

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

19 December 2023

Subject:	Feedback arising from the public consultation for a new pedestrian and cycle infrastructure improvement scheme between Dudley Port Railway Station and Great Bridge along the A461 corridor.
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 , Mervyn Bartlett Interim Assistant Director, Highways Services, mervyn_Bartlett@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That overall feedback received via the public consultation process are considered prior to deciding whether approval shall be granted to implement the pedestrian and cycle infrastructure improvement scheme between Dudley Port Railway Station and Great Bridge along the A461 corridor, as shown on drawing No. 52632 1/1 S/0, using funding awarded to Sandwell MBC by the Department for Transport.
- 1.2 That subject to 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 Sandwell Council in coordination with Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) submitted a bid to Government for Active Travel Fund Tranche 3 funding for a cycling and walking scheme along the A461 from Peake Drive, past Dudley Port Railway Station and to Great Bridge in accordance with the funding guidelines which stipulated that only those schemes which aim to deliver high quality, off road, segregated cycle lanes, new footways and pedestrian crossings in accordance with national cycle design standards would receive funding.

2.2 Consultation was carried out between 25th September 2023 and 13th October 2023, with Public Engagement events also held on 4th October 2023 and 7th October 2023 at Dudley Port Railway Station.

2.3 Ward members and the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and the local Member of Parliament also received notification of the consultation period and associated proposals prior to the public consultation.






2.4 Objections have been received via the statutory consultation process and therefore, they must be noted when considering the decision.

2.5 Of the 85 responses who commented on the proposals returned during the consultation period 40 residents supported the proposals and 44 objections were received. 1 resident responded as neutral to the proposals.

2.6 One resident responded with a comment not related to the proposals.



3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>People live well and age well: The funding will deliver cycling and walking improvements to encourage active travel which is good for our physical and mental health. Switching more journeys to active travel will improve health, quality of life and the environment.</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 the transport network via active travel modes 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 and leisure facilities in order for them to be successful. Funding to implement identify a package of measures by which access to the transport 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 Sandwell Council, in coordination with Transport for West Midlands (TfWM), submitted a bid to Government for Active Travel Fund Tranche 3 funding for a cycling and walking scheme along the A461 from Peake Drive, past Dudley Port Railway Station and to Great Bridge in accordance with the funding guidelines which stipulated that only those schemes which aim to deliver high quality, off road, segregated cycle lanes, new footways and pedestrian crossings in accordance with national cycle design standards would receive funding. This scheme aims to deliver high quality cycle and pedestrian infrastructure measures to improve accessibility by active modes to the tram stops along the A461 for the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro Extension. Sandwell was successful in receiving the full funding requested to implement the scheme in accordance with the funding guidelines.
- 4.2 The Funding Grant Agreement between West Midlands Combined Authority and Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council stipulates that the project should be completed by the 30th June 2024. Approval to progress with the project will ensure that the scheme is completed on time and within the budget and to ensure that funding guidelines are met so that the risk of the funding being withdrawn is minimised.
- 4.3 The scheme has the potential for a major shift towards cycling and walking journeys, public transport, and to improve public transport in the borough whilst reducing reliance on private cars. The scheme has been developed to provide interventions to support sustainable access to the new Metro stops at Dudley Port, Horsley Heath and Great Bridge.
- 4.4 Consultation was carried out between 25th September 2023 and 13th October 2023, with Public Engagement events also held on 4th October 2023 and 7th October 2023 at Dudley Port Railway Station.
- 4.5 Residents and businesses within the vicinity of the scheme received a letter outlining the proposals for the scheme confirming an end date for them to submit any objections. The letters contained a link and QR code for the Council's CitizenSpace consultation webpage where a plan could



be viewed and where they could leave feedback and comments. Details of the public consultation event to be held at Dudley Port Railway Station where they could view and discuss proposals in person with relevant officers were also provided in the letter.

4.6 Ward members and the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and the local Member of Parliament also received notification of the consultation period and associated proposals prior to the public consultation.

4.7 Comment received from Councillor William Gill (Great Bridge Ward) (as originally written) are below:

Comments from Councillor William Gill (Great Bridge Ward)

I welcome the principle of funding into Tipton from Government but as part of this consultation process, I think it is important that we listen to the voices in our community who will be impacted by this decision on a daily basis.

The Active Travel Fund, if spent correctly, could change the way people in Tipton travel, to work, school or for leisure but I regret that I don't think the current proposals will do this in an effective way.

The idea of narrowing the carriageway to facilitate the installation of a cycle route and wider footpath on the A461, seems at best counterintuitive as the Government is actively looking to reduce congestion around Great Bridge Island following the local community campaigns led by Shaun Bailey MP. By narrowing the road, the traffic will likely worsen which is of great concern to me and the residents of Great Bridge and Tipton.

In years past, there was conversation about duelling the A461 towards Dudley Port in an attempt to reduce congestion but this proposal seems to have been forgotten. Moving forward, we need to

I am a great believer in trying to protect our planet and leaving the environment in a better place than when it was in when I was elected. Likewise, I want to improve the health and life expectancy of Tipton, as when I was elected the life expectancy was 72 years (the lowest in the region). The Active Travel Plan will go some way to improve both our local air quality and in turn the health of our local population - which is why I support things like the the improved crossing facilities as well as the installation of new crossing facilities along this road.



In principle, I support the idea of cycle routes but I simply won't support them as set out in the proposals in their current format

As an alternative approach to this I would encourage the Council to narrow the footpaths to accommodate a separate cycle route. The Council could then remove the current cycle routes along the A461 as this would enable the road to be wider which would be particularly useful near the junctions with local residential streets.

