

Notes of a remote meeting of the East Cambs Bus, Cycle, Walk Working Party held on Thursday 28th January at 6.00pm.

PRESENT

Cllr Alan Sharp (Chairman)
Cllr David Ambrose Smith
Cllr Charlotte Cane
Cllr Lorna Dupré
Cllr Lis Every
Cllr Simon Harries

OFFICERS

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

39. APOLOGIES

Cllr Harries was not present at the start of the meeting due to technical issues. No apologies for absence were received.

40. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

41. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Notes of the meeting held on 12th November 2020 were agreed.

42. REVISED TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Working Party received the revised Terms of Reference, previously circulated, as agreed by the Finance & Assets Committee at their meeting held on 26th November 2020.

A Member commented that they contained no mention of how this Working Party was aligning with or contributing to the County Council Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) and questioned whether the Finance and Assets Committee would be setting any targets for the Working Party to

address. In response, the Chairman reported that the Cambridgeshire County Council Highways and Transport Committee had met on 19th January and approved a public consultation on the draft LCWIP but the consultation dates had not yet been publicised. He stated that this Working Party would be overseeing the development of the East Cambs strategy to feed into that consultation, so timings and targets would be somewhat led by that although the Working Party could also recommend some targets if needed. Sally Bonnett, Infrastructure and Strategy Manager, clarified that the Department for Transport would only fund walking and cycling projects that were included within an LCWIP and reminded Members that the LCWIP would be discussed in more detail under Agenda Item 7. She said she anticipated the consultation dates to fall in the spring.

Members agreed that the LCWIP was crucial if funding depended on it but that there may also be other projects within the District's strategy that they would want to progress even if they did not fit within the LCWIP.

The Chairman summarised that the role of the Working Party was to put forward the best case possible for the District to try to secure as much County funding as possible in order to achieve optimum provision for our residents.

It was agreed that it be RECOMMENDED TO FINANCE AND ASSETS COMMITTEE:

To add into the objectives of the Terms of Reference for the Working Party a reference to the importance of the LCWIP for securing funding for the District.

43. NEW BUS SERVICES FOR EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE PROPOSALS DOCUMENT – UPDATE FROM CPCA

The Working Party received a verbal report from Sally Bonnett, Infrastructure and Strategy Manager, regarding her discussions with Oliver Howarth, Bus Strategy Manager at CPCA, on the Council's Prospectus for new Bus Services in East Cambridgeshire. She informed Members that he had agreed to share the Working Party's document with Stagecoach who were currently evaluating routes. He had also agreed to look at the proposed new routes and determine which he considered could be viable, at which point it would be necessary to produce a business plan and potentially a tender. She reminded Members that all bus operators were currently under huge financial pressures.

Cllr Harries joined the meeting at 6:14pm

Cllr Every reported that she was a Member of the CPCA Bus Reform Taskforce, together with Cllr J. Schumann, and she expressed concern as to whether the demand responsive pilot in Huntingdonshire could damage future possibilities in East Cambs if the pilot was unsuccessful and therefore deemed non-viable. She also reported that substantial input from East Cambs and Fenland representatives was essential at the Taskforce in order for those rural areas not to be over-ridden by the more urban areas with larger connected services.

Members noted Sally Bonnett's update and requested that information from the discussions with the CPCA should be added to a future Agenda once more feedback had been received.

44. CYCLING AND WALKING ROUTES CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

The Working Party received a report, previously circulated, which provided a summary of the responses to the Cycling and Walking Routes Consultation which had taken place from 9th March to 31st May 2020. The report also contained two Appendices providing the data in table formats as well as heatmaps to show the popularity of the different routes, and breakdown of the data by journey purpose. Sally Bonnett, Infrastructure & Strategy Manager, asked the Members to use the information to consider which routes should be considered to take to the County Council for inclusion in the LCWIP.

A Member expressed concern that the feedback on which the report was based was almost a year old and therefore responses could be different now. She was also disappointed that few responses were received in the <18 yr and 18-24 yr age groups, especially given that people in those groups potentially have fewer transport options than those in older age categories and so are likely to be more reliant on walking, cycling and public transport.

Sally Bonnett responded that some of the information would be refreshed as part of the LCWIP Consultation and she explained that there had been a planned programme to engage younger people through the schools but that had not been possible due to the Covid lockdowns. She suggested that it may be possible to involve the new Youth Advisory Group. Members suggested that although schools were not operating in their usual way during lockdown they were still open and contacting their students, so it should be possible to reach young people that way as long as the right person was found in each school to organise it. A Member also asked if it could be possible to directly mailshot 18-24 year old residents to ask for their opinions.

