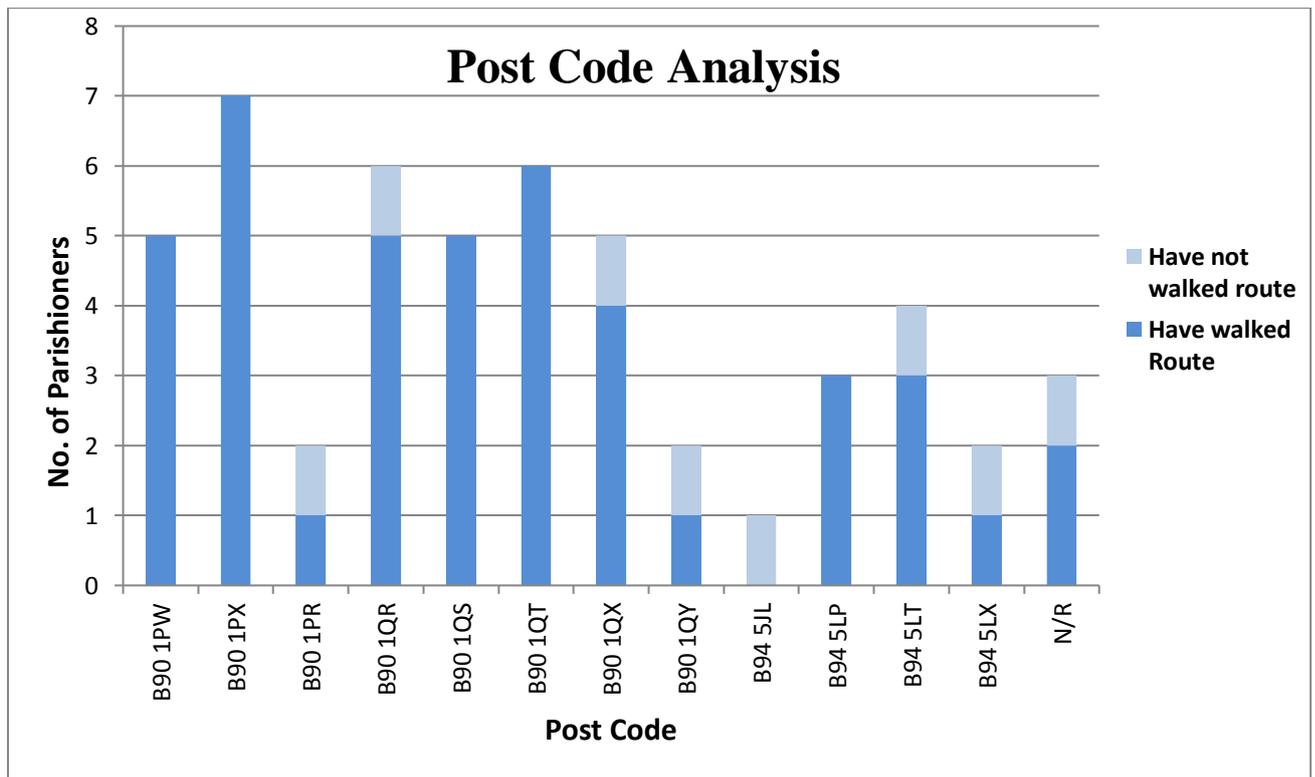
51 completed questionnaires were returned, which is considered an excellent response rate, indicating that this is a subject that really matters to people. This response rate will allow meaningful conclusions to be reached that represent the views of Tidbury Green parishioners.

It was noted that some of the returned questionnaires did not have every question completed. Where this situation has occurred the findings included in this report are record as a “NR” - No Response.

2.2 Location of Participants

1/ Please provide your postcode. This is very useful for us to understand the locations in Tidbury Green where walkers or non-walkers of this route generally reside

As shown on the chart below, there is quite an even spread in relation to where people live. There was not one post code where parishioners submitted significantly more returns. Also there is no clear pattern, identified between the post codes of parishioners who walk the route, in comparison to those who do not.



