

Report to the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board

13 July 2023

Subject:	Europa Avenue Cycle Route Towns Fund Scheme
Director:	Director of Regeneration & Growth Tony McGovern
Contact Officer:	Strategic Planning & Transportation Manager, Andy Miller andy_miller@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations




- 1.1 That the Board considers and comments upon the Europa Avenue Towns Fund highway improvement scheme and the associated consultation which has been undertaken for a proposed cycle and walking route, including continuing the route through Middleway on Europa Avenue, West Bromwich
- 1.2 That the Board considers whether sufficient and appropriate consultation has been carried out in line with existing council policies, practices, and procedures prior to reaching the previous decision to proceed with the scheme as proposed.





2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 At present, there is Cabinet Member approval in place to complete the Cycle Route Proposal 2 which connects to the West Midlands LCWIP route proposals to Sandwell Valley via Europa Avenue to its full extent as initially proposed so that an end to end cycle and walking route can be delivered in accordance with the route proposals in Sandwell's Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (SCWIP) which was approved by Cabinet in January 2020 and in line with the submission for Accelerated Town Funding that was awarded to Sandwell MBC by government for this scheme.
- 2.2 Following the approval by the Cabinet Member for Environment on 28th June 2022, a petition was received by the Council on 02 November 2022 containing 150 signatures. This petition was against upgrading the cycle route between Europa Avenue and Sandwell Valley via Middleway path whilst generally supportive of the resurfacing the path. On receipt of the petition, Cabinet Petitions Committee referred the matter to this Board for consideration.
- 2.3 The Board is therefore requested to consider and comment on the scheme, and the consultation carried out, to enable Cabinet Petitions Committee to reach a decision on what action, if any, should be taken in respect of the petition.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>People live well and age well: The proposals contribute to providing safe and efficient access to the cycling and walking network and the wider transport network, include improved access to Sandwell Valley Country Park for local people and visitors, and contribute to the health benefits of sustainable active travel.</p>
	<p>Strong resilient communities: Successful communities need access to jobs, services, and facilities to enable them to remain healthy and vibrant. Improving access to Sandwell Valley Country Park, the local cycling and walking network, and the wider transport network is an important enabler of this.</p>
	<p>Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods: Both new and existing residential developments rely on good quality access and links to shops, services, as well as leisure facilities such</p>



	as those provided within Sandwell Valley Country Park for them to be successful. Measures by which access to leisure facilities and the wider transport network, including the cycling and walking network is improved and maintained is key to this.
	A strong and inclusive economy: Transport plays a vital role in connecting people to jobs and learning opportunities. Health-promoting transport systems are pro-business and support economic prosperity. They enable optimal travel to work with less congestion, collisions, pollution, and they support a healthier workforce. The provision of improved high-quality cycling and walking connectivity will therefore play a key role in connecting Sandwell residents and businesses to economic and social opportunities.
	A connected and accessible Sandwell: The provision of high-quality cycling and walking links and improved access to the transport network is vital to enable Sandwell residents to access jobs, education, and services both within and beyond the Borough's boundaries.

4 Context and Key Issues

4.1 Cycling and Walking are important activities that are proven to improve health and wellbeing, assist in reducing traffic congestion and improve air quality. In 2017 the Government published 'The Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy' (CWIS), which outlines the government's ambition to make cycling and walking a natural choice for shorter journeys, or as part of longer journeys by 2040. This has resulted in the development of Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs), as set out in the Government's CWIS, which are a new a strategic approach to identifying cycling and walking improvements required at the local level. 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. Recently the Government has made it clear that only those Local Authorities who have an approved Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP)



would be prioritised for additional funding to improve their cycling and walking infrastructure.

