

OPEN

## Highways & Transport Committee

19 June 2025

### Active Travel Strategy and Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs)

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**Report of: Tom Moody, Director of Transport and Infrastructure**

**Report Reference No: HTC/10/25-26**

**Ward(s) Affected: All wards**

#### Decision

#### Purpose of Report

- 1 This report provides an overview of work to date on updating the Cheshire East Active Travel Strategy (see Appendix 1) and progress in developing Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) across the borough (see Appendix 2). The report seeks approval to launch a public consultation this summer to enable local communities to comment and shape the emerging strategy and infrastructure proposals.
- 2 Committee is responsible for developing policies and making decisions on matters relating to highways and transport as they affect the policies of the Council and residents throughout the borough of Cheshire East. The Active Travel Strategy contributes to the Cheshire East Plan aims of 'unlocking prosperity for all' and 'improving health and well-being'.

#### Executive Summary

- 3 The Cheshire East Plan 2025-29 (adopted in February) sets out new commitments for the borough. The Council has clear ambitions for delivering sustainable and inclusive economic growth, and environmental and health improvement. A key element of achieving these ambitions is delivering investment in transport infrastructure that promotes active travel. A step change in levels of walking and cycling will support wider strategic priorities.
- 4 The existing Cycling Strategy 2017-2027 was prepared pre-pandemic, and prior to many policy changes and new guidance which has emerged,

including: Gear Change (2020), the Transport Decarbonisation Plan (2021) and Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy 2 (2022), as well as new cycle infrastructure design guidance.

- 5 The Cycling Strategy focused on a single mode only, without consideration of the interfaces with walking and wheeling, which have subsequently been emphasised in national policy. The government considers 'active modes' (walking, wheeling and cycling) holistically. This direction can be seen in the Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy and the expectation for local authorities to develop Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs).
- 6 An Active Travel Strategy will be a supplementary "daughter" document to the emerging Local Transport Plan (LTP) and the draft document is aligned with the vision, aims and priorities of the new LTP.
- 7 Importantly, Active Travel England (ATE) expect local authorities to complete an active travel capability self-assessment each year, which is then assessed by ATE to assign a level to which a local authority is performing, ranging from levels 0 (lowest) to level 4 (highest). Cheshire East is currently classified as level 1 and there is ambition and commitment to progress through the levels. Those authorities performing at a higher level have greater access to funding.
- 8 Developing a new strategy and infrastructure plans is a key part of demonstrating our ambition and commitment, with clear recognition that increasing levels of active travel supports the delivery of wider corporate priorities, particularly health improvement and local action to tackle the climate change emergency.
- 9 The draft vision for the Active Travel Strategy is "*A borough where walking, wheeling and cycling are the preferred option for short journeys, achieved through a connected, safe and accessible network that supports a healthy Cheshire East.*" The strategy is framed around three clear themes: create, culture and collaborate.
- 10 The Council has LCWIPs for Crewe, Congleton, Macclesfield and Wilmslow which were adopted in March 2021 and remain current and valid. These four areas were selected following an evidence-based review, which identified them as having the highest potential in the borough to increase walking and cycling.
- 11 LCWIPs have now been prepared for the remaining 7 towns (see Appendix 2), which complement the emerging strategy and support the delivery of the "create" theme to develop high quality active travel infrastructure at key locations across the borough.

- 12 A consultation is proposed to seek the views of stakeholders, residents and community groups on the draft strategy and the latest LCWIPs which set out proposed interventions and scheme prioritisation. A Consultation & Engagement Plan and Communications Plan are included at Appendix 3 and 4 respectively.
- 13 This report also seeks delegated authority to spend the Council's Consolidated Active Travel Fund (CATF) allocation of £813,292 (£565,019 capital and £248,273 revenue), which will fund high-quality walking, wheeling and cycling infrastructure, measures to build capability and behaviour change activities. The Council is currently developing a full programme of initiatives to be delivered under CATF.
- 14 The CATF grant was announced after the MTFS was approved on 26 February 2025 and therefore fully funded supplementary estimates are required.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

The Highways & Transport Committee is recommended to:

1. Approve the draft Active Travel Strategy at Appendix 1 and the LCWIPs summarised in Appendix 2 as a basis for public consultation, taking into account the desire to improve the Council's performance rating in future ATE assessments.
2. Approve the proposed approach to consultation in line with the Consultation & Engagement Plan at Appendix 3 and Communications Plan at Appendix 4.
3. Delegate authority to the Director of Transport and Infrastructure to finalise the consultation material and undertake the public consultation.
4. Approve the fully funded Supplementary Revenue and Capital Estimates for the value of revenue funding £248,273 and capital funding £565,019.
5. Delegate authority to the Director of Transport and Infrastructure to spend the Council's Consolidated Active Travel Fund (CATF) allocation of £813,292 (£565,019 capital and £248,273 revenue) in line with our strategy and infrastructure delivery plans.

