

Highways and Transport Committee

Date of Meeting: 13 January 2022

Report Title: Sustainable Transport Programmes - Update

Report of: Andrew Ross, Director of Highways and Infrastructure

Report Reference No: HT/18/21-22

Ward(s) Affected: All wards

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1.** The Council has clear ambitions for delivering sustainable and inclusive economic growth and environmental improvement. A key element of achieving these ambitions is delivering investment in transport infrastructure that supports cycling, walking and public transport.
- 1.2.** A step change in levels of walking, cycling and using public transport across Cheshire East will contribute to the Council's strategic outcomes for environmental improvement, health and wellbeing, the local economy and communities. Cheshire East Council has committed to delivering local action to tackle the climate change emergency by encouraging and supporting more people to walk, cycle and use public transport, making an important contribution to this imperative.
- 1.3.** The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an update on the programme of sustainable transport initiatives and improvements across the Borough. The report contributes to the following priority outcomes identified in the Corporate Plan:
 - 1.3.1. GREEN** – through delivering improved routes, the Council will encourage increases in the number of people walking, cycling and using public transport. This will positively contribute both to our response to the climate emergency and also to reducing the incidence of air quality problems, especially in urban areas.
 - 1.3.2. FAIR** – through delivering improved walking and cycling networks the Council will provide low-cost travel options for all residents and

visitors to work, school, and other everyday destinations. By improving the network in line with high quality and accessibility guidance this will improve access onto routes for people with mobility aids and adapted cycles.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1.** Highways and Transport Committee is recommended to endorse the Sustainable Transport programmes, as set out in this report.

3. Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1.** Funding for these Sustainable Travel Programmes was approved as part of the Council's overall capital programme for highways and transport, at the start of financial year 2021/22.
- 3.2.** Significant progress has been made in the delivery of these programmes, with this report being an opportunity to provide Committee with an update.
- 3.3.** The schemes included within the programmes are consistent with the Council's wider policy and strategy framework.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1.** No other options have been considered.

5. Background.

- 5.1.** The Department for Transport (DfT) places an obligation on local transport authorities to provide high quality sustainable travel journey options. Over the last 20-30 years a body of research and evidence has emerged which demonstrates the benefits of sustainable travel choices, including reduced congestion, improved air quality and health benefits. Both nationally and locally, encouraging sustainable travel is well established as part of mainstream transport policy.
- 5.2.** The role of active travel increased significantly during the Covid-19 pandemic. Nationally, 2020 saw the highest level of cycling on the highway since the 1960s and the greatest year-on-year increase in post-war history. The Council have taken advantage of opportunities to capitalise on the central Government funding made available for active travel.
- 5.3.** Walking and cycling can significantly improve wellbeing and community cohesion. Walking and cycling routes using well designed transport routes incorporating green spaces have been shown to increase the emotional wellbeing and resilience of those using them. There are additional benefits of more attractive communities and transport networks with associated reductions in crime and antisocial behaviour. Walking and cycling helps to easily achieve recommended levels of physical activity and also improves physical and mental health and reduces the probability of cardiovascular diseases and cancer.
- 5.4.** Cheshire East is committed to encouraging more sustainable travel to and from schools through the implementation of its Sustainable Modes of Travel

to School (SMOTS) strategy. It establishes a framework which supports schools, pupils and parents/carers to travel more sustainably for all journeys to school, recognising that travel habits are formed at a young age. It will enable healthier and more active lifestyles for staff, students and parents/carers, whilst reducing congestion on local roads around schools with associated improvements in air quality and road safety.

- 5.5.** In July 2021, the Government published the Transport Decarbonisation Plan which sets out a programme of commitments to deliver a step change in transport carbon emissions reductions to reach net zero. The plan sets out strong policy support for sustainable travel and notes that future funding for local transport authorities will be linked to the effectiveness of Local Transport Plans (LTP) to deliver decarbonisation. The sustainable travel agenda is set to grow significantly in future years.