Several Members highlighted that the issue of safety at the A10/A142 BP roundabout had arisen in multiple responses and also commented that many paths and bridleways had been split by the A10 and/or the A142 resulting in dangerous crossings. Sally Bonnett reminded Members that the CPCA were currently looking at dualling of the A10 and provision of a safe crossing point at the A10/A142 roundabout was included in that project.

A Member commented that a very high percentage of routes were suggested by less than 10 people and had therefore not been included in the tables of Appendix 2 but that it should be borne in mind that responses from a couple of residents from a hamlet or small village were proportionally more than 90 from Ely and that it would be important not to disregard these as an indicator of residents' need. For rural communities there may be only a few requests but their proposed route could be really vital for access to a GP or school.

A Member commented that one consultation respondent had mentioned the www.widenmypath.com website and she questioned how the Council takes information from that site and interacts with it.

Two Members stated that it was important to ensure the equestrian community was not overlooked and it could be useful to invite a representative from a local Equestrian Access Group to talk to the Working Party about the issues they faced. In conjunction with that, Members noted the lack of clarity regarding general preferences for mixed-user routes compared to separate routes.

There was general agreement that more work was needed to collate the consultation responses, particularly the bullet point comments from Appendix 2, into more ordered data grouped in meaningful ways in order to assist the process of determining where the focus of the project should lie. It was agreed that small routes that would be important for village residents may need to be progressed separately from larger routes suitable for the LCWIP. Members' knowledge of their local areas was potentially important and useful and consequently Sally Bonnett was asked to arrange a Member Seminar on cycling and walking. Members agreed it would be important to meet again very soon in order to keep the project on track.

It was agreed that:

- Ways to increase the input of the <18yrs and 18-24yr age groups be investigated.
- The data be further analysed and reformatted in order to draw out more information from it.

- Equestrians needs be fully considered as well as those of walkers and cyclists, potentially by inviting a representative from local Groups to speak to the Working Party.
- More clarity be obtained regarding shared-use vs single-use routes.
- A cycling and walking Member Seminar be arranged to seek Councillors' local area knowledge.
- A two-pronged approach be taken in order to progress larger routes for inclusion in the LCWIP and smaller rural routes for possible local funding.

45. CAMBRIDGESHIRE LCWIP

The Working Party received a report, previously circulated, which had been sent to the Highways and Transport Committee from Cambridgeshire County Council. Sally Bonnett, Infrastructure and Strategy Manager, explained that she had brought this document to the Working Party because it had been approved for public consultation on 19th January 2021 and that both Sustrans and the Department for Transport had indicated that future funding for walking and cycling projects would mainly be awarded to projects in an LCWIP.

In response to Members' questions Sally Bonnett agreed to find out if a timeframe had been assigned to "short-", "medium-" and "long-" term aims. She also explained that a distance limit was applied to potential cycle routes and possibly to walking routes as well which could explain why some routes were included in the cycle plans but the same route didn't appear in the walking plans.

A Member was disappointed to see that East Cambs residents recorded the highest rates of driving to work in the county as well as a 26% decrease in the number of residents cycling to work between the 2001 and 2011 censuses. She also commented that it would be useful to ask East Cambs residents the more general questions shown on page 5 of Appendix 1 of the report in order to help inform the local approach.

Members agreed that the LCWIP requirement for a route to provide value for money could exclude short routes with few users but that such routes were vital for supporting small rural communities, for example to be able to safely walk or cycle to the shop in the next village, and that completing these short journeys by car also made them some of the most polluting journeys.

There was general agreement to assess at the next meeting which of the proposals from the consultation would be suitable for feeding in to the LCWIP on behalf of the District and which would be more suited to pursuing on a local level.

46. SUSTRANS FEASIBILITY STUDIES

The Working Party received a verbal report from Sally Bonnett, Infrastructure and Strategy Manager, explaining that schemes would be more likely to receive funding if they had been worked up in detail and that Sustrans were able to complete feasibility studies regarding things such as land ownership and issues with utilities. These studies could put a project in a better position to receive funding from the Department for Transport once available. The cost for such studies would be in the region of £5-20k per route and that clearer costs could be provided once the proposed routes were agreed. She asked Members to consider identifying suitable projects to propose to Finance and Assets Committee for funding for feasibility studies.

There was general agreement on the merits of this approach once the assessment of all the proposals had progressed further.

47. WORK PROGRAMME – JANUARY 2021 – AND DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Members received and noted the Work Programme to January 2021. The Democratic Services Manager reminded Members that there would be a meeting of the Finance and Assets Committee on 25th March 2021 and Members agreed they should meet in advance of that in order to be able to provide a report to that meeting.

Therefore, it was agreed that a meeting of the Working Party be held at 6pm on Wednesday 10th March 2021. Members also agreed the meeting date could be subject to change, if necessary, once the dates of the LCWIP consultation were released.

The meeting closed at 7:13pm.