

Central Bedfordshire Council

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Executive

The development and public consultation on Local Walking & cycling Implementation Plans (LCWIPs) and Green wheel masterplans.

Report of:

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Responsible Director:

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Purpose of this report

To provide an overview of the process being undertaken to develop and deliver the suite of Local Cycling & Walking Implementation Plans and Green wheel masterplans for the Central Bedfordshire area and seek delegated approval for these to be issues for consultation at an appropriate time prior to returning to Executive for a decision on adoption.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

The Committee is asked to:

1. Grant delegated approval to the Director of Place & communities in consultation with the Executive Member for Sustainability and Transformation to approve consultation of the suite of Local Walking & cycling Implementation Plans (LCWIPs) and Green wheel masterplans that will be produced over the next two years.

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

1. A paper providing an overview of the process being undertaken to develop and deliver the suite of Local Cycling & Walking Implementation Plans and Green wheel masterplans for the Central Bedfordshire area was presented to Corporate Resource Overview & Scrutiny Committee on the 23rd June. The committee supported the approach being taken.

Executive Summary

2. Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) are a strategic approach to identifying cycling and walking improvements required at the local level. Work is underway to develop a suite of LCWIPs for Central Bedfordshire and this report details the progress to date, how they build on previous work, such as the cycle Network Blueprint for Bedfordshire (2007) and the latest iterations of the Travel choices map.
3. The next stage is to begin engagement with residents, members and other key stakeholders, the outcomes of which will shape the final LCWIPs. These will then be formally consulted on with a view to formal adoption by the council. This report seeks delegated approval to the Director of Place & Communities to approve these plans to go for public consultation.
4. The government's cycling strategy called "Gear Change", places a renewed emphasis on the provision of high-quality infrastructure for active travel. To shape this cycle way standards, called LTN1/20 have been introduced and the Department for Transport have also set up an executive body, called Active Travel England (ATE) to oversee, inspect and manage funding for cycling infrastructure. Whilst welcomed, these will have implications for the council which are detailed in this report.

What are Local Walking & cycling Implementation Plans (LCWIPs)?

5. Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs), as set out in the Government's Cycling & Walking Investment Strategy, are a strategic approach to identifying cycling and walking improvements required at the local level.
6. They enable a long-term approach to developing local cycling and walking networks, ideally over a 10-year period, and form a vital part of the Government's Strategy to increase the number of trips made on foot or by cycle.
7. The key outputs of LCWIPs are:
 - a network plan for walking and cycling which identifies preferred routes and core zones for further development
 - a prioritised programme of infrastructure improvements for future investment
 - a report which sets out the underlying analysis carried out and provides a narrative which supports the identified improvements and network
8. LCWIPs will assist the council to identify cycling and walking infrastructure improvements for future investment in the short, medium, and long term, ensure that consideration is given to cycling and walking within both local planning and transport policies and strategies and make the case for future funding for walking and cycling infrastructure.
9. The current Department for Transport (DfT) guidance, which sets out the recommended approach is under revision and expected to be issued in summer 2022.

Progress to date

10. Work is well advanced in producing revised cycle network blueprints for the six largest conurbations with the authority. These blueprints are the key component of the LCWIPs and serve to update the outputs of previous mapping exercises undertaken in 2004 and 2008/9 and bring promoted networks into line with the new, high standards

for cycling infrastructure required by central government in the LTN 1/20 standard. This has been the focus of the past 12 months.

11. In this regard, cyclists must be accommodated as a separate traffic stream and be provided with dedicated infrastructure within the public highway on all but the quietest roads. An overview of LTN1/20 and its implications for the council is provided in later in this report. These blueprints will be validated through a rolling programme of public engagement, with phase 1 programmed to start in June 2022 and run on into the Autumn, and phase 2 to commence during 2023/24. Each phase will cover the following areas:
 - i. **Phase 1:** This will see six LCWIPs produced for the larger towns and their hinterlands. This includes Ampthill & Flitwick, Leighton Buzzard, Biggleswade, Sandy, Arlesey & Stotfold, Dunstable & Houghton Regis.
 - ii. **Phase 2:** Will see a further three LCWIPs produced, one for other towns of >2,000 residents, one for strategic routes and one for rural routes).
12. The LCWIPs are split in this way to allow for a greater focus on different towns and their wider hinterlands. This best reflects the geography of Central Bedfordshire and differing needs and opportunities of each area.
13. Between January and May 2022, the Sustainable Transport & Active Travel Team have undertaken a process of ground proofing by carrying out network reviews of the existing areas of expansion previously recommended. This includes possible areas for re-routing and new works. The network reviews were conducted by bicycle to ensure the needs of the cyclist are properly understood. The outputs of this are being added to outputs of the technical review, detailed above, to provide revised network plans. These will be used for engagement with residents and other stakeholders.
14. After the initial engagement process has been completed for each plan, the final LCWIP for each area will be produced and undergo formal consultation prior to returning to Executive committee for adoption.
15. Because of the previous work that the LCWIPs are based upon, it means that progress can be made in on the ground delivery of cycling schemes and improvements, with a number of schemes across Central Bedfordshire either at design stage or due to start design in the coming months. Before implementation the council is now required by DfT to carry out consultation in individual schemes. This is in addition to the wider engagement and consultation necessary for the LCWIP development process.
16. The LCWIPs on publication, will include detailed schedules of improvements required alongside a priority rating and indicative assessment of expected costs.

