

Agenda Item No:

Report To: CABINET

Date of Meeting: 14th March 2019

Report Title: Ashford's Cycling and Walking Strategy 2019 - 2029

Report Author & Ian Grundy, Principal Policy Planner

Job Title: Simon Harris Community Projects Manager

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Bennett, Portfolio Holder for Culture

Portfolio Holder for: Cllr Clokie Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development



Summary: The Draft Cycling and Walking Strategy as attached as appendix 1 provides an overall approach to cycling and walking in the borough that helps to promote benefits in health, transport and the economy. The Strategy sets out the picture regarding walking and cycling in the borough at present and then establishes over-arching aims and key areas of work. A Delivery Plan of key projects in appendix 2 is based on the key themes.

Key Decision: YES

Significantly Affected Wards: All

Recommendations: The Cabinet is recommended to:-

- i. Approve the Ashford Cycling and Walking Strategy and Delivery Plan 2019 – 2029 for the purpose of public consultation.**
- ii. Delegate authority to the Head of Culture in consultation with the Portfolio Holder to make minor amendments to the Strategy**
- iii. To note the use of £195,000 for the town centre projects as identified in the Town Centre Framework.**
- iv. Agree the funding of £20,000 from reserves for appropriate rural projects as identified in the Delivery Plan and £10,000 for promotional projects.**
- v. Delegate authority to the Head of Culture and Head of Planning to complete all tasks and to deliver the projects and give effect to the above recommendations.**

Policy Overview: The 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" and also references developing connections between green spaces

via cycle and footpath links under the theme of “Attractive Ashford”.

Financial Implications:

There will be a funding implication to implement the projects set out in the Delivery Plan. An initial funding allocation is requested as part of the Town Centre Framework project proposals as agreed by the Town Centre Partnership Board who have allocated £195,000 for appropriate town centre projects. This will fund initial detailed feasibility work on key town centre routes and the implementation of key proposals.

Additional funding from reserves totalling £20,000 is requested to fund appropriate rural projects and £10,000 for suitable borough-wide promotional projects respectively.

Legal Implications

None

Equalities Impact Assessment

Note required as no policy changes proposed.

Other Material Implications:

None

Exempt from Publication:

NO

Background Papers:

The Ashford Local Plan 2030

Contact:

ian.grundy@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233) 330 213
simon.harris@ashford.gov.uk

Report Title: Ashford's Cycling and Walking Strategy 2019 - 2029

Introduction and Background

1. The Council's Cycling Strategy was approved in 2010 and has now been revised and reviewed to incorporate walking into a joint strategy which supports benefits in health, transport and the economy.
2. Ashford borough has an excellent network of well-used cycling routes already in place in the urban area and this incorporates parts of the national cycling network that pass through the borough. The main routes are incorporated into the green corridor network that follow the river corridors and converge on the edge of the town centre. There have been recent significant new routes delivered including the link from Park Farm to the Designer Outlet across the Willesborough Dykes and the route from Godmersham to Chilham in the rural area. Many of the routes are dedicated off-road routes that are shared with pedestrians. There has been a significant increase recorded in the number of cyclists accessing the domestic railway station on a daily basis.
3. The Council has worked closely with key partners in the preparation of this Strategy including Sustrans who have carried out detailed route assessments and in particular the Council has worked with consultants Mott MacDonald, appointed by the Department of Transport (DfT) to enable a comprehensive walking and cycling strategy to be produced and endorsed by the DfT.
4. The Cycling and Walking Strategy will be a key part of the wider aim of improving overall sustainable transport within the Borough and in particular accessibility to the town centre.
5. The draft Cycling and Walking Strategy sets out the ambitions for cycling and walking in the Borough as follows:
6. The draft Cycling and Walking Strategy presented here sets out six over-arching principles as follows:
 - Providing and improving the cycling and walking network
 - Cycle parking
 - Maintenance of the existing cycling and walking network
 - Safer cycling
 - Promoting cycling and walking in the Borough
 - Cycling and walking tourism
7. A series of key projects under each principle are set out in a Delivery Plan.

