



NT Killerton – Cranbrook Community Crossing Workshop Summary 26th February 2026

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Introduction

On 26th February, National Trust Killerton hosted a workshop at Cranbrook Education Campus. Participants from the National Trust, local authorities, and community-based organisations came together to explore the value of a community crossing of the railway for life in and around Cranbrook, Broadclyst, and the National Trust Killerton Estate. The discussion considered the potential benefits of a crossing, the main challenges and risks, how it might affect the character of the area, and what support or contributions participants and organisations could offer to maintain momentum.

The discussion showed strong interest in the idea of a railway crossing and a clear sense of its potential value. Participants saw it not simply as a transport intervention, but as a project with wider social, environmental and community benefits. At the same time, they were realistic about the complexity involved. A crossing was seen as something that could improve access, safety and connectivity, but only if it is supported by good onward routes, careful design, strong partnership working and clear communication with local communities.

Independent consultants Dialogue Matters designed and led the workshop and have created this report. This report summarises the points and discussions participants had at the workshop. Further detail and original input can be found in the workshop output record.

Towards a shared vision

When invited to imagine the crossing in 2035, participants described a future in which it is helping people to move around more safely and more actively, while also improving access to countryside, green space and local amenities. The strongest themes in these responses were active travel, safer routes for children and families, better access to nature, and stronger links between communities.

Participants hope to see more people walking, cycling and running between Cranbrook, Broadclyst and Killerton, with reduced reliance on short car journeys. They also value the possibility of the crossing becoming a preferred route for everyday movement, including journeys to school, access to local services, and recreational trips. Alongside this is a strong sense that the crossing could help people enjoy green space and wildlife more easily, while connecting newer and longer-established communities more closely.

The value of a community crossing

Within small groups, participants could use a map and material to talk generally about the idea of a community crossing at Cranbrook before responding to a series of questions. The first consideration was the potential benefits of the crossing and people highlighted several positives. Overall, a crossing is seen as an enabler, something that unlocks other benefits, which include both practical and social. Participants implied uneven access currently, and a crossing would help address some of those latent equity issues. It would be a connector, in physical, social, access, and recreational senses.

Safer and more viable active travel

Participants feel that a crossing would make walking, cycling and running feel safer and therefore more realistic as everyday options, not just in theory. Within responses they appear to say that currently the choice to partake in active travel is suppressed by safety concerns, and that a crossing would help unlock behaviour changes.

A crossing could provide a much safer way for people walking, cycling and running to move across the railway, especially compared with current options. This was seen as particularly important for children travelling to school, families, and those making local journeys between Cranbrook and Broadclyst.

Better everyday access to key local destinations

People consider that a crossing would improve practical day-to-day access to destinations people need to reach regularly, especially without reliance on a car. These include Cranbrook station, local supermarket, school, and gym. The points raised the benefits of utility access being improved by the crossing, distinct from recreational access and movement. A crossing may help support local economic activity and make places services and facilities more usable or attractive as destinations.

Improved access to nature, green spaces, and the wider countryside

Participants attached value to the prospect of improving access to countryside, woodland, wildlife and the wider Killerton landscape. Things that are currently harder to reach without a car. The crossing was seen as a way to open up opportunities for recreation, exploration and enjoyment of the natural environment, while also helping local people make more use of nearby green spaces. The benefits go beyond 'countryside access' to include the distribution of recreational pressure and environmental capacity.

More opportunities for recreation, exercise and informal enjoyment

The crossing would create new possibilities for movement, leisure and enjoyment beyond essential trips. This connects with the idea of safety and is distinct from reaching necessary services. Participants see the opportunities to enhance quality of life, exercise, and leisure.

Stronger links between communities

A new crossing would not just connect places physically but could help connect communities socially. The points made were not only about connectivity, but raised ideas of belonging, integration, and mutual use of shared and public assets.

The workshop highlighted the social importance of better physical connections. Participants felt that a crossing could help connect Cranbrook, Broadclyst and surrounding areas more effectively, making it easier for people to access shops, schools, leisure facilities, the station and countryside destinations. Some also felt that better connectivity could help support social integration between communities that can currently feel separate.

Reduced car dependence and broader sustainable transport options

Discussions pinpointed ways which a crossing could help reduce car use and encourage using feet and human-powered ways of getting about. The ideas around this were broader than active travel alone, considering car substitution, carbon reduction, parking pressure and links to public transport and bike hire schemes.

Supporting growth, adaptability and longer-term changes in settlement

A crossing would help the area cope with future change in settlement patterns, population mix and development pressure.

Participants talked about Cranbrook being currently constrained to the north, with a relatively young population. The station itself is also a destination for people travelling out of the area to London for example. Various points covered the idea of a crossing helping to provide strategic resilience in a growing and changing place over time.