#### Background

- 15 The vision and aims of the strategy have been identified and discussed amongst key Council service areas, noting that an increase in active travel trips supports wider strategic goals, including health, economy and the environment. It is the intention for a succinct yet ambitious strategy that provides a clear strategic direction. Targets have been identified to

show commitment both locally and nationally and will support the government's ambition for 50% of all journeys in towns and cities to be walked, wheeled or cycled.

- 16 The draft Active Travel Strategy sets out clear actions, including development of specific infrastructure plans and supporting policies to deliver the wider aims, including the Access Control Barrier Policy. The strategy provides the overarching vision and framework that sets the direction for these more specific policies.
- 17 Development of an Active Travel Key Route Network will help inform investment and maintenance decisions as part of the over-arching Highways Asset Management Framework.
- 18 The Department for Transport (DfT) guidance states that 'whilst the preparation of LCWIPs is non-mandatory, local authorities who have plans will be well placed to make the case for future official investment'. LCWIPs provide strong evidence to support future funding from DfT, Active Travel England, Sustrans and other external funding bodies, as well as through the Local Transport Plan allocations and developer contributions from the planning process.
- 19 Active Travel England (ATE) has provided Capability Funds to local authorities since 2021. This funding has enabled the development of LCWIPs for the remaining 7 towns across the borough (see list below).
  - Alsager
  - Handforth
  - Knutsford
  - Middlewich
  - Nantwich
  - Poynton
  - Sandbach

Committee should note that LCWIPs for Crewe, Congleton, Macclesfield and Wilmslow were developed and approved in 2021. These documents remain relevant and will work concurrently with the new plans to provide a comprehensive framework for the whole borough.

- 20 All key towns with over 10,000 residents are now covered by an LCWIP, which have identified a prioritised programme of potential active travel routes and infrastructure improvements for future investment. The improvements are evidence-based and take account of the volumes of cycling and pedestrian movements in Cheshire East, and the potential to increase these mode shares to achieve wider strategic outcomes.

- 21 All schemes identified in LCWIPs will be subject to further detailed development and design work, with extensive public consultation necessary before schemes are implemented.
- 22 It is recognised that the delivery of the prioritised LCWIP routes is not funded at this stage. They establish a plan for improvements that can help in securing future funding from a wide range of sources.
- 23 Delivery of individual projects identified in the LCWIPs will be embedded into the annual capital programmes and active travel pipeline programme. Adjacencies with external funding opportunities will be sought to maximise delivery and value to the authority.

### **Consultation and Engagement**

- 24 Engagement with Council officers from across the service areas was integral to setting the strategic direction of the emerging Active Travel Strategy, particularly health improvement, regeneration and environment.
- 25 A period of stakeholder and public consultation is proposed in summer 2025. Views will be sought from across the walking, wheeling and cycling communities, as well as town and parish councils, active travel groups, wider stakeholders, local businesses and residents.
- 26 The consultation will primarily be online with paper copies available in libraries and customer contact centres. A Consultation & Engagement Plan has been developed in conjunction with the Council's Research & Consultation Team (see Appendix 3), as well as a Communications Plan (see Appendix 4).
- 27 Town councils and local interest group representatives were invited to engage via a workshop during the development of the draft LCWIPs, to ensure that local knowledge of specific issues was captured in the interventions proposed for each route.

### **Reasons for Recommendations**

- 28 Development of an Active Travel Strategy and LCWIPs is key to demonstrating strong local leadership for walking, cycling and wheeling. The consultation will take place at a formative stage, time for consideration and response will be given to feedback and thorough consideration will be given to points raised where appropriate. The consultation on these documents and gaining public input towards the plans will ensure that the Council will have robust plans in place to prioritise the future active travel network in line with potential future funding opportunities.