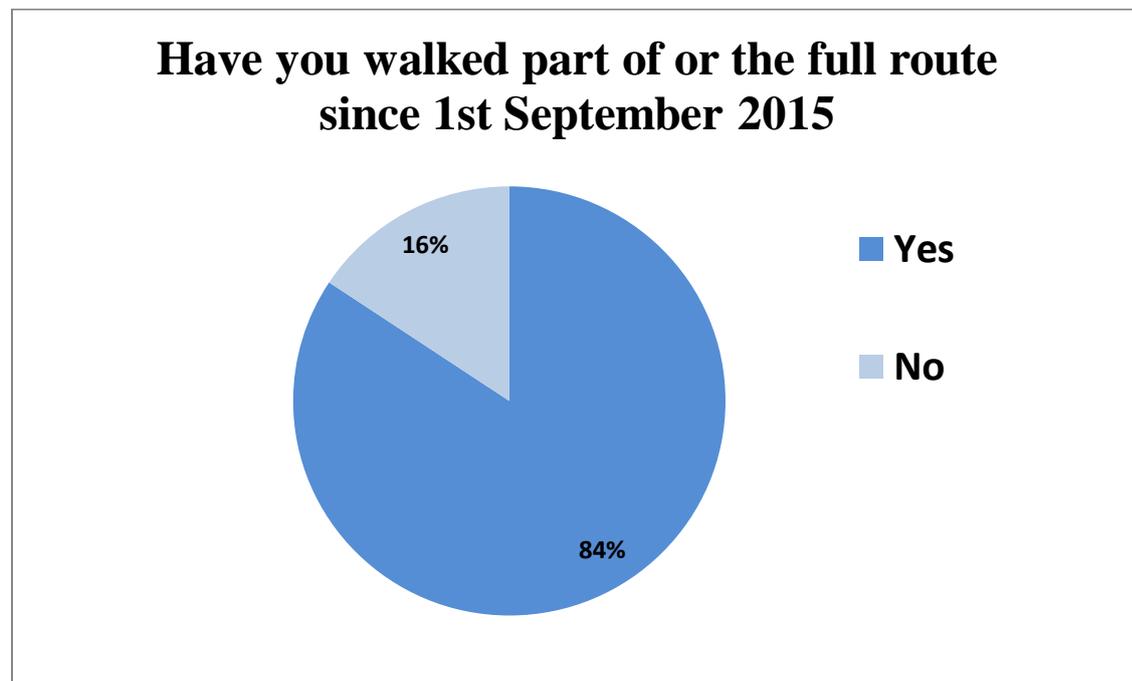
2/ You may wish to provide your telephone number for any follow up by the Clerk. This is entirely discretionary. Your response will be given equal weight, whether this information is provided or not.

Some participants provided their contact telephone numbers whereas others did not. As stated in the question this was entirely at the discretion of the parishioner and had no impact upon how their views would be collated or analysed.

2.3 Frequency of Use

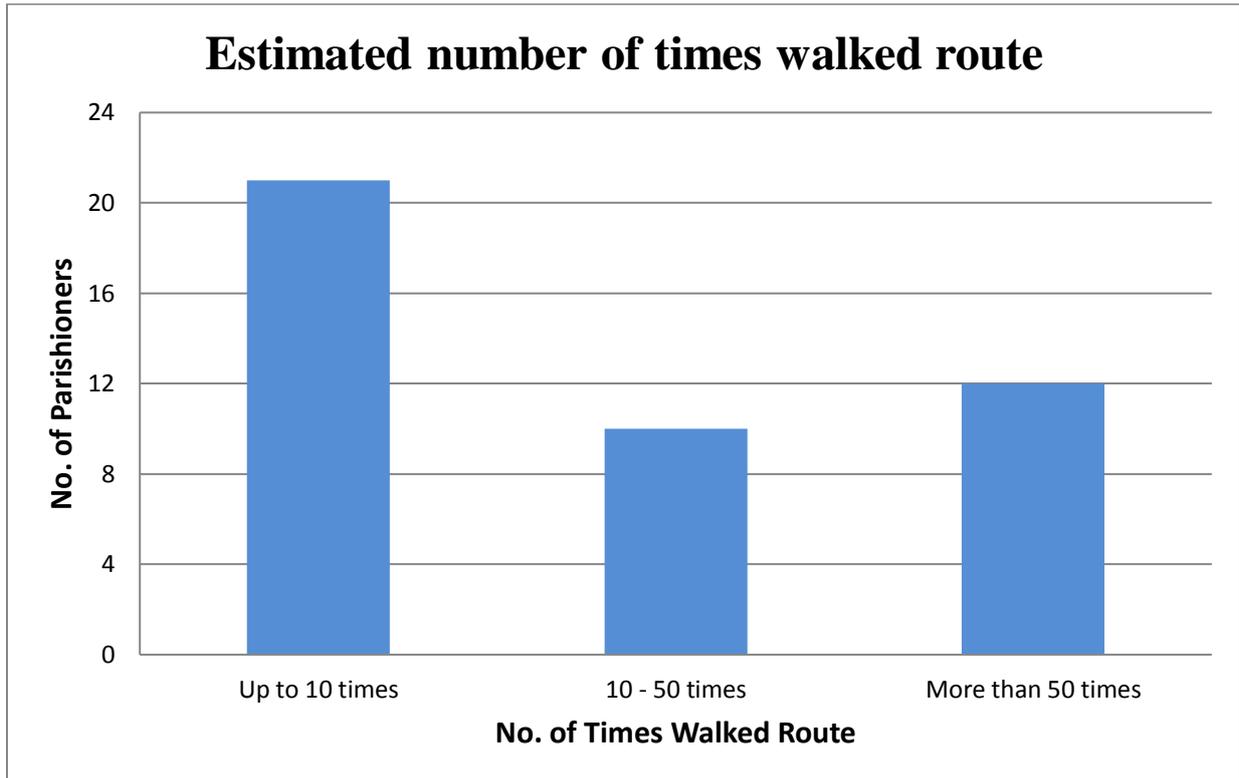
3/ Have you walked fully or partially along this route at any time during the period from 1 September 2015 up to the closing date that this survey ends? If NO go to question 13.