Walking & Cycling

- 5.6.** It is the Council's ambition to improve walking and cycling facilities within the Borough. Investing in high quality cycling and walking infrastructure to give people safe and attractive routes is an important factor in encouraging the uptake of walking and cycling for commuting and leisure.
- 5.7.** The Cheshire East Cycling Strategy, adopted in 2017, outlines the target to double the number of people cycling once per week for any journey purpose in Cheshire East by 2027, which also aligns to the Government's ambition set out in the national Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy (CWIS).
- 5.8.** Following the publication of the CWIS by the DfT in 2017, local authorities have been encouraged to develop Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) to provide a strategic approach to identify walking and cycling improvements which are required at a local level. DfT has stated that 'whilst the preparation of LCWIPs is non-mandatory, local authorities who have plans will be well placed to make the case for future investment'. There are clear indications that authorities with complete and adopted LCWIPs are more likely to receive DfT funding in future years, as part of national funding programmes such as "Gear Change".
- 5.9.** The LCWIPs for Crewe, Congleton, Macclesfield and Wilmslow have identified a sequenced programme of potential routes and infrastructure improvements for future investment. A report was provided to the committee in November 2021 setting out the forward implementation plan for schemes identified in the LCWIPs. Plans are also being developed to improve active travel infrastructure across the Borough in other towns as part of the STEPs programme and Local Transport Delivery Plans.
- 5.10.** Cheshire East benefits from an extensive public rights of way network with generally good provision for walkers. However, gaps continue to exist and for cyclists, horse riders and users with mobility impairments in particular, the network remains fragmented. The Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) has identified the need to improve, upgrade and connect the existing network by:

- Filling gaps in the existing network;
- Improving access opportunities for horse riders, cyclists and people with reduced mobility;
- Providing information and signs to inform use;
- Partnering with local businesses and the visitor economy to promote routes and trails; and
- Maintaining the network and improving surfacing.

Public Transport

- 5.11.** In October 2021, the Council submitted a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) to Government setting out proposals to work with local communities, bus users and local operators to improve services and deliver transformational change across the network. The plan seeks to deliver better quality, more reliable and more frequent buses, with simpler, integrated ticketing between bus routes and other public transport. It will also build on the success of the Council's existing FlexiLink service and recently launched 'Go-too' demand-responsive bus service.

6. Sustainable Transport Enhancement Programmes (STEPS)

- 6.1.** The Council is developing and delivering a broad programme of work to provide high quality sustainable travel journey options across the borough. The total value of the programme in 2021/22 is £1.6m which includes funding from the Council's annual LTP capital programme and external sources of funding, including grants from DfT (see table below).
- 6.2.** Appendix 1 provides a high-level overview of the programme and extracts from the financial dashboard which is used to manage and monitor delivery and track expenditure throughout the year. It is forecast that a full programme will be delivered against allocated budgets in 2021/22.

LTP Integrated Transport Block	21/22 Budget
Active Travel	£527,738
Sustainable Modes of Travel to School	£255,236
Public Transport Infrastructure	£99,073
Available Walking Routes	£1,000
Public Rights of Way (PROW)	£80,000
<u>Total</u>	<u>£963,047</u>
External Funding	21/22 Grant Allocation
DfT Active Travel Fund	£463,827
DfT Capability Fund (revenue)	£170,615
<u>Total</u>	<u>£634,442</u>
PROGRAMME TOTAL	£1,597,489

- 6.3.** The allocated budgets within the Council's LTP capital programme include some carry forward from the 2020/21 financial year and the new allocations for the 2021/22 financial year.
- 6.4.** Previously the Council have delivered "Available Walking Route" projects, however, for confirmation, there is limited funding for 2021-22 to cover the cost of reviewing Route Assessments by qualified Road Safety Officers.
- 6.5.** The grants from the DfT Active Travel Fund have been allocated to local transport authorities in "tranches" since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. In Autumn 2020, eight temporary trial schemes were delivered as part of the Council's Covid-19 Recovery Plan. Reviews are being conducted on a scheme-by-scheme basis to determine the future shape of schemes or whether they should be removed. Tranche 2 schemes in Wilmslow and Tytherington are being delivered in 2021/22 and an application was submitted in August 2021 for a further round of funding (Tranche 3). DfT awarded £743,000 in Tranches 1 and 2, with approximately £280,000 spent in 2020/21.
- 6.6.** The DfT Capability Fund is a grant allocation issued to local transport authorities on a formula basis to promotion of cycling and walking by the development of infrastructure plans, including drawing up bids for capital funding that are compliant with local transport note (LTN) 1/20 and carrying out promotional activities, such as training and awareness raising. The DfT has confirmed that due to the timing of the award (August 2021) that all funding must be committed by March 2022 and all funded activities completed by November 2022.
- 6.7.** The Council is working in partnership with Sustrans to deliver pedestrian and cycle improvements to the National Cycle Network Route 55 at the junction of Hurdsfield Road and Black Lane in Macclesfield, linking to the Middlewood Way. The aim is to provide a safer and more coherent route through the junction including linking to the traffic free section of the Middlewood Way to the north of Tesco and to the south of Hurdsfield Road, towards the town centre. Other complementary measures on the Middlewood Way are also being investigated. The grant approval of £568,620 is currently being finalised.
- 6.8.** The Local Growth Fund aims to improve connectivity in the region and has funded two multi-year schemes in Wilmslow (£1.1M) and Crewe (£1.85M). The Wilmslow strategic walking and cycling scheme filled key gaps in the network to connect Wilmslow rail station and the town centre to Wilmslow High School, the Royal London campus and further south towards Alderley Park. This scheme was delivered in Spring 2021 and following feedback from stakeholders additional minor works are planned for early 2022 to provide additional signage on the route. The A530 scheme in north west Crewe will provide improved walking and cycling links to Bentley Motors, Leighton Hospital, Leighton Academy, existing residential areas and the

