

Notes of a remote meeting of the East Cambs Bus, Cycle, Walk Working Party held on Wednesday 20th April at 6.00pm.

PRESENT

Cllr Alan Sharp (Chairman)
Cllr Charlotte Cane
Cllr Lorna Dupré
Cllr Lis Every
Cllr Mark Goldsack (*from 6:15pm*)

OFFICERS

Sally Bonnett – Infrastructure & Strategy Manager
Caroline Evans – Democratic Services Officer

76. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr Simon Harries.

77. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

78. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Notes of the meeting held on 10th November 2021 were agreed as an accurate record.

79. DRAFT SUSTRANS FEASIBILITY STUDIES

The Infrastructure & Strategy Manager gave a presentation about the Sustrans feasibility studies that had been commissioned by the Council. Five priority routes had been identified for the studies, of which three had now been completed and copies had been sent to the Working Party members in advance of the meeting: Burwell – Fordham, Haddenham – A142, and Swaffham Prior – Reach – Burwell. The other two studies (Little Downham – Ely and Littleport – Chettisham – Ely) were underway and due to be submitted in June. In addition, Sustrans had updated the construction cost for the remaining works needed to complete the Wicken – Soham cycle path that had been included in their 2013 report.

The studies had each looked at constraints in the area, provided several route options, ensured compliance with the latest Government policy requirements,

included a cost estimate and benefit-cost ratio (BCR), and had considered construction, community engagement, and risks. In order to increase the BCR and encourage people to use the routes, options had been provided within villages rather than the routes just reaching the edges of settlements. The routes were described as cycle routes but the proposals were for 3m-wide shared-use paths between villages and segregated cycle paths within villages wherever possible. Where sufficient width was available a non-tarmac bridle path could also be included alongside. Full details were provided in the reports, including the reasons for discounting some options.

Swaffham Prior – Reach – Burwell

Seven different options had been identified of which three had been recommended as the preferred choices. Improvements within the villages had also been considered. All potential routes involved the use of private land and therefore there may be some variations on delivery if landowners did not allow access. In terms of ecology and heritage, the disused railway, Devil's Dyke, and many legally-protected species were all factors that would affect feasibility. The most expensive scenario would be £10.1m for Option 7 including new bridges and measures within the settlements. The cheapest scenario would be £176k for Option 3 with no bridges and reaching the edges of settlements only. A 20mph speed limit was recommended throughout Reach in order to improve the cycling and walking environment.

Burwell – Fordham

Six different options had been identified of which two had been recommended as the preferred choices. Improvements within the villages had also been considered and there was the option to include a Burwell – Soham link. The main constraints to the route would be the railway line and the A142. The most expensive scenario would be £16.6m for Option 2 including two new bridges and measures within the settlements. The cheapest scenario would be £1.1m for Option 6 reaching the edges of settlements only, and going *via* Exning which would allow onward access towards Newmarket.

6:15pm - Cllr Goldsack joined the meeting.

Haddenham – A142

Five different options had been identified of which Option 4 had been recommended as the preferred choice. Improvements within Haddenham and routes *via* Witchford and Wilburton had also been considered. The main issue was that the A142 cycle path was no longer policy-compliant (LTN 1/20), mainly due to its width, its lack of separation from traffic, and the manner of crossing side roads. Therefore, it could not be included in any funded scheme. The highest cost would be £3.8m to include measures in the villages. The lowest cost would be £1m to the edges of settlements only.

Soham – Wicken

The route would provide a link from the new Soham station to Wicken and to Wicken Fen. The costs in the report had been used to inform a successful bid

for CPCA Market Towns Funding, and work was underway with Soham Town Council to secure the remaining funding required.