As demonstrated by the chart below a large proportion of those parishioners, who participated in the survey [**84%**] have walked part or the full route since September 2015. This provides a good quantity of questionnaires (43) whereby all the sections were completed. Obviously those who have not walked the route were unable to comment on a number of the questions included.



4/ If YES (to question 3), how many times do you estimate that you have walked this route partially or fully since 1 September 2015:

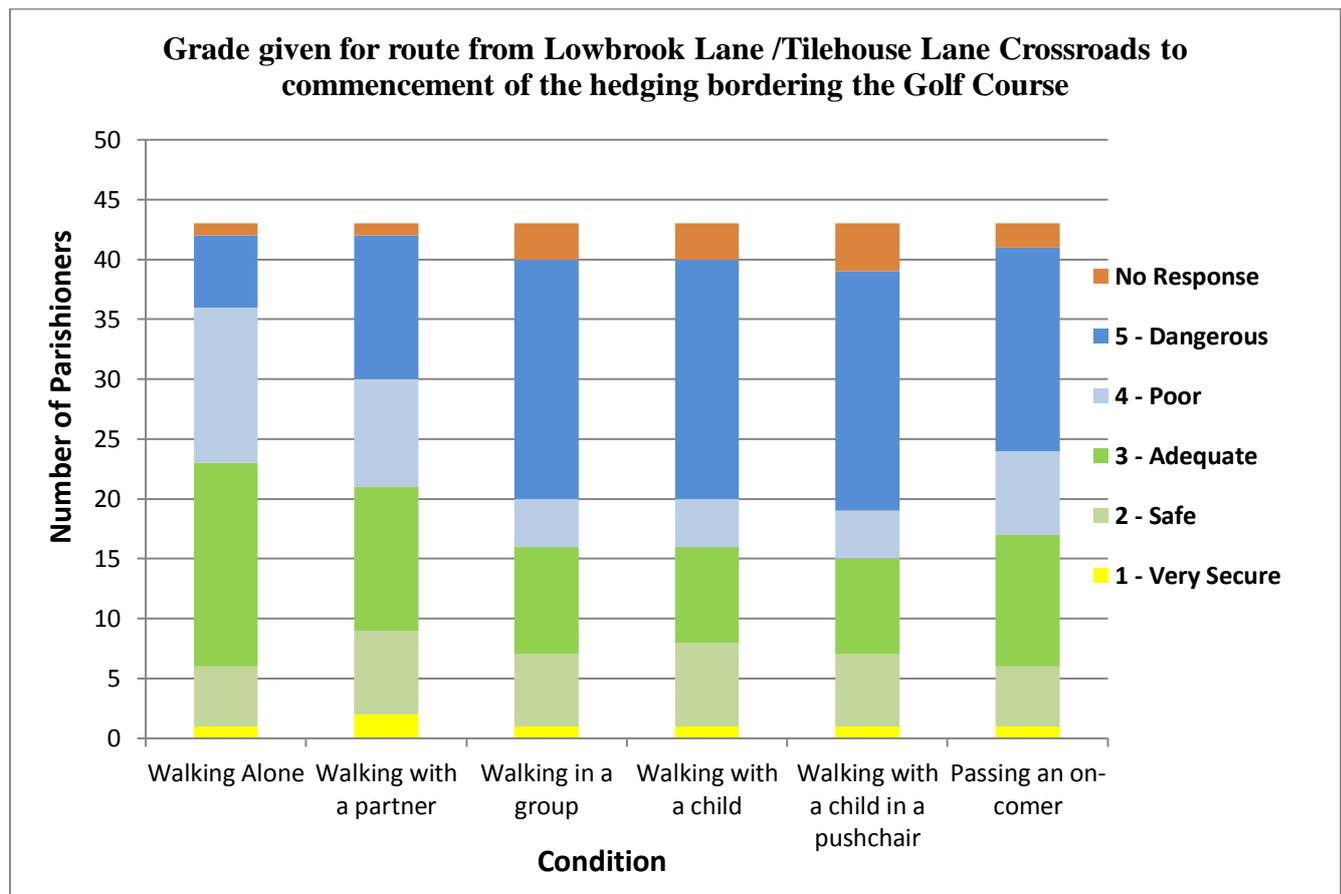
As demonstrated within the chart below the largest proportion of people who participated had walked the route up to ten times. However as can be seen, over 50% of participants have walked the route more than ten times, with 28% of participants walking the route in excess of 50 times.



