

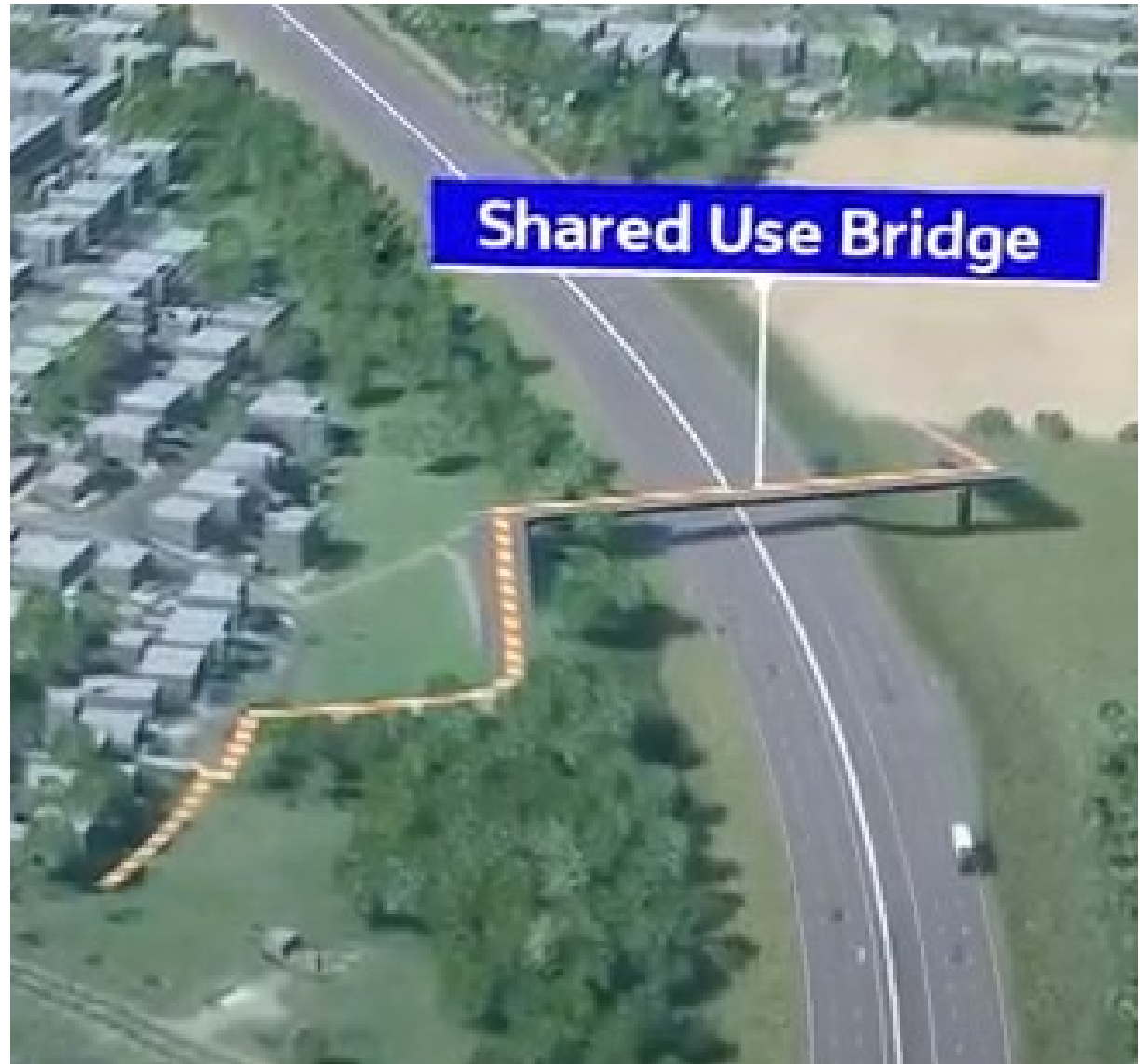
A12 Widening Project

The Gershwin Boulevard Footbridge

An objection and proposed alternative solution

Keith Lomax, local resident
January 2023

Image taken from Highways Agency fly-through video of proposed development



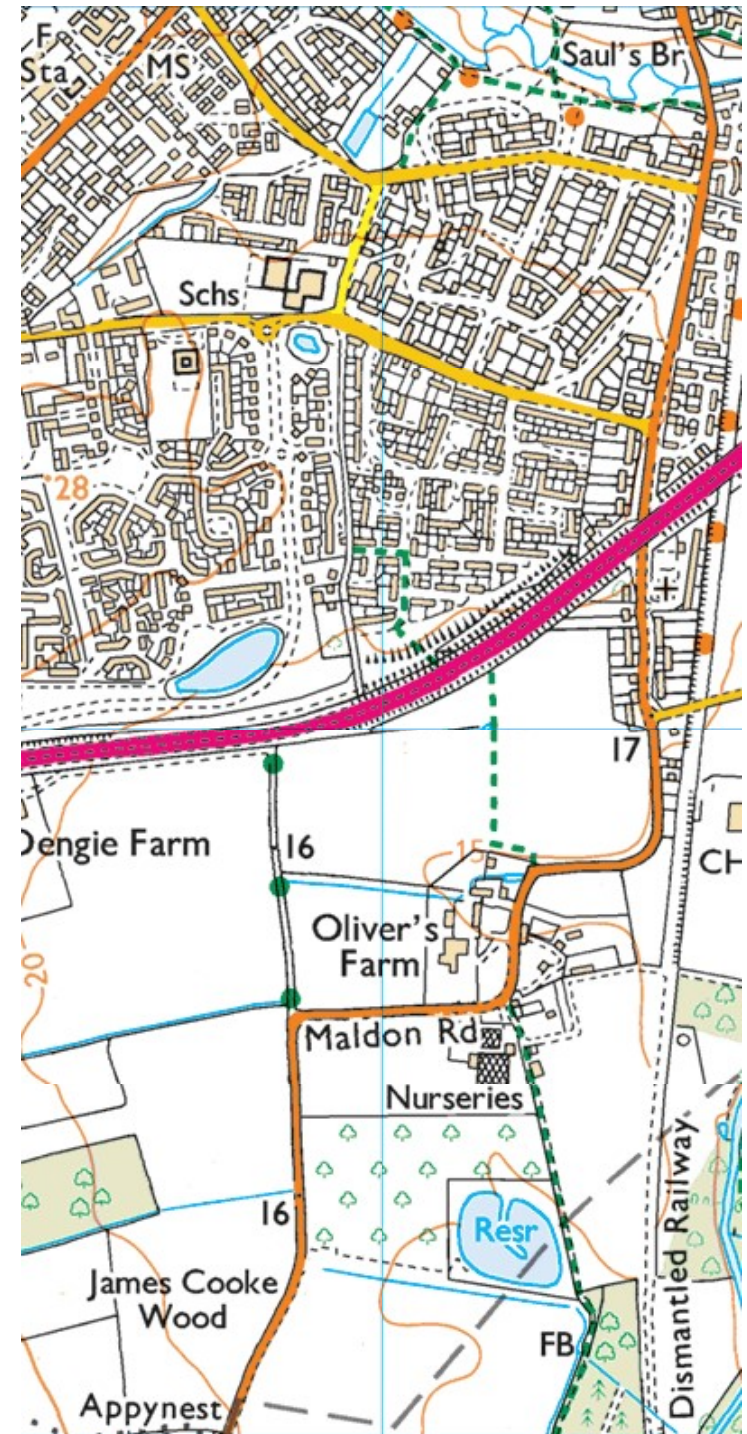
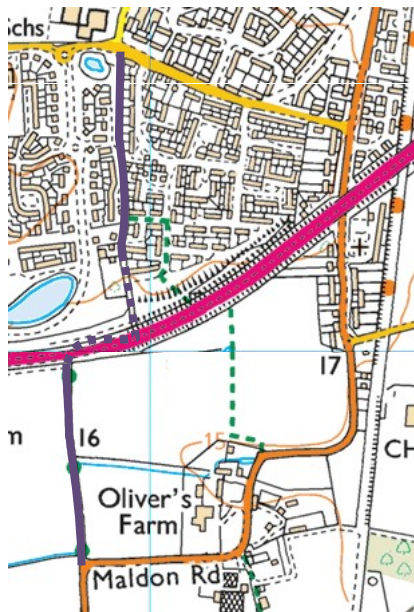
Historical and Geographical Context

Maldon Road forms part of the B1018 that links Witham to Maldon. After leaving the built up area of the town, this is a National Speed Limit road, with no pavements and, in the area under discussion, four tight ninety degree bends.

Approximately 300 metres West of Maldon Road, and joining it at the last of the aforementioned bends is Howbridge Hall Road (purple line added to the small map below left). Half way between these is a footpath shown as a dotted green line on the Ordnance Survey map.

