

Progress for tunnel cycle path

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Council officials are about to sign the paperwork which will allow work to start on a £1.9 million new cycle path to the south of Bath.

Campaigners had been growing anxious about Bath and North East Somerset Council's commitment to the Two Tunnels Greenway route, which is due to open in 2012.

But they have now been assured that officials are happy to sign an official memorandum of understanding document to set the ball rolling for the scheme, which would open up two old railway tunnels for cycling and walking.

The council is putting £400,000 into the development of the four-mile route, which will run through Oldfield Park, Lyncombe Vale, Monkton Combe and Midford and be used for up to a million journeys a year.

The biggest chunk of funding has come from the National Lottery through national charity Sustrans.



Council cabinet member for customer services Councillor Charles Gerrish (Con, Keynsham North), said: "The Two Tunnels Project is an initiative that will make walking and cycling more attractive and enjoyable.

"Bath and North East Somerset Council is delighted to invest money in this project that will improve transport and the public realm.

"It will help promote sustainable transport use and support people to get active through improving health and fitness.

"I'm very aware of the high levels of community support for this scheme."

The Bristol transport group's senior engineer for the project Patrick Tully said: "We are very pleased with the progress that is being made to make the decision for the Two Tunnels scheme to go ahead. We look forward to signing the finalised paperwork very soon and getting on site so we can start making this route a reality and the local communities can start to benefit from it."

Frank Tompson, who chairs the Two Tunnels campaign group which has been working with Sustrans on the project for nearly four years, said: "It has been a very long road to get to this point.

"The path will provide a huge benefit for local people, cyclists and walkers alike, including many schoolchildren, and provide a boost for tourism, too."

The first job will be to dig out the northern entrance to the Devonshire Tunnel at the top end of the Linear Park, which is buried under earth.

Former councillor Gitte Dawson, who led the King Bladud's Pigs Project to raise £200,000 for

the route, added: "I'm so pleased to hear that it is all coming together at last. Council red tape can take a long time to cut through, but it seems we now have."

Councillor Roger Symonds (Lib Dem, Combe Down), the council's cycling champion said: "There have been times when I really didn't think we would get here. There seemed to be a lack of urgency on the part of the council, but now Sustrans can really get going. Two Tunnels is a fantastic project and will put Bath on the map as far as cycling goes. The council must now get on with the planned cycling improvements throughout the city to make it safer for the thousands of cyclists who will be attracted to Bath to use the Two Tunnels."

Lights in the two tunnels will have to be switched off for part of the night to protect bats but there will be infra red CCTV cameras linked to the council's monitoring system.