Main issues and challenges

Turning to challenges and issues, participants considered things that would need to be addressed. These include how the crossing fits into wider systems as a whole, not just the crossing itself, the technical and social aspects of safety, and the tensions between enabling benefits and potential trade-offs or new pressures.

Physical route condition, flooding and resilience

Participants highlighted that the crossing would only work well if the surrounding and connecting route is physically reliable, usable, and resilient to weather conditions and changing climate. Here people were not just considering the bridge itself but the quality and resilience of the whole approach route. The implied concern being that a crossing has limited value if access remains poor or unreliable in certain conditions.

Parking pressure, vehicle access and spillover effects

Improved access could generate additional parking demand and knock-on effects for residents in Cranbrook, street access and other routes. The ideas go beyond parking as a generic issue to displacement – a scheme that intends to support active travel may also attract more car-based leisure users unless managed carefully.

Safety, personal security and confidence in use

The crossing and surrounding route would need to feel safe as well as be safe. This is especially true for more vulnerable users and during quieter or darker periods.

While the crossing itself was seen as a way to improve safety, participants also highlighted a number of design and access considerations that would need careful attention. These included the safety of quiet or isolated routes, women's and children's safety after dark, the possible role of lighting, and the need to balance lighting with impacts on wildlife. Accessibility was also raised in a broader sense, including mobility access and neurodivergent-friendly design. Participants were clear that inclusive design should be a central consideration from the outset.

This theme raised several layers of safety – interaction between safe modes of travel, personal security in isolated spaces, darkness and lighting, and trauma or risk associated with the bridge design itself. These matter because they frame whether people will actually use the route once in place.

Inclusive accessibility for different users

The crossing would need to create a route which is genuinely accessible to people with different mobility, sensory and cognitive needs. This connects with safety and confidence to use the crossing whilst raising a distinct design principle – that of inclusive access.

Environmental protection and ecological sensitivity

An explicit point was made in relation to bats. This points to the scheme needing to avoid harming wildlife, and respond carefully and sensitively to its environmental setting. This signals a potential environmental trade-off, especially around lighting and habitat disturbance.

Making the crossing useful within a wider network

Participants see the value of the crossing being dependent on how well it connects into onward routes, destinations and the wider network of movement. Points raised highlight the importance of network connectivity in conjunction with the crossing structure itself.

Design quality, character and experience

People see challenges around the way the crossing fits in the landscape, that it should avoid unwanted urbanisation and ideally become a positive and distinctive part of place. Participants' discussion went beyond visual impact to consider the emotional response - "how to make it joyful?" - character of place and how infrastructure shapes people's experience.

Community effects, local identity and stewardship

The scheme should support local ownership, protect valued local character, and avoid undermining existing community assets or trust. Participants expressed ideas of stewardship and community ownership, whilst also being concerned that local life and provision could be adversely affected.

Funding, permissions and institutional coordination

There was recognition that progressing a crossing would require more than local enthusiasm. Delivery depends on securing money, approvals and cooperation between organisations with different drivers, powers and interests.

Participants referred to the likely need for phased funding, a business case, modelling, planning work, and support from organisations and decision-makers at different stages. There was also an explicit reminder not to confuse funding for studies with funding for delivery. This reflects a broad understanding that the project may need to move forward in stages and that expectations will need to be managed carefully.

Long-term maintenance and misuse

Participants see a challenge as not only building the crossing but sustaining it and preventing its decline, neglect or vandalism.

There was interest in how the crossing would be maintained, how it would remain attractive over time, and how to reduce the risk of neglect or vandalism. This was linked to a wider aspiration for the crossing to feel valued and well cared for, rather than simply functioning as a piece of infrastructure. This shows that participants are alert to delivery bias – that schemes get built more readily than they get maintained.

Construction impacts and landowner constraints

The process of delivering the crossing may itself create disruption, damage or conflict over land access. Participants discussed the importance of taking construction traffic and farming activity and land access seriously. This is distinct from approvals and funding as it concerns buildability and the temporary impacts and land relationships on those nearby.

Managing visitor growth and its consequences

One result of better access and opening up nearby countryside could be increased visitor numbers in ways that create pressure on sites, facilities or land managers. This links to National Trust goals and attention on non-paying visitors, as well as on those who may use the railway access as a means for longer distant travel. This is important because it shows that 'success' is ambivalent. Increased use is not treated as an unqualified benefit – it may also create pressures, especially for the National Trust and local spaces.

Overall, several trade-offs are implied in the tension between potential benefits. These trade-offs are:

- lighting for safety vs darkness for wildlife
- better access vs parking pressure
- increased visitors vs local amenity/site management
- improved infrastructure vs preserving rural character
- ambitious vision vs expectation management

Reflections on route options

Participants commented on the route options presented in the feasibility information. There was no single unanimous view, but option 4d appeared to attract somewhat stronger support overall. This seemed to be linked to its connections to existing paths, direct relationship with new woodland at Elbury, and potential to support a wider hub of activity involving the country park and Elbury Farm. Participants also noted its possible role in creating a safer route towards Clyst Vale and linking communities more naturally.