When the A12 Witham By-Pass was constructed in approximately 1975, Howbridge Hall Road was severed and the dotted section ceased to exist. Part of it is under 28 Olivers Drive and part under the A12.

At the same time, the footpath was also effectively severed. It technically still exists, with access via Howbridge Hall Road, Kinloch Chase, and then crossing the A12 at road level.



Historical and Geographical Context (Housing Developments)

Subsequent to the construction of the A12 Witham By-Pass, there have been two residential developments immediately to the North of the A12 in the affected area.

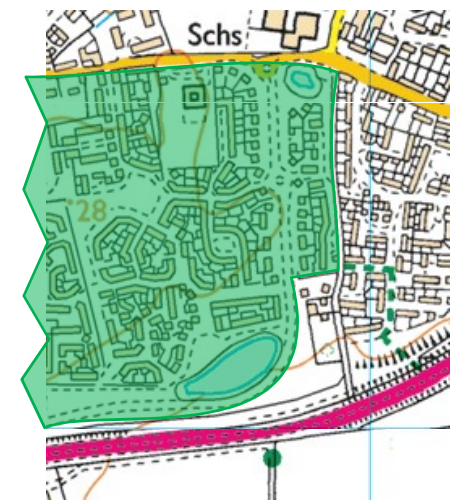


Firstly, approximately 600 houses were built in around 1980-1982 between Howbridge Hall Road and Maldon Road – consisting of Ashby Road, Pondholton Drive, Olivers Drive and eight small cul-de-sacs. A feature of this development is a buffer between the houses and the A12 consisting of open greensward and a line of established trees along the Southern Boundary. Between these trees and the A12 is a wide, deep ditch with a fence line along the bottom. At the point the footpath in question rises to the A12 by means of a gap in the fence and a flight of concrete steps.



Secondly, a much larger development (the “Maltings Lane Estate”) has been constructed progressively through most of this century (and not finished yet) occupying most of the space in an area bounded by the A12, Howbridge Hall Road, Maltings Lane and Hatfield Road. The Southern boundary of this development is a spine road called Gershwin Boulevard.

The initial plans for this development included a footpath linking Gershwin Boulevard to Olivers Drive, South of what was then Home Farm (now Long Mead). This was removed from the plans following local opposition.

