

Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames

**HOGSMILL VALLEY WALK STRATEGY
A3 TO OLD KINGSTON ROAD**

PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS TO THE WALK

MAY 2004



**Devendra Saksena BSc Eng FIE MBA
Director of Environmental Services
Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames
Guildhall II
Kingston Upon Thames
Surrey KT1 1EU**

1) Introduction

The Royal Borough of Kingston adopted the Hogsmill Valley Walk Strategy in June 2002. The Hogsmill Valley provides a chain of open space from Kingston Town to the South of the Borough, following the course of the Hogsmill River and Bonesgate Stream. The Strategy aims to identify potential action points to establish the Hogsmill Valley Walk along the length of the river in order to promote both long and short distance walking in the borough through improving accessibility, as well as enhancing the Borough's landscape and biodiversity.

The Hogsmill meets the River Thames in Kingston Town Centre, in an area which is now known as Charter Quay. This area has seen massive redevelopment over the last few years, and as a direct result the mouth of the river has been enhanced, and accessibility to it has been improved. This has enabled a greater degree of enjoyment of the river and provides a strong focal point at which to start the Hogsmill river walk or do a linked walk along the Hogsmill and the newly completed Thames-side path.

Following its departure from Charter Quay it is possible to follow the river upstream to the Guildhall complex, immediately adjacent to Guildhall 2.

The river then runs underneath college roundabout, until it emerges at the Reevethorpe Garage site (Proposal Site 21 in the Unitary Development Plan). The current entrance to this section of the Hogsmill Walk is next to the garage site, meeting the river as it emerges at the back of a residential area. The walk then follows the river until it meets the end of Heron Court, where it is forced to leave the river to circumnavigate Agar House and its grounds. The walk diverts along Denmark Road and meets the river as it flows under Knight's Park Bridge. It then follows the course of the river, crossing to the northern side of the river via Middle Mill Island. It leaves the river again at the boundary of King Athelstan School and emerges onto Villiers Road.

The walk continues along the east side of Villiers Road. There is currently a short footpath by the river that runs past the sorting office site. This path ends abruptly where it meets Kingston Cemetery. The strategy highlights the need to investigate the feasibility of putting a path through Kingston Cemetery, whilst maintaining the tranquillity of the Cemetery and ensuring that the stability of the bank is not compromised.

Currently the walk does not deviate from Villiers Road until the junction with Lower Marsh Lane. The walker follows the length of Lower Marsh Lane until it emerges out into Chiltern Drive, by Berrylands Station. The walk has historically turned left and followed an alleyway behind Rose Walk onto open land. This alley has recently been found to be in private ownership, and should not be used for public access. Walkers should follow Chiltern Drive until they turn left onto Subiton Hill Park, and follow this until open land again appears on the left.

At this area of open space the walk continues by the river, passing the new cycle bridge at Green Lane. The walk then reaches Elmbridge Meadows, where wide grass paths are mown to direct the walker. Elmbridge Meadows is managed for nature conservation, and the informal path by the river is in keeping with this.

The walk then reaches the gate onto the slip road adjacent to the A3, where the walk deviates from the river and uses the subway to cross the A3. The walk then follows the A3 until it reaches the entrance to the next section of open land.

The informal path through Long Meadows follows the river until it reaches the bridge at Knollmead, where you can follow the river on both banks. The leaflet suggests the walker takes the route across the bridge and round by the children's playground. From here there are several routes the walker can take – either to visit St John the Baptist Church or enjoy a walk through Six Acre Meadow. It is at this point that the walk is forced to leave the river again, and the walker has to choose to use either the hazardous Old Malden Lane or walk through Cuddington, a residential area, before rejoining the river by Worcester Park Road (see Map 1).

The Strategy highlights the desire to maintain the route as close to the river as possible. However, the land adjacent to the river from Six Acre Meadow through to the bridge over the Hogsmill opposite the Hogsmil Tavern is in a number of different ownerships. A report to the Environment and Neighbourhood Overview Panel in January 2004 suggested it is unlikely a route by the river will be possible in the foreseeable future.