I hope the Council take my views on board and look forward to working with them towards a resolution to this issue.

Best
Will

- 4.8 1643 letters and questionnaires were distributed to the local area. Comments were received from a total of 91 residents: 42 using Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council's online consultation portal, 41 residents responded by completing and returning the questionnaire to the Council House and 8 responded by email, 6 of the emails were received after the consultation period ended on 13th October 2023.
- 4.9 Of the 85 responses who commented on the proposals returned during the consultation period 40 residents supported the proposals and 44 objections were received. 1 resident responded as neutral to the proposals.
- 4.10 One resident responded with a comment not related to the proposals.
- 4.11 Summary of responses from the objectors are as follows with comments from officers in response addressing the concerns raised:
- **Waste of money** – The funding is from Central Government for the provision of projects that promote Active Travel like cycling and walking and has been provided for this specific project, and therefore while some people may consider it a waste of money, we are not able to spend on other agendas.
 - **Narrowing of lanes** – The proposed scheme will not reduce the existing A461 carriageway lanes which are currently allocated to vehicular traffic.



The design of the proposed cycle track has been designed to make use of the area which is currently allocated as cycle lanes on the A461 and separated by a dashed white line. This space will be upgraded and reconstructed to provide dedicated off-highway cycle tracks. This means that where kerb lines are being realigned or new kerb lines are being installed they will not encroach into the trafficked lanes of the A461.

- **Road is already congested** – The existing layout of the A461 is to remain with right-turn lanes and parking bay allocation unaffected.
- **Removal of right turn lanes** - One other issue raised during the consultation was the proposed removal of the right turn lanes. As a result of these comments the design was reviewed, and the right turn lane provisions will remain to ensure drivers feel they have adequate facilities to make these manoeuvres. I believe this demonstrates we are listening to the voices in the community to provide a balanced provision, maximising travel choices across the area in a safe way.

4.12 The detailed responses from objectors can be found in Appendix B.

4.13 As stipulated by Government guidance, the awarded Active Travel Fund must deliver schemes that provide:

- better streets for cycling and people
- put cycling and walking at the heart of decision-making
- empowering and encouraging local authorities to enable this
- enabling people to cycle and protecting them when they do

4.14 The Department for Transport requires all funded schemes to adhere to published design guidance, policies and plans otherwise the Department reserves the right to reduce, suspend or withhold future DfT grant payments to Local Authorities.

4.15 As part of Sandwell's Active Travel Fund submission the following proposals were approved for Government funding:

4.16 The proposals included:

- Proposed 1.2km of two-way segregated cycle tracks on A461 from Peake Drive to Great Bridge, ensuring cyclists are separated from both pedestrians and traffic
- New crossing facilities,
- Upgrading existing crossing facilities,



- Movement of bus shelters so that they are closer to the station and near crossing facilities
- Adjustment of kerblines allowing the widening of footways.

5 Alternative Options

5.1 The options submitted for funding approval as part of the ATF submission to Central Government must be implemented. Any alternative options will not be funded as part of the Active Travel Fund and there is a risk of funding being withheld should local authorities not meet the criteria set out in the funding guidelines and initial submission documents.

6 Implications

Resources:	The budget to implement the scheme is approximately £2.2M and will be funded by funding from the Department for Transport, called the Active Travel Fund.
Legal and Governance:	The Grant Agreement shall be 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 once this report is approved. Under section 65 (1) of the Highways Act 1980, a highway authority may, in or by the side of a highway maintainable at the public expense by them which consists of or comprises a made-up carriageway, construct a cycle track as part of the highway; and they may light any cycle track constructed by them under this section. To convert all or part of a footway to a shared pedestrian and cycle route, all or the appropriate part of the footway must be removed under section 66 (4) of the Highways Act 1980, and a cycle track 'constructed' under section 65 (1) of the act. No physical construction is necessary but there needs to be clear evidence that the local highway authority has exercised these powers. This can be provided by a resolution of the appropriate committee or cabinet member.
Risk:	The main risks are delaying the delivery of the schemes on site until approval is given and therefore missing the spend deadline, resulting in a loss of funding for Sandwell MBC



Equality:	An equality impact assessment was carried out during the development of the Sandwell Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan and the proposed infrastructure adheres to latest Government Guidance. Furthermore, an independent Road Safety Audit has been undertaken to ensure the schemes facilitate the safety of all users of the highway.
Health and Wellbeing:	A transport system that is easily accessible, reliable, and affordable contributes to life satisfaction and wellbeing in multiple ways. It enables access to work, friends, and family, as well as health-supporting facilities such as schools, colleges, parks, libraries, and health care centres. The proposed walking and cycling scheme will have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of local communities by encouraging active travel and the associated health benefits of increasing physical activity and minimising the time spent sitting down.
Social Value:	Providing high-quality walk and cycle links to the stops will give greater opportunity for composite active travel and tram journeys, providing better access to local jobs, education, and facilities, as well as providing access to the wider West Midlands Region through the rail network and existing metro. This will improve opportunities, reduce inequality, and will reduce car dependency, improving air quality and wellbeing. The proposed cycle route will also form part of a network that will link communities to employment, education, transport hubs, town centres and other 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. This active travel scheme aims to do this.



Corporate Parenting:	The funding will deliver cycling and walking improvements to public transport services as well as near schools and will encourage active travel which is good for our physical and mental health. Switching more journeys to active travel will improve health, quality of life and the environment for children and young people.
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7. Appendices

Appendix A - Proposed traffic calming details on Drawing No 52632 1/1 S/O.

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

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

