

Report to Decision Making Session for the Cabinet Member for Environment & Highways

01 November 2023

Subject:	Objections Arising from the public consultation for the New Cycle Track between Lynton Avenue and Soho Street Junction along the A457 Soho Way.
Cabinet Member:	Environment and Highways Councillor Danny Millard Regeneration and WMCA Councillor Peter Hughes
Director:	Alice Davey, Borough Economy Tony McGovern, Regeneration and Growth
Key Decision:	No
Contact Officer:	Andy Miller Strategic Planning & Transportation Manager, andy_miller@sandwell.gov.uk Robin Weare, Assistant Director, Highways Services, robin_weare@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the objections received via the public consultation process are noted and that approval is given to authorise the Director – Borough Economy to implement the New Cycle Track between Lynton Avenue and Soho Street Junction along the A457 Soho Way, as advertised and shown on drawing No. 41118 S/1 (Appendix 1).
- 1.2 That subject to recommendation 1.1, the Director – Borough Economy be authorised to complete the necessary statutory procedures.
- 1.3 That the Director – Borough Economy informs objectors of the decision of the Cabinet Member for Environment and Highways.





2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The proposals will encourage a greater proportion of trips to be undertaken by non-car modes and achieve an uplift in the number of people using active travel modes (cycling and walking) within Smethwick but also the wider borough and region to assist in reducing congestion, poor air quality, and other health inequalities.
- 2.2 This scheme is being funded through the Government's Towns Fund programme and is being delivered in accordance with approved business case by the Towns Fund Super Board on the 20th January 2022, and subsequently by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities on the 1st June 2022.
- 2.3 The longer-term aspirations are for an off-road segregated pedestrian and cycle route that will eventually connect Oldbury Town Centre to Smethwick along the A457, via the new Midland Metropolitan University Hospital (MMUH) and on into Birmingham's cycle route proposals at their boundary before continuing into Birmingham City Centre.




The previous phases of this Towns Fund project included:

- Phase 1 – Galton Bridge to Rolfe Street
- Phase 2 – Rolfe Street to Lynton Avenue
- Phase 3 – Walking route from Rolfe Street to Midland Metropolitan University Hospital (MMUH)
- Phase 5 provides a connection from the canal to the MMUH and is being delivered by the Canal & River Trust (CRT).

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	Best start in life for children and young people The proposals will provide a much safer highway environment in which children and young people can walk and cycle.
	People Live Well and Age Well



	The installation will help reduce the potential for road harm and provide facilities to encourage greater use of sustainable travel modes such as walking and cycling, which will have the added benefit of improving health and wellbeing.
	Strong Resilient Communities An improved highway safety environment will make our communities feel safer, more protected, and confident in their homes and neighbourhoods.
	A Strong and Inclusive Economy Our local highways are the arteries of our communities. They connect our residents to employment, education, local services and indeed the wider world.
	A Connected and Accessible Sandwell The scheme will provide facilities to encourage greater use of modes such as walking and cycling, linking safely with local bus and rail routes.

4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The A457 proposal is a Towns Fund project. The scheme was approved by Towns Fund Board under delegated powers from Council.
- 4.2 Sandwell MBC has consulted with residents, and ward members on details of New Cycle Track between Lynton Avenue and Soho Street Junction along the A457 Soho Way. A decision relating to the objections is required.
- 4.3 The first round of consultation was carried out between 17th July 2023 and 6th August 2023, and following comments from the first phase, a second round of consultation with revised plans was carried out between 21st August 2023 and 10th September 2023.
- 4.4 Each resident received a plan showing the proposals along with a letter outlining the principles for the scheme and confirming an end date for them to submit any objections.



4.5 Ward members and the Cabinet Member for Regeneration & WMCA also received notification of the consultation period and associated proposals.