new homes to be constructed within the Local Plan sites 4 and 5. It is due for construction in 2022.

7. Scheme Delivery

- 7.1. Schemes included in the Sustainable Transport Enhancement Programme (STEP) are prioritised against the objectives of the LTP, as well as assessing the technical feasibility, value for money and whether a scheme is likely to attract additional funding.
- 7.2. This year's programme includes feasibility studies, detailed designs and construction of schemes that have been identified through the LCWIPs, the DfT's Active Travel funding in response to the Covid-19 recovery, Sustrans scheme development funding and engagement with stakeholders including councillors, schools and community groups.
- 7.3. Delivery of schemes is subject to external influences, including design constraints, landowner agreement and objections to legal processes. Therefore, a degree of flexibility will be applied to schemes delivered where appropriate.
- 7.4. The table below summarises the schemes being developed and delivered across the Borough in 2021-22, with the details of each scheme included as Appendix 2.

Theme	Description	£'s
Active Travel	15 schemes being developed and delivered across the borough to improve the existing walking and cycling network, fill in gaps or create new infrastructure.	£527,738
SMOTS	12 schemes being developed and delivered across the borough to improve sustainable access to schools.	£255,236
Public Transport Infrastructure	13 bus stops/shelters being installed or upgraded across the borough to improve the waiting facilities for bus users.	£99,073
Available Walking Routes	This allocation covers the cost of reviewing formal walking route to school assessments by qualified Road Safety Officers.	£1,000
Public Rights of Way (PROW)	Delivery of multiple schemes to improve the assets on Public Rights of Way, encompassing investment to enhance the infrastructure of the network	£80,000
DfT Active Travel Fund	Tranche 2: the Manchester Road (Wilmslow) and Manchester Road (Tytherington) schemes are currently being developed and are due for delivery in Spring 2022.	£463,827

DfT Capability Fund (revenue)	<p>Development of schemes identified through LCWIP process.</p> <p>Promotional activities including Travel Cheshire website developments and active travel challenges.</p> <p>Practical support including business and school travel planning for schools and businesses, cycle infrastructure maps and helping in access to employment.</p>	£170,615
-------------------------------	--	----------

8. Ward Members Affected

8.1. All Ward Members may be implemented by the Borough-wide programme.

9. Implications of the Recommendations

9.1. Legal Implications

- 9.1.1. As the local transport authority, Cheshire East Council has a legal duty to maintain a safe and efficient highway network. Developing a coordinated, high quality walking and cycling network will contribute to fulfilling this legal duty.
- 9.1.2. In developing individual schemes, the appropriate legal processes will need to be followed for the implementation of schemes e.g. Traffic Regulation Orders. This will be completed for specific schemes as they come forward for development and implementation.
- 9.1.3. Members must be fully aware of the equalities implications of the decisions they are taking. This will ensure that there is proper appreciation of any potential impact of any decision on the Council's statutory obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty. As a minimum, this requires decision makers to carefully consider the content of any Equality Impact Assessments produced by officers.
- 9.1.4. There is no statutory duty to consult on proposals to change the way in which a local authority carries out its duties but there is an expectation enshrined in case law that any local authority making decisions affecting the public will do so fairly and in a way that cannot be said to be an abuse of power.

9.2. Finance Implications

- 9.2.1. The STEPS Programme for 2021/22 is fully funded through the approved capital programme from the Local Transport Plan Integrated Transport Block, developer funding such as Community Infrastructure Levy, Section 106 & 278 Agreements, and external funding from the Department for Transport.