## Other Options Considered

- 29 The DfT has noted that LCWIPs are not mandatory documents but that local authorities who have plans will be well placed to make the case for future investment. ATE's local authority capability self-assessment included scoring for the development and publication of LCWIPs.
- 30 Therefore, not updating our strategy or continuing to develop LCWIPs would likely result in avoidable constraints for securing external funding. It could also suggest to external funding bodies that there is a lack of local leadership for active travel in the borough.

Option	Impact	Risk
Progress without consultation	Active Travel Strategy and LCWIPs progressed without public input	Lack of opportunity for the public to input and help shape the documents.
Progress without consultation	Active Travel Strategy and LCWIPs progressed without public input	Constraints for securing external funding.

## Implications and Comments

### *Monitoring Officer/Legal*

- 31 As the local transport authority, Cheshire East Council has a legal duty to maintain a safe and efficient highway network. Developing a cohesive, integrated high-quality walking and cycling network will contribute to fulfilling this legal duty.
- 32 In developing future schemes, the appropriate legal processes will need to be followed for the implementation of schemes e.g. Traffic Regulation Orders.
- 33 Committees are responsible for discharging the Council's functions, monitoring financial controls and making decisions as required.
- 34 Chapter 2, Part 4 of the Council's constitution details that the Highways and Transport Committee is responsible for developing policies and making decisions on matters relating to highways and transport within the area.
- 35 Where local authorities undertake consultations, there is a duty to engage in lawful and fair consultation. The Gunning principles establish the

common law principles to be observed when undertaking a consultation will require the following:

- i) The consultation to be undertaken when the proposal(s) is still at a formative stage;
- ii) That there are sufficient reasons put forward for the proposals to allow for intelligent consideration and response from consultees;
- iii) That consultees are given adequate time to respond; and
- iv) That the product of the consultation was to be conscientiously taken into account when the decision is taken.

36 In accordance with Chapter 3, Part 3, where services wish to undertake an activity not originally identified in the budget or incur additional revenue expenditure on an existing activity, approval must be sought for a supplementary estimate. Successful grant applications will require a supplementary estimate to incur spending. Supplementary estimates of a value between £500,000 and £1,000,000 are required to be approved by Committee.

#### *Section 151 Officer/Finance*

37 In March 2025, ATE awarded Cheshire East Council £813,292 from the Consolidated Active Travel Fund (CATF) for the 2025/26 financial year. ATE determined the allocation based on the borough's population size and the Council's current capability rating. The CATF allocation grant is split into revenue and capital payments, as set out in the table below.

Consolidated Active Travel Fund 2025/26 – Cheshire East		
Capital	Revenue	Total
£565,019	£248,273	£813,292

38 The CATF is intended to be used for delivery of high-quality walking, wheeling and cycling infrastructure, capability building measures and behaviour change activities.

39 The consultation on both the Active Travel Strategy and LCWIPs will be funded by the Consolidated Active Travel Fund (CATF). The Council is currently developing the full delivery programme of schemes that will be funded by the CATF.

40 Upon completion and adoption by the Council, the LCWIPs will provide a prioritised programme of route interventions and schemes to inform the annual capital programme for transport. The schemes will be developed

utilising funding from a range of sources including: LTP Integrated Transport Block; Section 106 & 278; the Council’s capital and revenue programmes and external grant funding.

- 41 These grants were announced after the MTFS was approved on 26 February 2025 and therefore fully funded supplementary estimates are required.
- 42 The Council’s capital programme remains under review with any schemes requiring Council resources being challenged in order to reduce the call on prudential borrowing.

*Policy*

- 43 The Active Travel strategy and its associated initiatives align well with the Councils corporate policies and transformation plan. In particular, they encourage sustainable travel choices for work-related trips, contributing to our Corporate Travel Plan and the equivalent plans in other organisations across the borough.
- 44 The Active Travel Strategy and LCWIPs support the delivery of the Cheshire East Plan 2025-29 (adopted in February) which sets out the corporate plan vision and commitments, as well as the emerging LTP.