4.6 Comments received from John Spellar (MP) (as originally written) are below:

Comments from John Spellar (MP)	Response from Sandwell MBC Officer
<p>I have strong reservations about the installation of dedicated cycle paths on main roads, which not only restrict road space but also tend to cause considerable congestion during their construction. It is also not clear what the projections were for use of such paths and what measurement has been undertaken as to the outcome. From observation there would appear to be very little use of the current paths. I am aware that some of the pressure for this comes from the Government Department of Transport who are also forcing money onto the Council to fund the work , which is extraordinary at a time when the same Government are refusing to fund core services . Accordingly the Council should not proceed with such schemes on main roads including this particular phase, although some provision on side roads and canal paths might be feasible</p>	<p>Dear John Spellar MP</p> <p>Thank you for your correspondence below dated 28th August 2023 regarding the Smethwick Towns Fund Tollhouse Cycle Way Phase 4 public consultation, currently being undertaken. We appreciate the feedback you have provided and would like to address your concerns below.</p> <p>The proposed section of cycle track is being delivered between Lynton Avenue and Soho Street Junction along the A457 Soho Way following the receipt of funding from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, called the Towns Fund. Sandwell Council has worked in partnership with Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust, Canal & River Trust, Greets Green Community Enterprise Centre and Sandwell College (Sandwell’s Towns Fund Partnership) to help secure £67.5 million Towns Fund investment in total for Sandwell. This is the largest amount for any local authority area under the Towns Fund programme. The aim of the funding is to level up communities and helping to increase economic growth with a focus on regeneration, improved transport, better connectivity, skills and culture.</p>



The Government approved all 16 projects within the Sandwell Towns Fund Programme and project delivery is now under way for most. As it is a five-year programme, projects will come to life at different points during this period. One of these projects is Smethwick Connected: Active Travel Corridor Improvements which aims to deliver high-quality cycling and walking infrastructure connecting Smethwick Galton Bridge Railway Station, Smethwick High Street and Rolfe Street Railway Station and further towards the Midland Metropolitan University Hospital. However, the longer-term aspirations are that these will be the first phases of the route that will eventually, in the longer term connect Oldbury Town Centre to Smethwick along the A457, and then past the new Midland Metropolitan University Hospital (MMUH) and to the Birmingham City Council boundary on B4135 Heath Street and A457 Dudley Road, connecting to Birmingham's cycle route which is currently on-site which then continues on into Birmingham City Centre. So, in effect, in the longer-term there will be a continuous cycle and pedestrian provision from Oldbury, via Smethwick and past MMUH, and then into Birmingham City Centre. In addition to this, in Smethwick, there will also be links to the north which will connect to the Birmingham Canal network (where the towpath has already been resurfaced as part of a project called Managing Short Trips in partnership with the Canal & Rivers Trust) and links to the south, connecting the High St and the



Smethwick railway stations to the new Aquatics Centre.

The complete project, specifically as part of the Towns Fund is being delivered in 5 phases and includes previous phases from Galton Bridge to Rolfe Street and from Rolf Street to Lynton Avenue. The 5th phase is currently being delivered by The Canal and River Trust which includes improving the towpath and creating a link from the Birmingham Canal to the hospital site.

The aim of the overall project is to intercept car trips and provide alternative safe, sustainable, segregated from traffic, active travel options for the residents of Sandwell, whether they be for commuter journeys or for leisure trips. By doing this, we hope to contribute in addressing some of Sandwell's Public Health concerns in the longer term by tackling child obesity levels, especially in Smethwick where levels are high. In addition, the scheme will help in reducing congestion on the highway network hence improving on the current poor Air Quality levels in Sandwell and contributing to Sandwell's Climate Change Strategy and Transport Action Plan which was approved by Sandwell's Cabinet in August 2020 with full Council approval in October 2020.

The proposed scheme will not be restricting road space as the cycle lanes are being delivered on parts of existing grass verges or creating new paths with some minor kerb re-alignments. No traffic lanes are being taken out. Traffic running lanes will remain as they are.



Some minor congestion issues may be caused during construction; however, these will be kept to a minimum through night working and restricting works during peak hours of the day. The Contractor will be required to submit their Traffic Management plan to the Council's Highway Team. The Highway team will review the plans to ensure co-ordination with other works taking place along the corridor and in the local area. Every effort will be made to keep traffic disruption to a minimum, however it is essential to have traffic management in place to ensure safety of the workforce and protect them from live traffic.

The full benefits of the proposed scheme will be realised once all 4 phases have been completed and furthermore once the route links to the hospital and Birmingham's cycle route which offers a route into Birmingham City Centre. In accordance with the guidance provided by Department for Transport, the proposals will be monitored 6 months and 12 months post completion of Phase 4 which we aim to complete by October 2023. A site visit with the Towns Fund Board took place on the 11th August 2023 where local residents approached Councillors to state they welcomed the scheme. Police officers who were also in attendance stated that they used the cycle route and looked forward to seeing the full scheme completed. We hope, with the full scheme in place, providing connections to key transport hubs and site's such as the hospital when it opens, coupled with promotion of the scheme, the usage of the cycle route increases year on year, providing health benefits of



	<p>Active Travel to the residents of Sandwell and helping those that do not have access to a car.</p> <p>We hope the above details address the concerns raised in your correspondence.</p>
--	--

Further response received from John Spellar (MP)

Thank you for your email dated 6th September regarding the cycle way.