Engaging with residents and stakeholders

17. From June engagement with residents and other stakeholders will begin using the revised network plans as a basis for discussion. This will be an iterative process of engagement, focused on ensuring that the plans that form the final LCWIPs represent what is practicably deliverable, meets the active travel needs of residents and other stakeholders, and once implemented, will enable cyclists to access key areas of demand (workplaces, schools, town centres etc) on a cycle network that as far as practicable embraces the requirements of LTN1/20.

18. To support this process an interactive mapping tool will be used which will allow interested parties to suggest new routes, highlight potential problem areas (such as busy roads without a safe crossing point) and highlight important destinations that they would like to be able to safely access by bicycle.
19. Once the comments have been processed, we will finalise the network maps and produce a longlist of prioritised infrastructure improvements. The revised maps and associated schedules will be subject to a formal consultation stage later in 2022/early 2023 as they will be published in report format alongside the revised LTP4 Cycling and Walking Strategies.
20. In both the engagement phase and formal consultation stage, every effort will be made to ensure the views of all stakeholders and residents are sought. This will include special interest groups and well as users of the network with differing needs, including disability groups.

The role of Green wheels

21. A number of green wheel masterplans have been produced by BedsRCC in partnership with the council and various local town and parish councils.
22. Green wheels create a long-term vision for linking publicly accessible routes and green spaces around communities. These paths create a 'rim' which is supported by 'spokes' of paths leading from the towns and villages out to the circular 'rim' and beyond.
23. The wheels are said to be 'green' due to their natural setting and because they promote trips using healthy sustainable transport. Ultimately each green wheel should be available to walkers and cyclists, while also providing links to the wider bridleway network for horse riders.
24. As well as improving public access, the green wheels also protect, manage and enhance biodiversity, landscape and heritage. Where possible, they also create new habitats, landscape, and accessible green spaces.
25. Green wheels are one of the many ways in which improved infrastructure for active travel and cycling will be provided for with the council committed to working with BedsRCC, the Greensand Trust and Town & Parish councils to produce Green Wheel masterplans that cover all the Central Bedfordshire areas most populated towns and areas.
26. When masterplans have been finalised, they will also be formally consulted on prior to seeking formal adoption by the council.

Key national changes that will impact on LCWIP outputs

27. The government's cycling strategy called "Gear Change", places a renewed emphasis on the provision of high-quality infrastructure for active travel. To shape this cycleway standards, called LTN1/20 have been introduced and the Department for Transport have also set up an executive body, called Active Travel England (ATE) to oversee, inspect and manage funding for cycling infrastructure.
28. These both will dictate how cycling infrastructure is designed, funding provided and also provide external scrutiny of active travel schemes that the council delivers. An overview of the follows.

LTN 1/20 – Cycle infrastructure design

29. LTN 1/20 provides guidance and good practice for the design of cycle infrastructure, in support of the Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy. The document sets out minimum requirements for cycle infrastructure, including but not limited to, cycle lanes and tracks, junctions and crossings, construction and maintenance, and cycle parking. The design options detailed in the LTN 1/20 include segregation from traffic, measures for cycling at junctions and roundabouts, and updated guidance on crossings, signal design and the associated traffic signs and road markings.

30. LTN 1/20 identifies five core design principles which represent the key requirements to encourage more cycling and walking. These principles are as follows:

- **Coherent** – people must be able to reach their destinations easily, along routes that are well connected, simple to navigate and of consistent high quality.
- **Direct** – cycle routes should provide the shortest and fastest way of travelling from place to place.
- **Safe** – cycle infrastructure must be safe and most important must be perceived to be safe by users.
- **Comfortable** – cycle routes should be of a good quality, well-maintained, smooth, wide enough to accommodate the volume of users, have minimal stopping/starting and avoid steep gradients.
- **Attractive** – cycle infrastructure should help deliver public spaces that are well designed stimulating cyclists.

31. A further twenty-two summary principles have been identified that should be followed by developers and local authorities to deliver high-quality infrastructure. From those principles the following are considered the most significant changes/additions compared to previous guidance:

- Cycles must be treated as vehicles and not as pedestrians.
- Cyclists must be physically separated and protected from high volume motor traffic.
- Cycle parking must be included in substantial schemes.
- Maintenance of schemes is vital, and proposals should always include a clear programme of maintenance.
- Trials can help achieve change and ensure a permanent scheme is right first time.
- Access control measures, such as chicane barriers and dismount signs, should not be used.
- All designers of cycle schemes must experience roads as a cyclist.

32. LTN 1/20 places additional emphasis on segregation of cyclists from both pedestrians and high-volume traffic. On urban streets, cyclists must be physically separated from pedestrians and should not share space with pedestrians. In these cases, distinct tracks for cyclists should be made, using sloping, pedestrian-friendly kerbs and/or different surfacing. This presents a challenge in many of our towns where existing roads and pavements are constrained in width, or where residents rely on on-street parking.