Information regarding land ownership was needed and local knowledge would be particularly helpful. The reports would all be shared with all Members, as well as with other stakeholders, and Sustrans were keen to deliver a workshop or seminar in the District in order to explain the reports. Project Initiation Documents submitted to the Combined Authority were awaiting determination regarding funding for the Swaffham Prior – Reach – Burwell route as well as five further Sustrans studies. Officers would continue to seek funding for the delivery of the schemes and the Planning Department would use the bus and cycle/walk strategies when engaging with developers. Lobbying would also take place to have the routes included in the LCWIP, the County Council's Active Travel Strategy, and the Combined Authority's LTCP refresh. In due course there would be a Comms strategy detailing the commissioning of the reports, the work that had taken place regarding buses, and the plans for active transport.

Members complimented the depth and thoroughness of the reports, and the clear evidence of understanding of each area. In having gone beyond simply linking settlements, some of the proposals within villages had the potential to greatly improve the village environment but could also prove to be very controversial.

Discussion followed regarding the following points:

- **Preferred format for the proposed Sustrans event:** There was general agreement that an initial online event to explain the background and process would maximise attendance. All Members should be included so that they would be well-briefed on the project and, with no limit on numbers, it would be possible to include Parish Councillors and members from other relevant groups as well. In due course, in-person events near to each route and open to the wider public could be beneficial.
- **Parish Councils involvement:** It was agreed that only the Parish Councils affected by the proposed routes should be contacted at this stage. Funding had been requested from the Combined Authority for further feasibility studies in other locations and therefore other Parish Councils could be included in future.
- **Communications:** It was agreed that clear messaging would be essential to avoid giving false impressions of imminent projects or definite plans. The work to date, and the Sustrans event and any further community consultation, was purely a preparation for funding bids. No funding was yet in place and, although the feasibility studies had identified multiple routes, many proposals had later been discounted within the reports. In addition, areas not yet included in the studies were potentially to be investigated in future.
- **Funding:** A Member stated that transformative projects would require very significant levels of funding, conversely the lowest-cost options could potentially be disappointing; the Council would therefore need to

decide on its level of ambition. Several Members commented that completion of fewer ambitious projects would be more meaningful than multiple weaker projects.

Sustrans had informed the Infrastructure & Strategy Manager that there would be future funding announcements from the Department for Transport. Both the Cambs LCWIP team and the County Council's Active Travel team were aware of this work. She had submitted a bid to the Combined Authority's Active Travel Fund for the Swaffham Prior – Reach – Burwell route in late 2021 but had not yet heard the outcome. (That route had been the only one with a completed feasibility study by the bid deadline of 31/12/21.) Further funding options would be researched and the various routes would need to be prioritised due to limited funds; external funding would be essential since the Council did not have its own funding available. A Member suggested that by preparing a "shopping list" of ideal requirements, appropriate bids could be made as and when funding opportunities arose.

- **Equestrian routes:** A Member asked about the status of routes with an adjacent equestrian path, and stressed the importance of maximising equestrian access to avoid horses being close to busy and fast-moving traffic. The Infrastructure & Strategy Manager stated that not all of the routes would be suitable for horses, but she was aware that similar schemes had been implemented elsewhere so she would clarify with Sustrans what the route status would be.
- **Next steps:** Potential dates for future meetings, and a draft potential stakeholders list for the Sustrans meeting, would be circulated to Working Party Members. An update report would be provided to the Finance & Assets Committee in June and a decision report in September.

80. WORK PROGRAMME – APRIL 2022

Members received and noted the Work Programme to October 2022. The Chairman highlighted the need for the Council to respond to the Combined Authority's Local Transport and Connectivity Plan that was due for release after the May elections. There would be a Member Seminar on 16th June and a subsequent Working Party meeting to prepare the response for approval by all Members.

81. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that meetings would be arranged as follows:

- A Member Seminar to be arranged with Sustrans in mid-June.
- Working Party to meet in late May to plan the Sustrans seminar.
- Working Party to meet in late June/early July, after the LTCP Member Seminar, in order to prepare the Council's response.

The meeting closed at 7:32pm.