2.4 Grading - Lowbrook /Tilehouse Lane crossroads to the commencement of hedging bordering the Golf Course

5/ Please provide grades for the section of the route from Lowbrook /Tilehouse Lane Crossroads to the commencement of the hedging bordering the Golf Course under the following conditions: (Walking alone/with a partner/with a group/with a child/with a child in a pushchair & passing an on-comer)

The chart below indicates that for the section of the route from the Lowbrook Lane/Tilehouse Lane crossroads to the commencement of the hedging bordering the Golf Course, whilst walking alone over 50% of participants felt that conditions were between adequate and very secure. This view did not change significantly whilst walking with a partner. However whilst walking in a group, with a child, a child in a pushchair, or passing an on-comer, people felt less safe, with a much higher proportion of people considering the route dangerous under these conditions.



6/ Please set out any additional comments you may wish to make – In relation to question 5.

Some participants used this question to provide supporting information to explain the scores given in question 5.

The most common reasons for parishioners finding this section of the route poor or dangerous were when travelling it in a group, with a child, with a child in a pushchair or when passing an on-comer, were narrow pathways, speeding traffic and poor lighting. A number of people felt that walking with a pushchair or travelling on a mobility scooter was hazardous.

Other reasons for grading this section of the route poor or dangerous

- very busy road - including HGV's
- Cars parking on verge
- Often flooded areas

Others who completed this section believed that this section of the route is adequate, and is improved by having a verge. Also a number of people believed that the street lighting is adequate for a village.

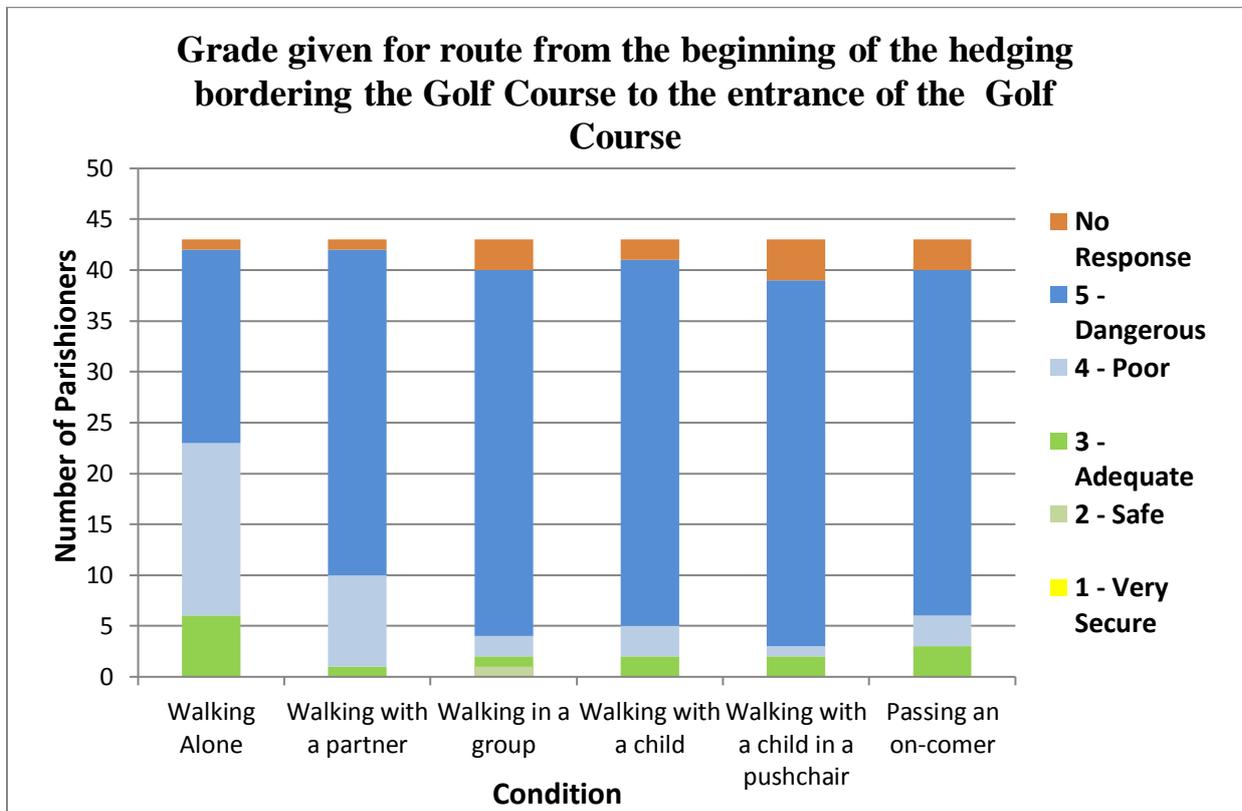
2.5 Grading - Beginning of the hedging bordering the Golf Course to entrance of the Golf Course