33. LTN 1/20 contains assessment mechanisms that set minimum quality criteria to achieve when designing cycling schemes. These are the Cycling Level of Service tool (CLoS) and the Junction Assessment tool (JAT). CLoS and JAT tools are significant as only schemes which meet minimum criteria levels will be considered for funding. If the criteria are not met, then authorities will be required to justify the design choices.

34. Local Authorities are expected to consider this guidance and the tools when designing new transport schemes and particularly when applying for government funding that includes cycle infrastructure.
35. Consideration of the opportunities to improve cycling provisions in adherence with LTN1/20 will be an expectation of any future local highway schemes funded by government. Implementation of schemes deemed to be poor quality could also have implications for levels of other related funding received, such as the DfT Capability fund which provides revenue funding to support active travel.

Active Travel England (ATE)

36. ATE is a new executive agency created by DfT and will become operational over the course of 2022.
37. They will manage the national active travel budget, awarding funding for projects which meet the new national standards set out in 2020. It will inspect finished schemes and ask for funds to be returned for any which have not been completed as promised, or which have not started or finished by the stipulated times.
38. ATE will also begin to inspect, and publish reports on, highway authorities for their performance on active travel and identify particularly dangerous failings in their highways for cyclists and pedestrians. ATE will effectively perform a comparable role to Ofsted with respect to active travel infrastructure.
39. This is significant for the council on a number of fronts, these being:
 - iii. The provision of active travel infrastructure to support and encourage walking and cycling will be externally assessed and the council graded. This will have a bearing on availability of funding from ATE to implement new schemes and could possibly result in the council having to pay back funding if the implemented scheme is deemed not to be of standard.
 - iv. This places greater weight on compliance with LTN1/20, which, as detailed in the section above, does present some challenges. It also places greater weight on getting the LCWIPs done to a high standard with wide buy in from our communities.

Council priorities

40. A high-quality cycling network is part of the suite of key infrastructure that is, and will, be necessary to support all priority areas detailed in the council's Strategic Plan. By setting out the plan for implementation of cycling and walking infrastructure through the suite of LCWIP's it will help to ensure key areas where people live, learn and work are connected to a network that allows them to fully utilise and benefit from active travel opportunities.
41. By clear setting the infrastructure requirement through LCWIP's it allows the council to plan investment and bid for funding ensuring better use of resources.

Legal Implications

42. Aside from the requirement to consult before adoption of the LCWIP's there are no direct legal implications at this stage. As routes are identified and move forward with design, and then to delivery appropriate legal advice will be sought. This would include

the use of a range of legal instruments, such as Traffic Regulation Orders, to enforce appropriate usage as appropriate. This will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Financial and Risk Implications

43. Once adopted, the LCWIPs will require investment to be delivered. This will be done through a combination of DfT/Active Travel England (ATE) Funding, Section 106 contributions and direct funding from the council. The LCWIP's and their accompanying implementation plan, as well as the criteria for prioritisation, will allow a fully costed programme of projects to be put together based on detailed design of the routes set out in the LCWIP's.
44. Where specific projects are identified for future delivery that require an additional capital funding investment by the Council, these will be assessed through the normal budget setting process. This will include a number of fully costed schemes for consideration as part of the MTFP budget setting process.
45. By not taking forward LCWIP's and ultimately delivery of high-quality active travel routes that comply with LTN 1/20 the council is at risk of being assessed as poor by ATE which will impact on active travel funding allocations and in some instances, where funding has already been provided, see the council at risk of having to pay back funding received. This represents a considerable reputational risk to the council.

Equalities and Fairness Implications

46. Central Bedfordshire Council has a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics: age disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
47. The LTN 1/20 standard sets out clear requirements with respect to accessibility for new active travel networks and these will be complied with. The public engagement on network plans and consultation on the LCWIP's will proactively seek views from all interest groups to ensure that the council's duty to implement this infrastructure is done in a way that ensures that there are no disproportionately negative effects on people and groups with protected characteristics.

Sustainability Implications

48. At approximately 40%, Green House Gas emissions from transport represent the largest element of the Central Bedfordshire area's carbon footprint. The paper sets out the approach being taken to deliver LCWIP's and ultimately a much-improved network of walking and cycling infrastructure. This is critical to provide a safe and tangible zero carbon alternative to private car use. Without delivery of this, then net zero carbon emissions for Central Bedfordshire will be even more challenging to achieve.

Conclusion and next Steps

49. The report sets out the process that will be followed to deliver the suite of LCWIPs for the Central Bedfordshire area. The next step, as set out in the report, will see engagement on the updated network plans with residents and other stakeholders.
50. Once completed, final LCWIPs will be produced, and each will have to undergo formal consultation prior to adoption by the council.
51. In addition to the LCWIPs, further work is progressing to produce masterplans for new Green wheels focus on those areas that do not yet have them. The masterplans for these will align with the LCWIPs but also require formal consultation prior to adoption.

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