- 4.2 Sandwell published its own Sandwell Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (SCWIP) in 2020, following public consultation and cabinet approval. It was also presented and discussed at Sandwell's Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board in October 2019 where it received support. The document focusses on local walking and cycling infrastructure connecting communities to town centres, transport hubs, employment, education, and services. The SCWIP aims to assist Sandwell in securing government funding to improve the cycling and walking network within the borough. It also aligns with the Black Country Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (BCLCWIP) and the West Midlands Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (WMLCWIP).
- 4.3 The West Midlands Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (WMLCWIP) entails primary corridors where there are high flows of cyclists forecast along desire lines that link large residential areas to trip attractors such as a town or city centre. Routes were also prioritised based on links to other schemes and upcoming developments. One of the primary corridors that falls within the borough of Sandwell is the route running from Smethwick Galton Bridge to Wednesbury Town Centre via West Bromwich. Part of this corridor coincides with National Cycle Network Route 5 (NCN5) from Galton Bridge, where it links with Birmingham Canal/NCN5 to Birmingham City Centre at Centenary Square and through Sandwell Valley via Roebuck Lane. Birmingham Canal/NCN5 had towpaths upgraded in 2018 as part of the Managing Short Trips programme. The West Midlands LCWIP route aims to continue NCN5 improvements from Galton Bridge to High Street/Birmingham Road via Telford Way and Roebuck Lane. Subsequently the Roebuck Lane to West Bromwich Town Centre element of this route secured central government funding via the West Bromwich Towns Fund project 'West Bromwich Connected' and is due to be delivered over 2023 and 2024.



- 4.4 National Cycle Route 5 (NCR 5) is a 360 miles route within the National Cycle Network, running from Reading to Holyhead, via Birmingham, Sandwell, Walsall, Stoke on Trent and Chester. The National Cycle Network began with a National Lottery Grant from the Millennium Commission in 1995 and NCN5 through Sandwell was delivered in 1999 and this runs from the Birmingham Canal, across Birmingham Road and to Sandwell Valley via Europa Avenue. The route eventually ends at Holyhead in North Wales. The original goal was to create 5,000 miles of signposted cycle routes by 2005, with 50% of these not being on roads, and all of it being "suitable for an unsupervised twelve-year-old. By mid-2000, 5,000 miles of route was signposted to an "interim" standard. Much has changed in the world of cycle infrastructure since NCN5 was delivered. Most notably the publication of Local Transport Note (LTN) 2/08 Cycling Infrastructure Design, which itself was superseded by LTN 1/20 Cycling Infrastructure Design published in July 2020. This guidance has been developed in partnership with a range of stakeholders and experts to ensure it reflects the latest developments in cycle infrastructure design, including proven design elements pioneered in London under Transport for London.
- 4.4. The Black Country LCWIP entails proposals to upgrade the cycle route from Europa Avenue to Walsall Town Centre. This aims to create a traffic free cycle route from Birmingham City Centre, to Walsall via Galton Bridge, West Bromwich High Street, Europa Avenue, Sandwell Valley and Yew Tree.
- 4.4. Cycle Route Proposal 2 within the Sandwell Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan connects to the West Midlands LCWIP route proposals to Sandwell Valley via Europa Avenue. Currently this section of NCN5 is not to current cycling infrastructure standards, as the route is on highway and not segregated from traffic. It's also part of the route included within the Black Country LCWIP. Therefore, the Europa Avenue highway improvement scheme, which is the subject of this report, is included as an improvement route within all three LCWIPs; the SCWIP, the BCLCWIP and the WMLCWIP. Furthermore, it's part of the existing National Cycle Network Route 5 (NCN5) which passes through Europa Avenue from



Beeches Road and then turns right along Europa Avenue on-road, through St John's Close and then on into Sandwell Valley Country Park.

- 4.5 The West Midlands Strategic Transport Plan “Movement for Growth” addresses the transport challenges from the current pressures on the local transport system, the demands of new developments and our growing population. Approximately 41% of journeys made by car are under 2 miles in the West Midlands. There is therefore great scope for the increased role of sustainable travel including cycling and walking as a viable solution to address challenges in congestion and air quality. The Strategic Cycle Network (SCN) in Movement for Growth identifies the main corridors for cycling which includes 274 km of roads in the region. The Metropolitan Cycle Network includes all routes including on-road (including shared use bus lanes, segregated, quiet streets), off-road (including green and canal towpaths), and shared use routes. Routes within the SCWIP, the BCLCWIP, and the WMLCWIP form part of the West Midlands Metropolitan Cycle Network.
- 4.6 There has been significant investment nationally in delivering cycling and walking schemes in what are called Active Travel corridors. This is part of objectives within the Governments Cycling and walking plan for England called ‘Gear change: a bold vision for cycling and walking’. Any funding for active travel infrastructure stipulates that only those schemes which aim to deliver high quality, off road, segregated cycle lanes, new footways, and pedestrian crossings in accordance with the national cycle design standards called LTN 1/20 Cycling Infrastructure Design published in July 2020 would receive funding. Active travel projects would also be overseen and monitored to ensure they comply with national design standards by Active Travel England; the government’s executive agency responsible for making walking, wheeling and cycling the preferred choice for everyone to get around in England.