At the end of last week I was on a number of visits in Smethwick and including on Smethwick High Street. There was nouse being made of the cycle way and I would be interested as to the projected use before the full scheme is completed and how that matches up to actual usage.

You mention that local residents approached councillors. Their recollection is that this was one family who approached them which does not seem to be a particularly scientific survey.

I reiterate my concern that while schemes such as these may or may not work in London, they do not seem to have relevance in our area and at a time when spending on all sorts of services being cut, leaves the Council open to criticism.

4.7 Comments were received from 9 residents (combined for both rounds of consultation). Four residents supported the proposals and four objections were received. One respondent did not express a preference. Details of comments (as originally written) are below:

Resident A	Definitely good to see more cycling infrastructure. It would be nice if one route connecting this to Victoria Park could be signposted as a cycle route, ideally with 20mph or lower speed limit and some restriction on through traffic to make it safe to cycle in the road. This would connect this extended cycle route to the shops in Cape Hill with minimal additional infrastructure cost. Also, will there be any changes to the crossings on Soho Way/Tollhouse Way for cyclists turning off to the north, rather than having to wait at pedestrian crossings?
Resident B	We are completely against the proposal. It will take away our only green space, trees and barrier separating our road from the extremely busy dual Carriage way. It was bad enough when you took down the bushes, which at least



	<p>blocked some of the road. This will impact the value of our properties, people are already put off by having a busy road in front. Our street is predominantly private residents, there are hardly any council properties left. You are also encouraging more people traffic through our road. We are already see an increase of people walking up and down our street or congregating at the new crossing at the foot of lynton avenue. We have also seen an increase of people parking their cars on our street to walk up to rolfe street to catch their train. This will only get worse.</p> <p>There are at least 2 young families living on lynton avenue, facing the proposed route. 5 small children between them, they play on the grass in front of the house and you are creating an unsafe environment for them.</p> <p>It will also impact traffic. We've already had to put up with traffic queuing for the last 3 years due to the cycle lanes created and then demolished and then created again. The work a few months ago, caused havoc. The contractor fitzsimmmons either were never on site, or started work at 7am in the morning on the weekend or gone past midnight whenever they felt like it. There was no courtesy shown to the residents on roslyn close or lynton avenue. Whenever network rail do work, they write to us weeks in advance to warn of noise disruption. The previous work took months and months, causing traffic tailbacks all day long.</p> <p>There are elderly residents living on the street - who do not need this at their time of life especially as there is hardly anyone using the stretch between Galton Bridge and our street. I still see people cycle through the centre reservation! There are people walking on the cycle path than cycling. You could just as easily paint cycle signs on our road, like you have regent street, cyclists could follow this and reconnect at the proposed crossing on crocketts lane. Our road is not a busy traffic road and people drive slowly due to it being a dead end.</p>
Resident C	<p>Our household and our neighbours are very unhappy with the proposed works at Lynton Avenue.</p> <p>Firstly I would like to say the consultation process has not be inclusive of local residents. This is Smethwick, the council should be aware we are a diverse population but the documentation posted through our doors was only in English and encouraged residents to go online to register</p>



their views. You have given no consideration to people who are digitally excluded either because they have no access to go online or because they do not speak/write English. There are at least five homes on our street where they do not speak English.

So how are they meant to register their view or get their thoughts across or understand your proposals??

The main concerns are us losing our only green space in front of our property which will mean we are completely exposed to the dual carriage way - which is very busy. The embankment offers some degree of separation and safety, especially when we have young children on the street. We already had an incident last year where a woman tried to run into the dual carriageway from Lynton Avenue to take her life. We had to call an ambulance/police. We've also seen an increase in drunk people, again, a few weeks ago we had to call the police as a drunk chap wouldn't get out of the middle of the road. He'd come along the path from the high street.

Since the recent works completed, we have seen an increase in people using our street as a walkway - they always walk in the middle of the road, rather than crossing over to use the foot path. If this cycle lane is created, you will just encourage more people to use it as a foot path, making it a hazard for cyclists. We have also seen an increase in parking, dangerous parking at that, where people leave their cars and walk to the High street or to Rolfe Street to catch their trains.

We have hardly seen any cyclists using the existing cycles, and any we have seen, never cross over to Lynton Avenue at the crossing - they cycle directly on, down the dual carriage way. The same thing will happen if the lane is created on our side, cyclists will NOT cross over to join the lane on our side, only to go onto Crocketts Lane, they will just continue to cycle down the left hand side of the dual carriage way. You could just as easily paint cycle signs onto our road that cyclists could follow onto Crocketts Lane where they can rejoin the cycle path. This would not be anywhere near as costly (both financial and in terms of time) or disruptive to all concerned, including drivers on the carriageway. Our street is a quiet one for traffic and so cyclists would be safe.