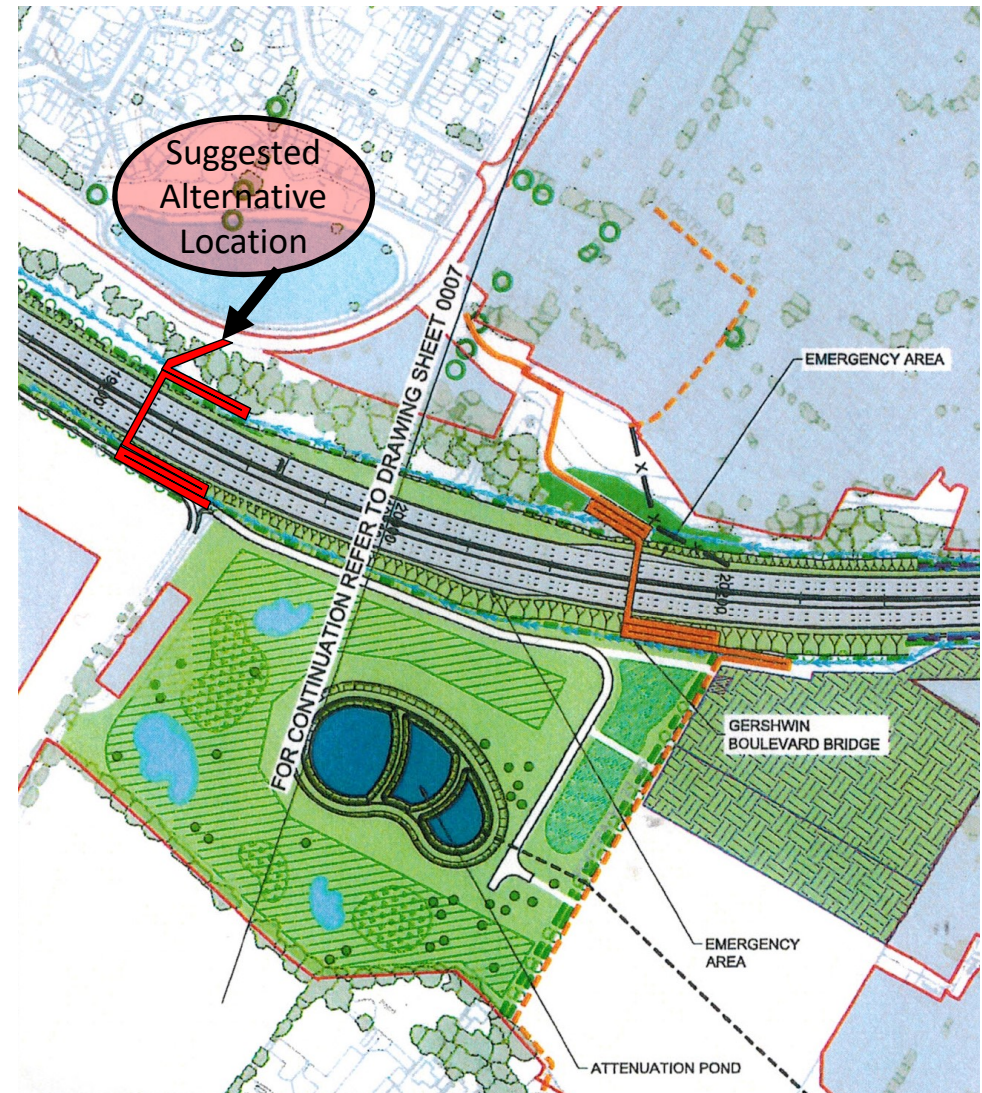


The Proposed Nature Reserve

As part of the A12 development, in line with the statutory obligation to not reduce the overall amount of open space, it has been proposed that a new nature reserve is established South of the A12, between the Southern part of Howbridge Hall Road and the line of the historic footpath.

It should be noted that the Southern end of the footpath exits onto Maldon Road on one of the sharp bends, adjacent to Olivers Farm which is now a collection of light industrial units. The road has no pavements and limited visibility due to established trees and high fences.

The field currently between the footpath and the rear gardens of houses on Maldon Road will be used as part of the construction site, and is then proposed to be returned to farmland (green tiled on this map).



Source: National Highways General Arrangement sheet 8 of 21

The “Gershwin Boulevard Bridge”

To provide access to the proposed nature reserve, and to re-link historic footpaths, a new bridge is proposed over the widened A12.

It is planned for this bridge to be a “shared use bridge” capable of being used by pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders (information taken from the Highways Agency “fly-through” video).

The likelihood of any such bridge being used by horse riders is virtually zero as there is nowhere on the Witham side of the A12 appropriate for horses.

The bridge is named on the plans as the Gershwin Boulevard Bridge. However, this is a misnomer as the proposed location is the middle of the greensward opposite Olivers Drive. It would end in the North East corner of the nature reserve.

The plans also include building the footpath that had previously been removed from the plans for the Maltings Lane development. This is not necessary as there is an existing footpath from Gershwin Boulevard, crossing Howbridge Hall Road and linking to Olivers Drive via Kinloch Chase. This would reduce the privacy and security of the eight houses (even numbers 14 to 28) facing the greensward.

At a meeting held in Witham Library with representative of Costain, the engineer responsible stated that the **only** reason for the selected location was to reinstate the historically severed footpath. As the nearby houses were constructed after the footpath was severed, the historical location is no longer relevant.

Alternative Proposal

Whilst, I support the benefits that such a bridge would bring, both the proposed location and the specification of the bridge are inappropriate.

Relocating the bridge approximately 300 metres to the West of the currently proposed location, such that it reaches ground level on the Southern part of Howbridge Hall Road (and thus the North West corner of the nature reserve) would give a number of advantages:

- The distance from there to the closest residences at the Northern end would be at least double that of the current proposal. Also, at 400 metres away, it would be barely noticeable from the residences on Maldon Road that are around 100 metres from the proposed location.
- The bridge would still provide access to the nature reserve.
- Whilst the current end of the footpath emerges onto Maldon Road on a bend surrounded by houses and mature trees, the Southern end of Howbridge Hall Road is more open, providing better visibility for both pedestrians and drivers.
- If a pavement could be provided on one side of Maldon Road for approximately 250 metres, it would provide safer walking access to James Cooke Wood. This is a local amenity owned by Witham Town Council which currently can only be accessed by road. From there, it would be possible to rejoin the established footpath that follows the Eastern boundary of the wood.
- There is a small parking area adjacent to the Anglian Water pumping station on the South East corner of Gershwin Boulevard.
- There would be no requirement for an additional footpath into the end of Olivers Drive.

The bridge should be designed for use by pedestrians and cyclists but not horse riders, which would reduce the visual impact for nearby residents, and presumably cost significantly less.