Funding

- 4.7 In September 2019, the government invited 101 places to develop proposals for a Town Deal, as part of the £2.4 billion Towns Fund. The



Towns Fund is part of the government's plan for Levelling Up the UK economy. Towns across England have been working with the Government to address their growth constraints, deliver economic benefits and improve the lives of people within their communities. The overarching aims of the Towns Fund are to drive sustainable economic regeneration and productivity across the UK.

4.8 Sandwell Transport Planning Team, working with the Planning Regeneration and Highway Services teams put forward 5 SCWIP schemes for the West Bromwich Towns Fund Bid. On 22nd July 2020 Cabinet delegated authority to approve the Town Investment Plan (TIP) for West Bromwich to the Sandwell Towns Fund Super Board. Super Board approved the projects to be included in the Accelerated Towns Funding programme on 14th August 2020. The Accelerated Funding was an early draw down of the overall West Bromwich Towns Fund for projects that could be delivered relatively quickly over a short period of time. All projects were subject to consultation and final approval through an assurance process that included sign off by Super Board. On 2nd October 2020 Super Board approved shortlisted projects to be included in the Town Investment Plan (TIP). This included the Cycle Route Proposal 2 within the Sandwell Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan which connects to the West Midlands LCWIP route proposals to Sandwell Valley via Europa Avenue.

Europa Avenue Scheme Proposals

4.9 As part of the proposals, the plan is to introduce a two-way off-road cycle route through the 'Middleway' area of Europa Avenue, by widening and realigning the existing path that is already used by both pedestrians and cyclists. The new proposals will separate cyclists and pedestrians, so they no longer need to share the same path help to avoid pedestrian and cyclist conflicts. This aligns with the national design guidance LTN1/20. As an added benefit, the path will also take cyclists away from the road and vehicles, making a much safer route for experienced and new cyclists



alike, particularly children. The work will also have the benefit of putting a brand-new surface on the existing path as well as providing a second dedicated path for the cyclists. In addition, the Middleway will be litter picked and cleaned and overgrown bushes and trees pruned and trimmed.

Consultations

- 5.0 Improvements to Middleway are included in Sandwell's Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (SCWIP) which was widely advertised prior to gaining Cabinet Approval in 2020. It was also presented and discussed at Sandwell's Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board in October 2019 where it received support. The SCWIP is a programme of projects used to attract funds to make improvements to walking and cycling infrastructure throughout the borough. Secondary consultation was scheduled to take place locally on a scheme by scheme basis. In late 2020, Sandwell was successful in bidding for Accelerated Towns Funds in West Bromwich, Rowley Regis and Smethwick and there was a press release on the 15th January 2021.
- 5.1 In December 2020 a change request was submitted to the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) to substitute the Europa Avenue scheme in replacement of the West Bromwich Town Hall project, which could no longer proceed as it was being used as a Covid19 centre at the time. Due to the unexpected substitution, delivery timescales for the Europa Avenue scheme had to be accelerated further. As a result of very short timescales for delivery as stipulated by the funding guidance, site preparation works, and public consultation took place simultaneously in February 2021.
- 5.1 Due to funding being made available unexpectedly to implement the identified improvements along Middleway, with very strict time conditions, letters were distributed to only those households directly adjacent by the scheme to hopefully allow work to start as quickly as possible. Work to upgrade the stretch of cycle route from the Beeches Road junction to the



T Junction with Europa Avenue had already begun in tandem with the letter consultation but not along the Middleway. The initial consultation received some adverse reactions from some of the residents on the Europa Village Estate.