7/Please provide grades for the section of the route from the beginning of the hedging bordering the Golf Course to the entrance to the Golf Course under the following conditions: (Walking alone/with a partner/with a group/with a child/with a child in a pushchair & passing an on-comer)

As shown in the chart below for the section of the route from the beginning of the hedging bordering the Golf Course to the entrance to the Golf Course, the findings are significantly different to those observed for the first section of the route (Lowbrook Lane/Tilehouse Lane crossroads to the commencement of the hedging bordering the Golf Course) For this section, no-one felt very secure and only one person out of the forty three felt safe, and this was only whilst walking in a group.

Whilst walking alone, over 86% of participants felt that conditions were between poor and dangerous. Whilst walking with a partner, in a group, with a child, a child in a pushchair, or passing an on- comer, at best only 7% considered the footway to be adequate or better, meaning that a staggering 93% + of people thought that this section of the route was poor or dangerous.

As is clearly demonstrated by the chart below, excluding walking alone, the majority of people believed that the route was dangerous.



8/ Please set out any additional comments you may wish to make – In relation to question 7.

Again participants used this question to provide supporting information to explain the scores given, to question 7.

The most common reason for people considering this section of the route so dangerous was because the footway is too narrow, with a number of people saying that it is only possible to walk this section in single file. Also it was noted that the narrow footway runs right alongside the highway.

Closely behind the narrow footway was the historic lack of maintenance along this section of the footway, with hedges uncut, overhanging the footway and with verges overgrown. This clearly exasperates the problem of the narrow footway.

Speeding of vehicles along Tilehouse Lane was also considered a real problem. There were fears from several parishioners, that because of cars speeding next to the narrow footway given the close proximity to the highway, it will be only a matter of time before there is a serious accident or fatality. A number of people suggested that the speed limit on this section should be reduced from 40MPH to 30MPH.

Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGV's) also were highlighted as a concern by a number of parishioners, with a number of people stating that the highway is too narrow for some HGVs that use it. Due to their size, such lorries pass very close to the footway, making the journey dangerous and frightening. A number of people reported overhanging loads, side mirrors, rope chains (from skip lorries), which could easily have life threatening consequences for pedestrians. One person stated that they were involved in a near miss of this nature, whilst walking this section of the route.