It is proposed the 'alternative route' set out in the Strategy be implemented. This path would leave the river just past Knollmead and traverse the playing fields adjacent to Richard Challoner school, then skirt around the Kingston University Sports fields before linking up with the Old Kingston Road. Access to the University's sport's fields is currently being negotiated through a Planning Agreement relating to the University's application on this site.

2) The existing problems on the Hogsmill Walk between the A3 and the Old Kingston Road



Above: Signage at the gate by the A3

a. Signage along the footpath

Similarly to the other sections of the walk, the existing signage along this length of the Hogsmill Valley Walk is poor, and not easily identifiable. As this stretch deviates from the river it is particularly important to ensure that all signposting is clear.

b. Path through Long Meadows

Although the current path through Long Meadows is in keeping with the rural nature of this stretch of the Walk, it can become almost unusable in wet weather. It is very muddy and rutted during the winter, and now forms hollows in some areas. In order to ensure that the route is accessible to the less able, and usable in wet weather it needs to be upgraded.

c. Sheephouse Way Bridge Improvements

The bridge across the Hogsmill at Sheephouse Way is narrow and rather unattractive. Its design also prevents wheelchair and pram access. It also lies on London Cycle Network Route that connects Tolworth and Old Malden, and provides a direct link for pedestrians and cyclists avoiding a lengthy detour along busy and heavily trafficked roads.



Above: Sheephouse Way bridge

d. Route clarity and improved interpretation

The route after the Sheephouse Way bridge at Knollmead is quite complex, with several different possible paths. This is also one of the loveliest areas of the walk, as it is a mixture of woods and open meadow. A clearer path outline, in addition to the signage, would help the walker follow a route.

e. Completing the walk

Currently, the walk leaflet suggests several possible routes from Knollmead. One is to go via St John the Baptist Church and then rejoin the walk at the gate to the footpath on the other side of Church lane. The second is to head straight on into Six Acre meadow, then over the new Hogsmill Bridge and up into The Hollows. From this point you can either attempt the very dangerous decent down Old Malden Lane, or take the suggested leaflet route and detour around Barrow Hill, Royal Avenue and down the residential roads until you meet the river again opposite the Hogsmill Tavern Pub.



The gate out of The Hollows onto Church Road (left) and the end of the pavement at the start of Old Malden Lane (right)

Neither of the routes from The Hollows is ideal. The strategy highlights the importance of finding a safe and attractive route from Knollmead. Initially the proposed route was to follow the river parallel to Old Malden Lane. The path for this route is in a number of different ownerships, and although officers have sought to secure a walk along this route it seems unlikely in the foreseeable future. However, this situation will be monitored and potential opportunities regularly reviewed.

In order to secure the best route for walkers it is vital that an acceptable and secure alternative route is implemented. The alternative route suggested in the Strategy would need a path to be created from beside the Chessington Line railway bridge over the Hogsmill to the Old Kingston Road. A possible route would be beside Richard Challoner School playing fields on RBK owned



land, then via Kingston University sports fields, the Knollmead Allotment site, the Kingston Permaculture Reserve and finally linking up with the Old Kingston Road.

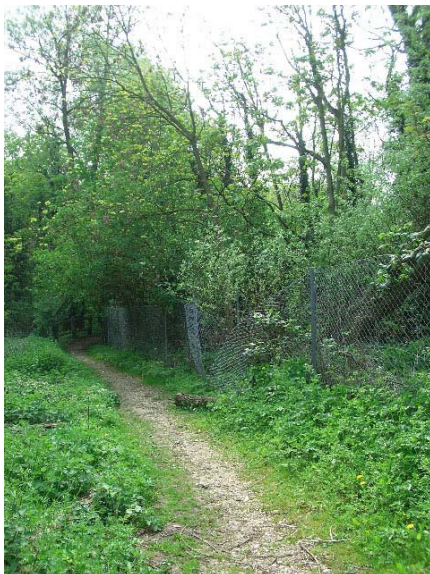
Although this route leads away from the river, it is across open land and links to the walk as it nears Tolworth Court Farm. If appropriate terms can be reached with the University through the Planning process (in connection

with a planning application the University has made in respect of it's land), we will seek to implement this route.