- 5.2 Councillor Jackie Taylor, as the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Transport at the time, was briefed about the consultation and some of the objections received and it was decided that further wider consultation should take place on the new cycle scheme proposed for the 'Middleway' off-highway section, to gauge interest and receive comments from all residents of the estate before any further work continues. Therefore, further consultation took place in November 2021. All 350 addresses on the Europa Village Estate were consulted by letter, a proposals leaflet and questionnaire. The Transport Planning Team received 44 replies, with 22 in favour and 22 opposed.
- 5.3 At a briefing session on 15th March 2022 with the Cabinet Member for Environment, Councillor Ahmed Bostan considered the responses received and stated that we should proceed with the scheme as originally proposed given the split in responses received from the consultation. However, due to a change in the portfolio holder covering Transportation Planning and Highway Services from Councillor Ahmed Bostan to Councillor Zahoor Ahmed, further briefings were undertaken and on 31st May 2022 a Delegated Report was taken to Councillor Zahoor Ahmed as the Cabinet Member for Environment at a briefing session where the scheme was given approval to proceed as planned. On the 28th June 2022, the Delegated Report was officially signed by Councillor Zahoor Ahmed as the Cabinet Member for Environment and subsequently, on the 16th September 2022, letters were sent to residents informing them that approval had been given to proceed with the scheme as planned.
- 5.4. In response to the letters sent to residents 16th September 2022 informing them of the decision to proceed with a scheme, a petition was received by the Council on 02 November 2022 containing 150 signatures. This petition was against upgrading the cycle route between Europa Avenue and Sandwell Valley via Middleway path whilst generally supportive of the



resurfacing the path. On receipt of the petition, Cabinet Petitions Committee referred the matter to this Board for consideration. The Europa Avenue petition and has been discussed at the following meetings: -

- 7 December 2022;
- 18 January 2023;
- 1 March 2023;
- 21 June 2023.

5.5 Following representations made by the petitioners in relation to their concerns around the consultation process and the cycle route proposals, officers agreed to submit a report to Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board (ESTE).

6 Implications

Resources:	Loss of Towns Funding which was reallocated for the Europa Avenue highway improvement scheme should the scheme not proceed as planned.
Legal and Governance:	Funding agreements for this project are governed by and construed in accordance with the Law of England and Wales and the Parties irrevocably submit to the exclusive jurisdiction of the English and Welsh courts.
Risk:	Leaving the Middleway path as it is, shared between pedestrians and cyclist could mean there is a risk of pedestrian and cyclist conflict in comparison to providing a segregated path as was proposed.
Equality:	This scheme is part of Cycle Route Proposal 2 within the Sandwell Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan, an equality impact assessment was carried out during the development of the Sandwell Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan of which this scheme and the proposed infrastructure adheres to latest Government Guidance.
Health and Wellbeing:	The proposed walking and cycling route aim to have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of local communities as it aims to encourage Active Travel.



	Not delivering the improvement scheme could have the opposite effect.
Social Value:	The proposed cycle route will form part of a network that will link communities to employment, education, transport hubs, town centres and services.
Climate Change:	Sandwell Council has joined other councils in England that have declared a Climate Emergency and as a result developed and adopted a Climate Change Strategy 2021-2041. Within Sandwell's Climate Change Strategy Action Plan 3 for Transport states that Sandwell Council will "Implement highway measures and transport facilities that fully accommodate and promote the use of public transport, cycling and walking, making journeys by such methods easier, faster and safer, alongside measures to discourage car use. The Europa Avenue scheme aims to do this.
Corporate Parenting:	There are no specific corporate parenting implications arising from the contents of the report.

7 Appendices

- APPENDIX A: SCWIP Cycle Route 2 Plan & Route Proposal.
- APPENDIX B: Existing Europa Avenue Middleway Path Photos
- APPENDIX C: Existing Example of Similar Scheme along NCN5
- APPENDIX D: Report to Cabinet Petitions Committee, Petitions Progress Report, 21 June 2023
- Letter and consultation leaflet sent to residents November 2021
- Delegated Report 28th June 2022
- Letter sent to residents 16th September 2022

8. Background Papers

Sandwell's Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan

https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/29952/sandwell_cycling_and_walking_infrastructure_plan_2020.pdf

Sandwell's Climate Change Strategy 2021-2041



https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/31151/climate_change_strategy.pdf

Sandwell Towns Fund

https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/info/200193/council/4490/sandwell_towns_fund

