

Joint Transportation Board 15th September 2020

Ashford Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan

Introduction

The report introduces the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan 2020 -2029 (LCWIP) attached as Appendix A that was adopted by the Borough Council at the Cabinet meeting on the 28th May 2020. The purpose of this report is to enable the LCWIP to be formally adopted by KCC

The Borough Council's Corporate Plan 2015 – 2020 sets out the Council's direction and key priorities and particularly refers to the development of a “cycle town” strategy as part of establishing an “Active and Creative Ashford”. In 2019, the Borough Council adopted the Ashford Cycling and Walking Strategy 2019 -2029 that sets out a framework for supporting relevant Cycling and Walking initiatives that is key to encouraging greater participation in these healthy and environmentally friendly activities.

One of the Strategy's key actions has been to develop a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) that will enable a long-term approach to developing local cycling and walking networks and form a vital part of the Government's strategy to increase the number of trips made on foot or by cycle. It is also timely, as Council's across the country aim to maximise the change in people's thinking and behaviour to both the environment and their mode of transport due to the coronavirus lockdown.

Before the coronavirus crisis, Ashford was chosen by the Department for Transport (DfT) as a pilot area to trial the preparation of LCWIPs, which were introduced in the Government's Cycling and Walking investment Strategy in 2017. Ashford has received support from consultant's Mott MacDonald in the preparation of the LCWIP via DfT by agreeing to produce an LCWIP that meets their criteria.

The LCWIP sets out a series of routes and projects that will help deliver the aspirations set out in the Strategy. Both documents will prove vital to support Ashford's recovery of the coronavirus, and support the Council's carbon neutrality ambitions as well as ensure Ashford is well placed to secure further funding.

The LCWIP, attached as Appendix **, aims to build on the excellent work that has already been achieved by analysing use of local census data to establish the most heavily used cycling and walking routes where key improvements would secure the greatest benefits.

The Ashford LCWIP

The Ashford LCWIP seeks to deliver a cycling and walking network linked to the town centre area where there is greatest footfall and links to businesses, schools and commuter routes. The aim is to provide high quality infrastructure that is safe and accessible, to encourage a greater uptake of cycling and walking.

The Ashford LCWIP follows the technical guidance around integration of cycling and walking with transport planning and land use planning. It has been prepared in consultation with Kent County Council (KCC) as the highway authority and reflects proposed known development and growth areas. It has been produced in line with DfT guidance and has been ratified by Mott McDonald as DfT lead consultants, ensuring it is compliant and meets the requirements for supporting future funding bids.

DfT guidance ensures a consistent approach to developing LCWIP's which has four main aims:

- Provide a network of primary, neighbourhood and strategic greenway cycle corridors to act as core routes for the highest volumes of journeys.
- Improve journeys into the town centre for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Create networks of quieter streets where children play out, neighbours catch up, air pollution is lower, and cycling and walking are the natural choice for everyday journeys.
- Increase the proportion of active travel journeys in the borough, utilising the economic benefits for business that can come from customers switching from car journeys to more sustainable travel modes.

Having undertaken detailed route assessments and considered a range of factors that affect potential routes and their suitability for development, the LCWIP has identified key cycling and walking routes in the Ashford urban area using the key data from a variety of sources including census data and detailed site studies by Mott McDonald personnel and key KCC staff. The town centre remains the main focus of the LCWIP due to the trip generators in and around the town centre.

The key route corridors set out in the LCWIP are as follows (not in priority order):

- Hythe Road – Mace Lane
- Canterbury/Faversham Road
- Highworth/A20
- Repton
- Victoria Park
- Ashford Oak (Arlington-Jemmett Road- Victoria Park)
- Jemmett Road
- Beaver Road
- Newtown

More detail is provided on each of those routes in the main body of the LCWIP, which then goes on to suggest key changes, improvements and amendments to those route corridors.

As has already been noted, the existence of an LCWIP gives the Council some priority in terms of bidding for DfT funding for local cycling and walking projects. In February 2020, the government announced significant funding for cycling and walking projects and specifically indicated that it would be allocated to towns and

cities with well-developed plans for cycling and walking networks, such as those set out in Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs).

The Government has also indicated a significant interest in funding projects, which support active travel plans in light of the current Covid 19 situation, which can both help to reduce social interaction on public transport and encourage engagement in healthy lifestyles and activities. Therefore, Ashford will be well placed to pursue funding for relevant projects by adopting the proposed LCWIP. It has been made clear by the DfT that bids for funding would be allocated to towns and cities with well-developed plans for cycling and walking networks, such as those set out in Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) and that meet their criteria for assessment.

Officers will continue to work with all major partners in seeking appropriate funding for the borough and work with local communities to ensure a strategic approach to delivering schemes is achieved and is particularly keen to implement interventions at the earliest possible opportunity to ensure the public have access to safe walking and cycling routes.

This is an exciting opportunity for Ashford to remain at the forefront of developing sustainable transport routes, in partnership with key stakeholders for the benefit of residents and visitors alike.

Conclusion

The Ashford LCWIP sets out a clear set of proposals to improve cycling and walking in the borough and is an important part of implementing the Ashford Cycling and Walking Strategy 2019 - 2029. This will promote sustainable development and contribute to the Council's carbon neutral ambitions. The adoption of the LCWIP document will enable the respective Councils to bid for significant DfT funding which has recently been announced for cycling and walking infrastructure and other new funds that become available. It will also enable Ashford to continue delivering routes with its partners based on strategic assessment and in line with other relevant strategies.

Recommendation

The Joint Transportation Board approves the Ashford Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan 2020 – 2029