<b>An open and enabling organisation</b>	<b>A council which empowers and cares about people</b>	<b>A thriving and sustainable place</b>
Ensure that there is transparency in all aspects of council decision making	Reduce health inequalities across the borough	A great place for people to live, work and visit
Listen, learn and respond to our residents, promoting opportunities for a two-way conversation		To reduce the impact on our environment
		A transport network that is safe and promotes active travel
		To be carbon neutral by 2027

*Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*

- 45 The Council will fully evaluate the equality implications of the proposed Active Travel Strategy and LCWIPs through an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA). The draft EqIA has been developed which focuses on the protected characteristic groups (age, disability, gender

reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race/ethnicity, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation and marriage and civil partnership).

- 46 There is a need to engage with the protected groups to help better understand any impacts and identify mitigation if required. The EqIA will be updated following consultation with protected equality groups, particularly young people, older people and people with disabilities. An EqIA will be required for each LCWIP route taken forward to design and delivery in due course. The draft EqIA is included at Appendix 5.

### *Human Resources*

- 47 There are no direct implications for Human Resources.

### *Risk Management*

- 48 In terms of governance, the Active Travel Strategy and LCWIP development has been regularly monitored through the Active Travel Board.
- 49 Risk registers and risk assessments have been produced as part of the Council's standard approach to project management and governance for both strategy and infrastructure development and delivery.

### *Rural Communities*

- 50 All key towns with over 10,000 residents are now covered by an LCWIP. Being the largest areas, there is the potential to increase these mode shares to achieve wider strategic outcomes.
- 51 The rural areas will require a tailored approach to reflect local needs for active travel – both for everyday journeys and leisure trips as part of the visitor economy.

### *Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)*

- 52 The LCWIPs have considered routes to schools as part of the evidence base in defining priority routes and potential interventions. The relationship to designated Available Walking Routes to school (for children within statutory walking distance) will also be fully assessed.
- 53 Any routes taken forward to design would aim where possible to be in line with Local Transport Note 01/20 – Cycle Infrastructure Design and therefore aimed to be suitable for a competent 12-year-old. Pedestrian infrastructure should follow best practice including guidance set out in the Manual for Streets 1 & 2. Routes in the vicinity of schools could be

considered as part of the Council's Sustainable Modes of Travel to School programme.

### *Public Health*

- 54 There are significant health benefits from active travel which are proven and well-documented. Creating and encouraging opportunities to build active travel into everyday lives will positively impact health outcomes.
- 55 Regular walking and cycling help people meet the recommended physical activity targets, improves physical and mental health, whilst reducing the risks of poor health and premature death. The delivery of the strategy and implementation of the LCWIP priorities will help to reduce health inequality across the borough.

### *Climate Change*

- 56 Cheshire East Council have committed to be carbon neutral by 2027 and to influence carbon reduction across the borough in order to become a carbon neutral borough by 2045. The Active Travel Strategy and LCWIPs would enhance active travel infrastructure and help encourage walking, wheeling and cycling as a mode of travel and support carbon reduction and more sustainable travel.

### *Consultation*

<b>Name of Consultee</b>	<b>Post held</b>	<b>Date sent</b>	<b>Date returned</b>
<i>Statutory Officer (or deputy) :</i>			
Ashley Hughes	S151 Officer	05/06/25	05/06/25
Janet Witkowski	Acting Monitoring Officer	05/06/25	05/06/25
<i>Legal and Finance</i>			
Nick Wrigley	Senior Lawyer, Place	13/04/25	17/04/25
Mandy Withington	Principal Lawyer, Place	13/04/25	17/04/25

Steve Reading	Finance Manager	13/04/25	17/04/25
<i>Other Consultees:</i>			
<i>Executive Directors/Directors</i>			
Tom Moody	Director of Transport and Infrastructure	23/04/25	25/04/25
DMT		08/05/25	08/05/25
CLT		21/05/25	21/05/25
Chair / Vice Chair		23/05/25	02/06/25
Phil Cresswell	Executive Director, Place	06/06/25	09/06/25

<b>Access to Information</b>	
Contact Officer:	Richard Hibbert, <a href="mailto:Richard.hibbert@cheshireeast.gov.uk">Richard.hibbert@cheshireeast.gov.uk</a> Head of Strategic Transport and Parking
Appendices:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Active Travel Strategy</li> <li>2. LCWIP summary</li> <li>3. Consultation and Engagement Plan</li> <li>4. Communications Plan</li> <li>5. Equality Impact Assessment</li> </ol>
Background Papers:	None