

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

3 October 2023

Subject:	Europa Avenue Cycle Path and Associated Consultation – Considerations and Conclusion – Report of the Working Group
Director:	Director of Regeneration & Growth Tony McGovern
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1 Recommendations

1.1 That in connection with the Europa Avenue Cycle Path Consultation, the following findings of the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board Working Group, in relation to whether sufficient and appropriate consultation had been carried out in line with existing council policies, practices and procedures, be approved by the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board:-

- (1) That having listened and considered the views of local residents, the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Board:-
 - (a) note that the Working Group are satisfied that consultation on the Europa Avenue cycle path, which was carried out both online and by letter drops to households, was conducted in accordance with Council processes, however, communication with residents could have been improved further;



- (b) note that in future, where simultaneous improvement works are being carried out within the vicinity by different departments, internal communication between departments should be undertaken to avoid confusion and disruption to residents;
- (c) suggest that the Council consider all platforms, including Citizenspace and neighbourhood forums, for communicating with residents, taking into consideration digital deprivation across the borough;
- (d) acknowledge that the Overview and Scrutiny function should be used to consider matters of strategic importance within the borough and not local ward issues in order to ensure value is added.


1.2 That the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board refers its findings to the next available Cabinet Petitions Committee.

2 Reasons for Recommendations





2.1 At its meeting on 13 July 2023, the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board established a working group to investigate concerns raised by petitioners regarding the Europa Avenue Cycle Towns Fund Scheme Consultation process.

2.2 Following further considerations and a site visit to the Cycle Path on 4 August 2023, the working group are now ready to report its findings to the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board for further consideration.

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>
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	<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 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.</p>
	<p>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.</p>
	<p>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.</p>

4 Context and Key Issues

4.1 Following the approval of the Cycle Route Proposal 2 by the Cabinet Member for Environment on 28 June 2022, a petition was received by the Council on 2 November 2022 containing 150 signatures. This petition was against upgrading the cycle route between Europa Avenue and Sandwell Valley via Middleway path however, residents were generally supportive of the resurfacing the path. On receipt of the petition, Cabinet Petitions Committee referred the matter to the Economy, Skills, Transport and



Environment Scrutiny Board to determine if the Council's consultation process was carried out adequately.

- 4.2 On 13 July 2023, the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board received a report on the Europa Avenue Cycle Path Scheme. Representations were made by both the Council and petitioners alike. Subsequently, the Board established a working group to investigate whether the Council's consultation process was in line with the procedures in place.
- 4.3 On 4 August 2023, the working group, alongside Council officers, visited the site of the Europa Avenue Cycle Route and noted the issues raised by residents. It was highlighted to residents that the path in the locality would be extended with separate sections for cyclists and pedestrians. The planned works were also in accordance with the government cycling and walking infrastructure plan which recommended that cyclists were not sharing the carriageway with motor vehicles. Minimal impacts were expected to residents as a result of resurfacing.
- 4.4 A final working group meeting occurred on 18 September 2023, where working group members considered all of the data available before agreeing their final recommendations to the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board.
- 4.5 The working group noted the issues raised by residents in previous sessions and agreed that better communications could have been made to keep residents updated. Separate works had also started in the area shortly after the end of the consultation process which caused confusion for residents. Members agreed that several lessons could be learned from this consultation process and suggested that consultations in future attempt to gain as much feedback and data as possible, regardless of whether works were considered minor or not.



5 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.
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6 Appendices

- Appendix A – Cycling and Walking Investment Plan
- Appendix B – Europa Avenue Middleway
- Appendix C – Europa Avenue Proposal
- Appendix D – Cabinet Petitions Progress Report
- Appendix E – Public Consultation Letter
- Appendix F – Europa Avenue – Consultation Plan
- Appendix G – Europa Avenue Letter
- Appendix H – Europa Avenue Consultation Leaflet
- Appendix I – Europa Avenue Questionnaire
- Appendix J – Europa Avenue Consultation Date Letter
- Appendix K – Europa Avenue Petition Plan
- Appendix L – Europa Avenue Consultation Area
- Appendix M – Report to Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board – 13 July 2023

7. Background Papers

