

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
HOUSING AND PLANNING SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE

14 December 2023

Report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)

1 ACTIVE TRAVEL STRATEGY

This report provides an update on progress and next steps in the preparation of the Tonbridge and Malling Active Travel Strategy (ATS). This is being prepared in accordance with the DfT's published Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) guidance. Once adopted this will replace the current borough [Cycling Strategy](#).

1.1 Background

1.1.1 An update on the ATS was last provided to members at the March 2022 meeting of the former Planning and Transportation Advisory Board; the report can be found [online](#). Following this meeting it was agreed with the Leader and portfolio holder for infrastructure that the Strategy would be progressed in line with the emerging Local Plan. This is to ensure that future developments are supported by appropriate infrastructure and makes best use of officer resource.

1.1.2 Consultants DHA have been retained by the council following their appointment in December 2019, to complete the preparation of the Strategy including any additional walking and cycling route audits to inform this. The focus of the audits has been to further develop:

- the borough's network of urban cycle routes.
- cycle routes that connect with potential areas of strategic growth.
- routes that are otherwise of benefit to the enhancement of the National Cycle Network, and
- walking infrastructure within Tonbridge, West Malling, Borough Green, Snodland and Larkfield urban areas.

1.1.3 Following member engagement, a cycle route priorities consultation was undertaken between March and April 2022, to inform the preparation of the

Strategy. This set out a suggested network of cycle routes in the four urban areas of Tonbridge, Kings Hill and West Malling, Borough Green, and the Medway Gap.

1.1.4 A full summary of the consultation feedback received is included at **Annex 1**. Headlines from the consultation include the following.

- 76 respondents engaged with the consultation, 24% of whom represented a local business or organisation.
- 36% of respondents never cycle for local journeys and 64% do, 39% cycle more than once per week.
- The most prominent barriers to cycling were considered to be traffic volume and vehicle speeds, a lack of dedicated and segregated infrastructure, inadequate cycle parking as well as perceptions of road safety.
- Broadly mixed views were received in response to the route proposals included in the consultation. Many concerns were raised about inadequate and inconsistent infrastructure in local communities for all non-motorised users including horse riders, and suggestions were made for additional routes and links. Views remain polarised between those who wish to see bold ambition and investment in active travel infrastructure and those who don't consider cycling as a practical alternative to the car.

1.1.5 The project team which comprises the lead officer and DHA team, has given careful consideration to the feedback received, particularly with regard to alternative route suggestions and ideas to improve infrastructure for active travel on local roads and public rights of way. The route suggestions are set out in **Annex 2** by area and include comments from the project team. Of the routes and links suggested there are issues with deliverability and viability of many of these given known constraints, anticipated resourcing for active travel projects, and likely route priorities that align to future development, which will be set out in the full draft of the Strategy. Points of detail made by respondents are and will be addressed in the route audit recommendations where relevant.

1.1.6 Of the routes suggested the following should be investigated further for potential inclusion within the Strategy.

- Alternative route from Hildenborough to Tonbridge via Leigh Road, Powder Mills and the Tudor Trail.
- Pembury Road should be included in the east of Tonbridge route proposals; so that members can fully consider this alongside other available options. This area requires particular focus within the ATS given the challenges of providing infrastructure between Vauxhall junction and the town centre.

1.2 Progress Update

- 1.2.1 Given the agreed Local Development Scheme for the progression of the Local Plan and the fact that Regulation 18b consultation will take place in Q1 of 24/25, it is not proposed to alter the approach to the ATS and complete a version of it ahead of that timescale, as some of the work may well be abortive.
- 1.2.2 Additional route audit work has been commissioned with consultants DHA. The route audits supplement those prepared previously and seek to provide a complete evidence base to inform potential cycle route options east of Tonbridge, and to provide better footpath provision between New Hythe Station and Larkfield. All route proposals will be subject to further detailed design work and public consultation before these could be delivered.
- 1.2.3 The following timetable has been agreed with the consultant team to progress a full draft of the Strategy.
- Progress drafting of Active Travel Strategy – October 2023-March 2024.
 - Undertake any further audit work required to align the Strategy to the draft Local Plan spatial strategy and site allocations – January-March 2024.
 - Draft ATS to be presented to members for agreement to publish for public consultation alongside the Regulation 18b Local Plan consultation – spring-summer 2024.

1.3 Kent Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan

- 1.3.1 To supplement the existing and emerging LCWIPs, KCC has decided to develop a Kent Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (KCWIP), to identify priorities for improvement and to ensure that each Borough/District LCWIP forms a coherent county wide plan for delivery.
- 1.3.2 Following initial officer engagement earlier in 2023 KCC has launched a consultation to gather views on the proposed cycling routes and walking and wheeling zones. Further information can be found on [KCC's consultation site Let's Talk Kent](#).

The key outcomes of the KCWIP are:

- A network plan for walking and cycling, which identifies preferred routes and core walking and wheeling zones.
- A plan for integrating the KCWIP into active travel planning policies, strategies, and delivery plans.
- A prioritised programme of infrastructure improvements for future investment.

- A robust, evidence-based document which sets out the underlying analysis conducted and provides a narrative which supports the identified improvements and network.

1.3.3 No proposed cycling routes are included for West Kent. There are proposals for enhancing a 'walking and wheeling' route in Tonbridge town centre and this will be considered and addressed in the consultation response.

1.3.4 It is hoped that once prepared proposals and priorities included in the borough Active Travel Strategy will be integrated into the KCWIP. The consultation closes on 10 January 2024, a response will be drafted for approval by the Cabinet Member for Transformation and Infrastructure to submit by the deadline.

1.4 Legal Implications

1.4.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. The DfT guidance sets out a recommended approach for local authorities in planning networks for walking and cycling, which the ATS is being prepared in accordance with.

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.5.1 There are no direct financial or value for money considerations arising from this report. The infrastructure priorities that will be identified in the draft ATS in most cases are unfunded. Infrastructure funding continues to be sought from all sources including government grants and s106.

1.6 Risk Assessment

1.6.1 The planning policy team maintains a risk register, and at present no high risks are associated with the preparation of this Strategy, however given the decisions on alignment with the Local Plan, some of the over-arching Local Plan risks may be relevant to this project. These were most recently reported to members at the July Cabinet meeting.

1.6.2 The delivery of active travel infrastructure will help to provide transport mode choice for residents and those who work in the borough and support the borough council to progress towards net zero. The strategy is an important policy tool to help the council achieve these outcomes.

1.7 Equality Impact Assessment

1.7.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users. Infrastructure projects identified in the Active Travel Strategy would be subject to Equality Impact Assessment as part of subsequent detailed design work.

1.8 Recommendations

HPSSC is asked to recommend to the Cabinet Member for Planning to:

- (1) Note the feedback received to the cycle route priorities consultation and the progress being made;
- (2) Agree that the alternative routes detailed in 1.1.6 be investigated further for potential inclusion within the Strategy;
- (3) That the updated timetable as detailed in 1.2.3 of the report be noted.

Background papers:

Annex 1 - Cycle route priorities consultation feedback
Annex 2 - Alternative route suggestions received from consultees.

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