Above: the gate shown here would be the likely entrance to the proposed alternative route

f. Fencing

The fencing between the walk and the sports fields that are parallel to Worcester Park Road is holed in several places. We need to ensure that this fence is upgraded and improved where necessary.



Above: One section of fencing that needs replacement

3) Potential improvements

i. New Signage along the length of path

The new Hogsmill Valley Walk signage will be placed at strategic points along the route.

ii. Path through Long Meadows

An appropriate path surface should be laid in areas of erosion to ensure that the path remains useable in wet weather.

iii. Sheephouse Way Bridge Improvements

The existing bridge pedestrian bridge was refurbished in 2003-4, and provision for cyclists would probably necessitate an additional bridge being built next to the existing one, similar to Green Lane further north. These works would incorporate improvements to the approaches from Knollmead and Sheephouse Way. A feasibility study should be commissioned in the short-term to assess the implications and costs.

iv. Route clarity and improved interpretation

In order to increase use of the Knollmead to Six Acre Meadow area it has been suggested that a circular route with an informal path could be implemented. The addition of an informal, but clear, path could also help clarify the route. The Ecology Officer is keen to set up a 'tree trail' in this area to encourage walk users to appreciate the local ecology.

v. Linking the route between Knollmead and the Old Kingston Road

The Strategy highlights the importance of completing the walk beside the river where possible. Along the stretch parallel to Old Malden Lane it seems unlikely that this will happen, at least in the foreseeable future. In order to progress the alternative route, negotiations with Kingston University for access to their playfields have started through the planning process attached to the University's application on this site. If negotiations are successful it may be possible to run a route parallel to the railway line, from the University fields, through the Knollmead allotments and Permaculture Reserve. The land ownerships between the Permaculture Reserve and the Old Kingston Road are currently being investigated with a view to implementing a path between the nursery and the University land. If an agreement for access were not possible through a Planning Agreement, direct negotiation with the University would need to be considered. Additional funding may need to be sought to achieve this.

vi. Fencing

The fencing along the Hogsmill Valley Walk boundary with Surbiton Town Sports Club on the Worcester Park Road is holed and collapsing in several places. It would be possible to upgrade and improve this fencing, providing a more attractive barrier between the walk and the sports club. Although the current high fencing is not attractive from the

Hogsmill Walk perspective, it is necessary to stop the sports club activities from impinging on the walk.

3) Proposed Timescales

No	Proposed Improvements	Responsibility	Cost	Timescale
i.	Signage along the footpath	Street Lighting	£1,500	Short Term
ii.	Path through Long Meadows	Landscaping/Trees	£1,000	Short Term
iii.	Sheephouse Way Bridge Cycle Bridge and approach route improvements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feasibility Study • Implement improvements 	RBK Structures	£10,000 £70,000	Short-Term Medium - Long term
iv.	Route clarity and improved interpretation	Environmental Co-ordination	£3,000	Short Term
v.	Linking the route between Knollmead and the Old Kingston Road	Environmental Co-ordination and Planning	£20,000	Short term or Long Term
vi.	Fencing	Environmental Co-ordination	£15,000	Short Term

Short Term = 2004/05; Medium Term = 2005/06; Long Term = after 2006

4) Funding

All improvements, accept for (iii.) Sheephouse Way Bridge Improvements will be undertaken with the BSP allocation for 2004/05. An assessment of the bridge and possible improvements need to be investigated before funding is sought. With regard to (v.) Linking the route between Knollmead and the Old Kingston Road, if negotiations with Kingston University are complete quickly, it may be possible to implement this route in 2004/05. If not funding will be sought in the future.

5) Influence upon the overall implementation of the Hogsmill Valley Walk Strategy

It is hoped that through implementation of these proposals the Hogsmill Valley Walk will grow in its significance to the borough, through increased

accessibility. The strategies aim ultimately to implement the walk closer to the river and improve the visual appearance of the walk.

6) Promotion

This scheme will promote the Hogsmill Valley Walk, and encourage people to begin to use it for their daily leisure activities. It should therefore raise the profile of the walk, and will assist in enhancing public awareness with regards to other schemes contained in the strategy.