Other reasons for grading this section of the route poor or dangerous

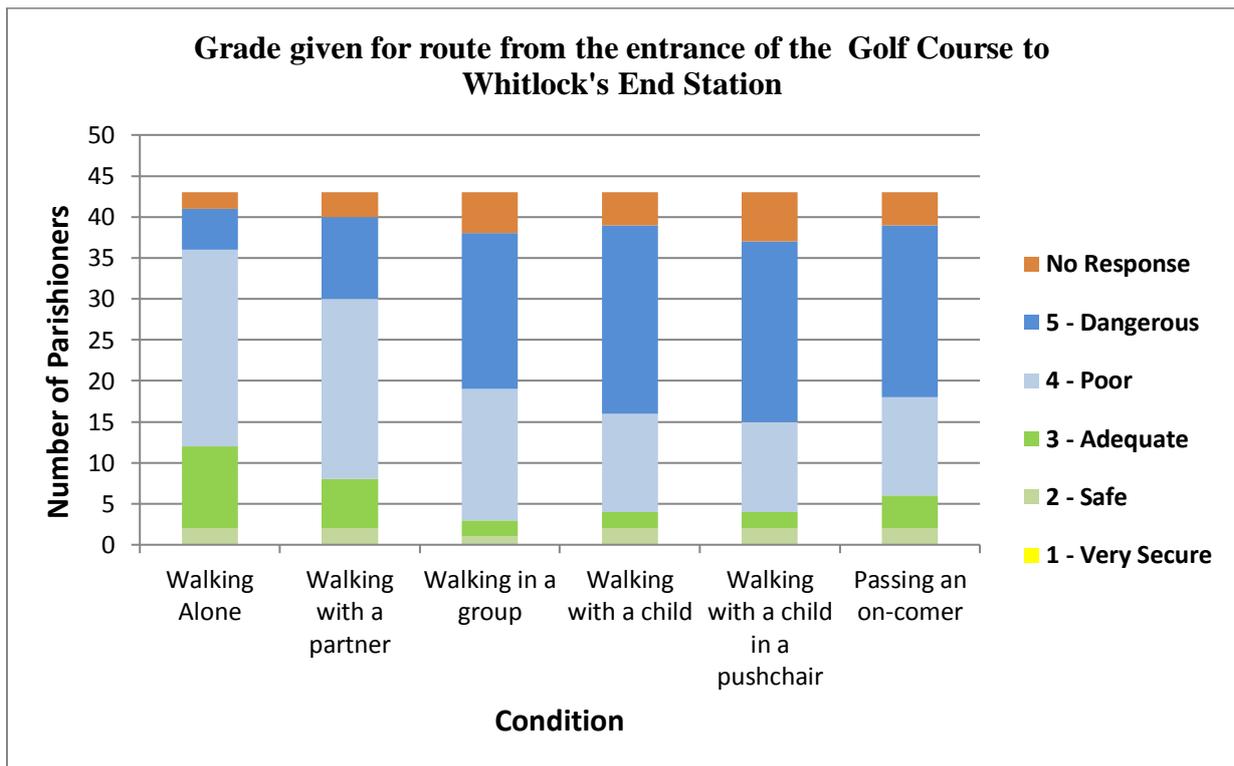
- very busy road / increased traffic
- Poor lighting

One specific section of the route which was mentioned by a few parishioners was the bend at the junction of Birchy Leasowes Road, as it was considered dangerous, particularly due to vehicles seeking to exit Birchy Leasowes frequently overshooting the junction, so causing vehicles on the main road to swerve towards the footway.

2.6 Grading - Beginning of the entrance of the Golf Course to Whitlock's End Station

9/ Please provide grades for the section of the route from the entrance to the Golf Course to Whitlock's End Station under the following conditions : (Walking alone/with a partner/with a group/with a child/with a child in a pushchair & passing an on-comer)

As shown in the chart below, for the section of the route from the entrance to the Golf Course to Whitlock's End Station, the findings are similar in certain aspects, when compared to the section of the route from the beginning of the hedging bordering the Golf Course to the entrance to the Golf Course, in that the majority of parishioners believed that the route was between poor and dangerous. However in contrast to the previous section of the route there was more of a divide between people considering this final section of the route poor or dangerous, as opposed to dangerous.



10/ Please set out any additional comments you may wish to make – In relation to question 9.

Again participants used this question to provide supporting information to explain the scores given, to question 9.

Reasons for people considering this section of the route so dangerous were very similar to the reasons provided in relation to question 8.

Many people reported they thought the footway too narrow, with a number of people saying that it is not possible to walk this section with a child or when walking a dog. A number of parishioners stated that the footway opposite to the bend at Tythe Barn Lane is particularly narrow, making it very unsafe.

People reported uneven pavements as an issue compared to other sections of the route.

Speeding of vehicles was again a key concern on this section of the route. Once again parishioners raised concerns regarding HGV's in terms of dangerous overhangs from vehicles.

Whilst lack of maintenance, including overhanging hedges was mentioned by several parishioners, this featured far less as a concern on this section of the route.