Option 4b was seen by some as having the advantage of being closer to the station and parking, but concerns were raised about how it meets Elbury Lane, including its relationship to a blind bend and junction conditions. Across both options, the strongest point was that route choice should be informed by how well the crossing fits

What good design would need to achieve

Participants wanted any crossing to do more than function well in engineering terms. There was a strong interest in design that fits the landscape, feels welcoming, and contributes positively to local identity. Suggestions included natural colours, planting, cladding, curves, seating, stopping points, viewpoints, and the possible inclusion of art, poetry or interpretation shaped by the community.

A recurring theme was the idea that the crossing should feel meaningful and shared. Participants were interested in how it might become something that both sides of the railway feel belongs to them. This included discussion of community involvement in design, representing both Cranbrook and Broadclyst, and creating something that is both aesthetically pleasing and durable. There was also a tension between wanting the structure to blend into the countryside and wanting it to be distinctive enough to feel memorable and valued. That tension may be useful rather than problematic, as it points towards a design brief that combines sensitivity, quality and local character.

Capacity and willingness to maintain momentum

Responses during the final part of the workshop demonstrate that there is a useful base of energy, commitment, and practical support for the next stage of work. Offers include support on:

- activity planning and use of outdoor space;
- interpretation and welcoming green spaces;
- communications and promotion; local history input for art or information boards;
- review of proposals through a cycling lens;
- and support with messaging and communications planning.

The National Trust also indicated their interest to pursue the next steps, and keep other participants informed on progress. Participants also highlighted the importance of transparency, resident awareness and joint working on communication. This suggests that momentum is likely to be strengthened not only by technical progress, but by a clear and credible process that keeps people informed and involved as the project develops.

Delivery considerations and stakeholders

The workshop highlighted a strong case for the project, particularly in relation to safer movement, better active travel, improved access to nature, and stronger links between Cranbrook, Broadclyst and surrounding destinations. These factors appear to be the main drivers for taking the project forward.

At the same time, participants were clear that delivery will depend on more than the crossing itself. Key constraints include the quality of onward routes, flooding and road conditions around Elbury Lane, parking pressures, accessibility and personal safety, potential effects on landscape and wildlife, and the need for long-term maintenance and stewardship. Participants also recognised that funding, approvals and delivery are likely to be complex, with a need for phased development, a strong business case, and support from the relevant authorities and rail bodies.

The discussion suggests that a wide group of stakeholders will need to be involved. National Trust appears likely to play a central coordinating role, with Cranbrook Town Council, Devon County Council, Network Rail and South Western Railway all important to progression. Early involvement from local residents and communities on both sides of the railway will also matter, alongside landowners, farming interests, and people able to advise on access, cycling, wildlife and inclusion. Overall, the workshop suggests that successful delivery will depend on combining technical feasibility with careful partnership working, community engagement and clear communication.

Suggested next steps

Drawing on the workshop discussions, we set out suggested next steps below based on our assessment of the most useful factors to progress the crossing.

Clarify the immediate purpose of the next phase

It would be helpful to define clearly what the next stage is intended to achieve, whether that is route refinement, further feasibility work, stakeholder engagement, funding development, or a combination of these. Participants showed awareness that different stages require different forms of support and decision-making.

Develop a stronger picture of onward connectivity

Further work is needed on the routes leading to and from any future crossing, including links to schools, the station, Elbury Lane, Broadclyst, existing paths and wider active travel networks. This appears central to whether the crossing can deliver the benefits participants identified.

Establish shared design principles

A useful next step would be to define a clear set of design principles that reflect the workshop discussion. These might include safety, accessibility, landscape fit, biodiversity sensitivity, long-term maintainability, and community identity. This would provide a shared foundation for future technical and design work.

Engage communities and affected interests early

The discussion suggests clear value in early engagement with residents, local councils, land interests, access groups and others likely to be affected by or interested in the project. Doing this early could help surface concerns constructively, build trust, and inform both design and communications.

A clear coordination and communications approach

Participants highlighted the importance of transparency, joined-up messaging and managing expectations. A coordinated approach to communications, alongside clarity about leadership and roles, would help sustain confidence and support as the project develops.

Build a realistic delivery pathway

There would be value in setting out a realistic pathway from further study through to possible delivery. This could include funding, approvals, business case development and partnership requirements. This will help anchor future conversations in a shared understanding of what progression is likely to involve.

Summing up

The workshop revealed a strong sense that a community crossing could offer real value to the area by improving safety, enabling active travel, opening up access to green space, and helping connect communities more closely. Participants saw it as more than a crossing point: they discussed it as a potential social, environmental and place-based asset. At the same time, they were clear that its success would depend on careful attention to onward routes, inclusive and sensitive design, long-term stewardship, and early engagement with the communities and interests involved.