	<p>These works will also impact the value of our homes, a majority which are privately owned. For years we have asked the council to resurface the access ways behind our properties only to be repeatedly told it's not their problem but now it feels like this is being forced onto us without a choice. You say this is a consultation and nothing is set in stone, yet there were men from the council measuring out by the trees on the proposed site, earlier this week, with consultation still open!!</p> <p>We are quite a diverse street as mentioned and do have a number of elderly people living here. My own parents live here - both have mental health issues and I'm not sure how they will cope with the immense disruption to life, especially considering how bad the previous works were. It all seems quite unnecessary, especially considering the lack of cyclists it's meant to benefit. You say it's to encourage people to cycle yet traffic levels on the dual carriage way are back to pre covid levels, despite the cycle lanes already established. I still see people cycling along Smethwick High Street, rather than use the cycle paths to Galton Bridge.</p>
Resident D	<p>Looks good. Doesn't negatively impact traffic flow and safety of pedestrians. I worry about electric bikes and scooters on footpaths.</p>
Resident E	<p>We are not happy with proposal. There have been no changes made. The trees planted are not going to help the value of my home. The cycle path will make the road seem and feel a lot closer to our property. It already feels unsafe at times, especially with the speeding cars. Why do the council not do anything about speeding drivers on the dual carriageway.</p> <p>The last few months the existing changes have already caused great problems for our street. Lots of people using it as a through road to walk to the high street and for some reason, hang about at the crossing. There has been an increase in teenagers cycling down and hanging about and being abusive.</p> <p>The disruption the last time was bad enough and lasted forever - we had to deal with lots of noise from traffic backed up in queues. The contractors you used fitwilliams or fitsimmons? didn't care about the residents. They would</p>



	<p>sometimes start at 7am, at weekends then for days at a times, nothing and then working until the middle of night, banging things.</p> <p>Some of our neighbours work night shifts or other unsocialable hours, this greatly impacted them. People will not use the cycle path. it makes no sense.</p>
Resident F	<p>It's good to see you are planting trees but that is not the only issue but seems to be the only one addressed.</p> <p>There are young families on our street, whose children play in the front gardens and it is already becoming quite unsafe for them with the amount of footfall that has increased since the current cycle path was constructed. It's not cyclists using it - it's people walking down to the high street.</p> <p>Taking away the green area in front of our homes will impact our living environment as well as our house prices. You will have to take it away to construct this path, that no one will use. They will not cycle over to only have cycle back at crocketts lane. There are also hardly and cyclists using it currently. You maybe trying to future proof but it's at our expense, which is not on or ok.</p> <p>Where is the data that shows people in smethwick want a cycle path a long the dual carriageway. I also do not understand why you are planning to build an uncontrolled crossing at the bottom of lynton avenue. We've lived here for years without an accident on our road that there needs to be a crossing there now.</p> <p>All this yet you will not re tarmac the alleyways behind our houses that are full of pot holes and overgrown weeds, effectively cutting off our access through out back gate. My Dad has tripped up so many times trying to take the bins out. The holes are like craters!</p> <p>As far as I can see, you haven't listened to anything our residents have said except about the trees.</p> <p>Again you've sent this information in English when nearly half of the residents do not speak english. This is intentional on your part so that they can't object to the plans but you can tick a box to say you let residents have their say.</p>
Resident G	No Comments on form
Resident H	Good Decision
Resident I	We are happy with the proposal and plans to go ahead. I thank you for working with us + seeing the benefits



5 Alternative Options

5.1 Amend or abandon the proposals.

6 Implications

Resources:	The cost to implement the scheme is approximately £3.2M and will be funded by, funding from the Department for Transport, called the Towns Fund.
Legal and Governance:	N/A
Risk:	None.
Equality:	An Equality Impact Assessment is not required as the proposals concern legal procedures which are non-discriminatory in nature.
Health and Wellbeing:	The proposals will implement high-quality cycling and walking infrastructure to make local journeys safer for all.
Social Value:	Improving the area for all residents making it a safer place to live and commute.
Climate Change:	None.
Corporate Parenting:	None.

7. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Consultation Plan - Drawing No 41118 S/1.

Appendix 2 – Copy of communications from ward members and members of the public.

8. Background Papers

Approved business case by the Towns Fund Super Board on the 20th January 2022 and the subsequently by DLUHC on the 1st June 2022.