LTP Integrated Transport Block	20/21 Carry Forward	21/22 Allocation	21/22 Budget
Active Travel	£127,738	£400,000	£527,738
Sustainable Modes of Travel to School (SMOTS)	£125,236	£130,000	£255,236
Public Transport	£24,073	£75,000	£99,073
Available Walking	£0	£0	£1,000*
Public Rights of Way	£0	£80,000	£80,000
Total	£277,047	£685,000	£963,047
External Funding	20/21 Spend	21/22 Budget	21/22 Grant Allocation
DfT Active Travel	£279,173	£463,827	£463,827
DfT Capability Fund	£0	£170,615	£170,615
Total	£279,173	£634,442	£634,442
21/22 PROGRAMME TOTAL	£277,047	£1,319,442	£1,597,489

* £1,000 nominal value allocated from SMOTS to support AWR initial assessments

- 9.3.** In addition to the funding outlined above, the Council is delivering two schemes funded through the Local Growth Fund. These schemes have more significant budgets than most STEPS schemes and as a Minor Major scheme have been reported separately.

9.4. P	Scheme	Previous years spend	21/22 Budget	22/23 Budget
	Crewe	£185,869	£328,021	£1,336,110
	Wilmslow	£328,020	£781,229	£0

Policy Implications

- 9.4.1.** The STEPS Programme will assist in the delivery of the Local Transport Plan (LTP), Cycling Strategy, SMOTS Strategy and the LCWIP Implementation Plan.

- 9.4.2.** The STEPS programme contributes to delivery of the Council's Environment Strategy by improving infrastructure to support more sustainable travel choices, reducing reliance on cars.

9.5. Equality Implications

- 9.5.1.** Specific Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) are being developed as appropriate for schemes as they come forward for development and delivery.

9.6. Human Rights Implications

- 9.6.1.** There are no direct implications for Human Rights.
- 9.6.2.** Consultation with users, residents and other directly affected stakeholders takes place during the delivery of individual projects within the STEPS programme.

9.7. Human Resources Implications

- 9.7.1.** There are no direct implications for Human Resources.

9.8. Risk Management Implications

- 9.8.1.** Development and delivery of specific schemes are governed by Project Boards chaired by the Head of Strategic Transport. Officers from finance, legal, research and consultation, estates, and highways are invited as required to ensure appropriate project governance and strategic direction. Project risk registers are prepared and maintained detailing risk mitigation measures.

9.9. Rural Communities Implications

- 9.9.1.** The STEPS programme is Borough-wide and links to other transport improvements identified as part of the Local Transport Delivery Plans connecting into rural areas.

9.10. Implications for Children and Young People/Cared for Children

- 9.10.1.** The STEPS Programme includes delivery of SMOTS schemes, which aims to improve walking and cycling routes to schools.
- 9.10.2.** Delivery of School Travel Plans contributes to positive educational outcomes according to research linking active travel – walking and cycling – to enhanced learning and attentiveness in schools.

9.11. Public Health Implications

- 9.11.1.** The public health benefits of active travel are well established. Greater reliance on walking and cycling helps people meet the recommended physical activity targets, improves physical and mental health, whilst reducing the risks of poor health and premature death.

9.12. Climate Change Implications

- 9.12.1.** The Council has committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2025 and to encourage all businesses, residents and organisations in Cheshire East to reduce their carbon footprint. The STEPS Programme is aligned with this ambition by delivering schemes to improve walking and cycling infrastructure, which will enable more convenient and routine sustainable travel choices.

10. Consultation and Engagement

- 10.1.** Engagement and consultation is conducted on a scheme-by-scheme basis, both during the design stage and before delivery on site begins. Engagement and consultation activities are usually proportionate to the size and impact of the proposed scheme.
- 10.2.** The DfT Active Travel Fund Tranche 2 schemes have undergone an extensive public consultation in February 2021, with a further round of engagement planned in early 2022. Schemes with benefits and impacts for fewer stakeholders are consulted on in a proportionate way, to ensure the views of local users, residents and members are understood.

11.Contact Information

- 11.1** Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

Contact Officer:	Richard Hibbert, Head of Strategic Transport Richard.hibbert@cheshireeast.gov.uk 07866 157324
Appendices:	Appendix 1 STEPS Financial Summary Appendix 2 STEPS Scheme Progress
Background Papers:	Highways & Transport Committee Report - LCWIP Implementation Plan, November 2021