Proposal/Current Position

8. The draft Ashford Cycling and Walking Strategy brings together policies and related actions to promote cycling and walking and the delivery of related infrastructure in Ashford Borough with the aim of increasing the proportion of journeys made by these active travel modes. The Strategy provides a basis for making bids for improvements to cycling and walking infrastructure at key routes serving the town, urban extensions and rural areas. The Strategy also seeks to increase cycling and walking participation by promoting safer cycling, active promotion of cycling and walking and the support for cycling and walking based tourism.
9. Specific route corridors have been audited in a number of key locations including Ashford town centre and the rural areas of Tenterden, Wye, Charing and Hamstreet. The Council has worked with consultants Mott MacDonald, appointed by the Department of Transport (DfT) to analyse local data using the propensity to cycle and walking toolkit. This will enable a comprehensive walking and cycling strategy to be produced and endorsed by the DfT.
10. In addition to the provision of new or improved cycling and walking infrastructure the Strategy acknowledges that the existing cycling and walking infrastructure in the Ashford urban area is very good, but could be better utilised, and there are therefore measures proposed to increase local awareness of local routes to increase their usage. There is the opportunity to host cycling events that will raise the profile of the borough and generate interests in cycling as both a sustainable means of transport and a healthy leisure activity.
11. The Strategy acknowledges the role that cycling and walking tourism can play in the overall visitor offer and economic vitality of the Borough and sets out measures to increase cycling and walking related tourism. The Council will actively pursue significant infrastructure projects such as the proposed Royal Military Canal shared pathway, this a long term project which has the potential to benefit both the rural economy and the enhanced opportunities for accessing the countryside by working closely with landowners and partner agencies.
12. The Strategy sets out the Council's ambitions for cycling and walking in the Borough as follows:
 - Ashford borough is recognised as a cycling and walking friendly borough
 - Cycling and walking routes are high quality, safe, accessible, well maintained, integrated, signed and promoted.
 - More people are cycling and walking for everyday journeys
 - There are more opportunities for sustainable travel to work, school and key services and reliance on cars is reduced
 - Drivers are more aware of and considerate towards cyclists and walkers
 - Cyclists and walkers are more aware of their rights and responsibilities to other road and path users
 - Off road cycling and walking networks are maintained and improved
 - Cycling and walking contribute to the visitor economy
 - To secure a significant modal shift from cars to cycling and walking to reduce air pollution and carbon emissions and improve overall air quality.

Implications and Risk Assessment

13. To support the delivery of the Strategy, sufficient funding will be required for Ashford to become an “active travel” destination. Funding from a range of sources will need to be acquired to pay for feasibility studies on potential new paths, up-grade of existing paths, signage, parking, storage, marketing and promotion, events and training.
14. A key risk is not producing a Strategy that is “fit for purpose” and has the support of the DfT and other key partners, as that would diminish the value of the Strategy and potentially miss opportunities for significant funding for key projects. To mitigate this, the draft Strategy is proposing the provision for initial seed funding of projects. The strategy has been produced using the guide methodology produced for the DfT, compliance with this methodology reduce this risk area.

Equalities Impact Assessment

15. Not required as no policy changes proposed.

Consultation Planned or Undertaken

16. The draft Cycling and Walking Strategy will be the subject of local consultation with community groups, parish councils and local interest groups before it is adopted.
17. In the event that the consultation highlights the need for minor amendments to the strategy a delegation to the Head of Culture is requested so that these amendments can be made after consultation with the portfolio holder. Alternatively major amendments will be reported to members before adoption.

Other Options Considered

18. The only other option considered was to rely solely on the policy approach set out in the newly adopted Ashford Local Plan 2030 that does include over-arching policies regarding cycling and walking, but it was considered that this would not include the level of detail involving detailed project delivery that is set out in a dedicated Strategy document or express the ambition of being a Borough acknowledged for its active travel offer.

Next Steps in Process

19. The Draft Cycling and Walking Strategy will be the subject of local consultation for a six week period and comments will be reported back to Members and appropriate amendments made to the draft Strategy where necessary.
20. The Audit of Cycle routes will be completed and a work programme of alterations produced that will be brought to the Town Centre Regeneration Board for approval

Conclusion

21. The draft Cycling and Walking Strategy brings together policies and related actions to promote walking and cycling and the delivery of related infrastructure in Ashford Borough with the aim of increasing the proportion of journeys made by these active

travel modes. The Strategy also provides a basis for making bids for improvements to walking and cycling infrastructure in Ashford Borough. The Strategy also seeks to increase cycling and walking participation by promoting safer cycling, active promotion of cycling and walking and the support for cycling and walking based tourism.

22. Portfolio Holder's Views

23. Councillor Bennett comments that, "Members have debated cycling and walking route expansion many times and agreed the need for an `active travel strategy to develop real progress towards our aspirations to make Ashford a `cycle town' and improve the network of routes. I support the adoption of the recommendations that will enable officers to develop a delivery plan for the next decade".
24. Councillor Clokie comments that, "This strategy should enable the council to increase not only the number of Cycle routes but also routes which have a high regard for Cyclist safety."

Contact and Email

25. Ian Grundy, Principal Policy Planner. ian.grundy@ashford.gov.uk
Simon Harris, Community Projects Manager. simon.harris@ashford.gov.uk