Other reasons for grading this section of the route poor or dangerous

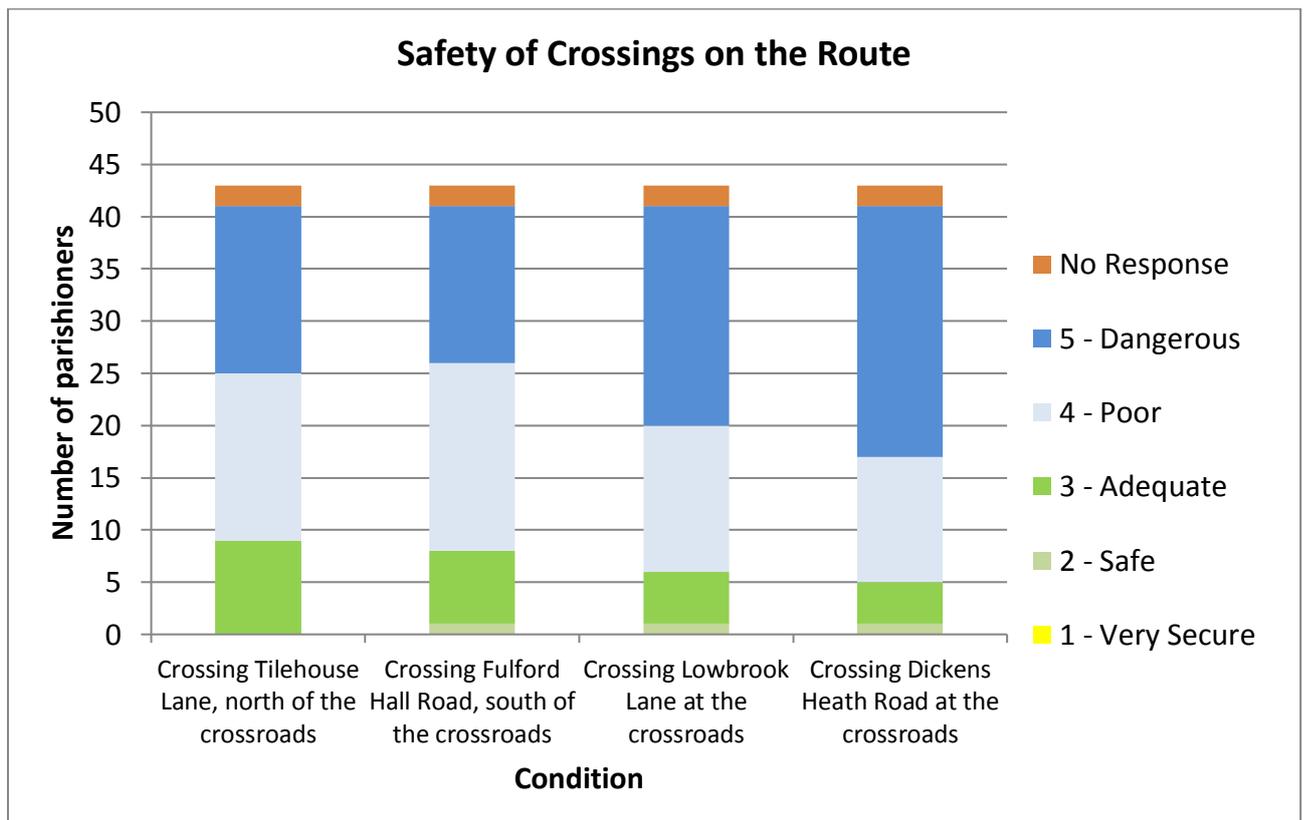
- Poor lighting
- Vehicles parked on footpath. It has been particularly noticed that several (meaning up to 20) vehicles can be seen parked on the pavement opposite Tythe Barn Lane during week-end days.

2.7 Grading - Crossing road at Lowbrook/Tilehouse Lane Crossroads

11/ In crossing any road at the Lowbrook Lane/Tilehouse Lane crossroads to access this route, how would you grade the safety of the following crossings Tilehouse Lane, north of the crossroads/ Fulford Hall Road, south of the crossroads /Lowbrook Lane at the crossroads / Dickens Heath Road at the crossroads

As can be seen in the chart below, none of the parishioners who participated in the survey felt that any of the crossings on this route were very safe, and only one person considered 3 of the 4 crossings to be safe.

The vast majority of parishioners stated that they believed the crossings were poor or dangerous, with the crossing at Dickens Heath Road at the crossroads marginally considered the most dangerous.



It is interesting to note that the developers of Tidbury Green Farm propose to include a crossing point at the “Crossing Fulford Hall Road, south of the crossroads”. According to our parishioners, this is the least dangerous crossing of the four.

2.8 Reasons for grading marks of 1 (Very Safe) or 2 (Safe) on any sections of the route under the various conditions

12/ If any grades in questions referenced as 5, 7, 9 and 11 above have been marked as 2 or 1, please provide a more detailed explanation of your reasons for grading them so,

Responses to this question were only received in relation to question 5. This is likely to be because this is the section of the route where a much higher percentage of people marked this section as a 1 or 2, compared to the other two sections of the route. In general this was the section of the footway considered most safe. The three reasons for this, which were given by most of those who responded to this question, are: -

1. The footway is set back from the road, and as there is a grass verge between the road and the footway, pedestrians feel safer from traffic in this section of the route.
2. The footway is wider on this section of the route.
3. The footway and level of lighting was considered adequate and in keeping with a village by some participants.

2.9 Reasons for not walking the route during the previous 12 months.

13/ If your answer to question 3 was NO, please provide us with the reasons you have not walked this route in the past year

Of the seven people who returned their surveys, indicating that they do not walk the route, the following reasons for this were provided:-

1. They consider it too dangerous due to
 - Speed and volume of traffic
 - Narrow poorly maintained footways
 - Poor Lighting
2. They are elderly and unable to walk too far and they consequently rely on their car
3. Wythall or Earlswood stations are nearer

3.0 Conclusions

The response rate to the questionnaire and in general the quality of responses received were considered good. This has enabled some evidence based conclusions to be drawn from this survey.

Overall the survey results clearly indicate that people do not find the route from the Lowbrook Lane / Tilehouse Lane crossroads to Whitlock's End train station to be either adequate or safe. There are a range of reasons for this view with the main ones being as follows:-

- The most common reasons for parishioners finding the route poor or dangerous was narrow footways, with certain sections where it is only possible to walk in single file. Also it was noted that at the commencement of the hedging bordering the Golf Course the narrow footway runs right alongside the highway, which also brings severe safety issues. A number of people felt that walking with a pushchair or travelling on a mobility scooter was hazardous.
- Lack of maintenance, particularly on the section of the route beginning at the hedging bordering the Golf Course. Also at the entrance to the Golf Course, the exit from Birchy Leasowes Road was also considered a major issue for parishioners. It was reported that hedges were uncut and overhanging the pathway and verges overgrown, exasperating the problem of the narrow pavements.
- Speeding of vehicles along the entire route was considered a real problem. There were fears from several parishioners that cars speeding, combined with the narrow footway and close proximity to the highway that it would only be a matter of time before there is a serious accident or fatality.
- HGV's also were raised as a concern by a number of participants. People felt that the highway is too narrow for some HGVs and found the journey to be dangerous and frightening due to the size and frequency of lorry traffic, and their very close proximity to the footway. A number of people reported overhanging loads, side mirrors, rope chains (from skip lorries), which could easily have life threatening consequences for pedestrians. One person stated that they were involved in a near miss of this nature, whilst walking the route.
- very busy road / increased traffic
- A high proportion of parishioners reported uneven footways as an issue, but this was predominately on the final section of the route (at the beginning of the entrance of the Golf Club to Whitlock's End train station)

- Poor lighting
- Vehicles parked on footway

The first section of the route (from the Lowbrook Lane/Tilehouse Lane crossroads to the commencement of the hedging bordering the Golf Course) was deemed to be most adequate, with over 50% of participants reporting that conditions were between adequate and very secure whilst walking alone. A similar view was observed whilst walking with a partner, however whilst walking in a group, with a child, a child in a pushchair, or passing an on-comer people felt less safe, with a much higher proportion of people considering the route dangerous under these conditions.

Reasons why people felt safer walking on this section of the footway, compared the other two sections were due to the wider footway and that this is set back from the road, there being a grass verge between the road and the footway

Along the routes specific locations, all being bends were noted as particularly dangerous spots, due to visibility, or vehicles overshooting the junction causing vehicles on the main road to swerve towards the footway.

Sites mentioned were:-

- The bend near Whitlocks End train station
- The bend at the junction of Birchy Leasowes Road

The vast majority of parishioners believed that all of the crossing points at the Lowbrook Lane/Tilehouse Lane crossroads were unsafe, with only one person considering 3 of the 4 crossings to be safe. At best almost 75% of people graded each of the crossings as poor or dangerous

Results from this survey clearly support the views of the Parish Council and demonstrate that this route cannot be considered fit for purpose. Parishioners already feel unsafe using the route. The two housing developments in Tidbury Green will see a greater demand for use of the footway, alongside increased domestic traffic, and a massive increase in HGV's. Combining these factors together, it is clear to see that it is only a matter of time before someone is seriously injured or worse.

This is one instance of how our local infrastructure is shown to be completely inadequate for current use, let alone the future increased demand that we will see.

This route is considered unsafe by the Parish Council and by a large number of parishioners. Therefore how can this route be deemed to be attractive for users, or support SMBC's aims of promoting cycling, walking and use of public transport. It also does not support Policy 7– accessibility and ease of access, which clearly states that access to development from the core walking, cycling, public transport and road networks will be expected to be safe, attractive, overlooked and direct on foot, by bicycle and from public transport.