

Minutes

Community Development Group

17th February 2021



Present

Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
Mrs C Dervish	Apologies	Mrs L Walters	Yes
Mrs D Garrod (Chairman)	Yes	Miss M Weeks	Yes
A Hensman (Vice-Chairman)	Yes	Mrs S Wilson	Yes
Mrs I Parker	Yes	B Wright	Yes
Mrs J Pell	Yes		

6 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

INFORMATION: There were no interests declared.

7 **MINUTES**

DECISION: The Minutes of the meeting of the Community Development Group held on 28th October 2020 were approved as a correct record.

8 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

INFORMATION: There were no questions asked, or statements made.

9 **CYCLING AND WALKING IN THE BRAINTREE DISTRICT – INTRODUCTION TO TERMS OF REFERENCE AND FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME 2021/22**

INFORMATION: Members of the Community Development Group gave consideration to a report which introduced them to the latest topic for the purposes of scrutiny review, 'Cycling and Walking in the Braintree District.' Mrs E Wisbey, Governance and Members Manager, presented the report to Members which identified the Terms of Reference for the review and the anticipated Future Work Programme for the Group.

The topic of 'Cycling and Walking in the Braintree District' had been submitted in response to an announcement by the Government on 28th July 2020 in its Cycling and Walking Plan for England 2020 - 'Gear Change'. This sought to encourage people to live healthier lifestyles by cycling and walking, to help combat the causes of both physical and mental ill-health, and to reduce pressures on the NHS.

It was proposed that the review should explore the perceived barriers to local residents and communities in the District participating in cycling and walking activities, as well as the benefits. The review would also consider the purpose of cycling and walking, to

determine if this was for leisure or commuting to work, and how the Council's proposed town centre 'pedestrianisation' schemes across the District might link in with this. The scope of the review could also be expanded to encompass villages and development sites, and any initiatives or strategies in the Local Plan regarding cycling, walking and pedestrianisation. The key questions of the review would centre around the perceived barriers and limitations to increasing cycling and walking provision for residents and communities in the District; the action being taken by the Council in respect of the Government's 'Gear Change,' initiative, and other initiatives; and the Council's current policies / criteria in relation to cycling and walking and whether these should be improved. In addition, the review would scrutinise the work of the Climate Change Working Group and Braintree Cycling Group, which had been established by the Council. The Council's Planning Policy, Health and Well-being and Sustainability Teams; Councillor F Ricci (Cabinet Member for Communities, Culture and Tourism); and Parish and Town Councils had been identified as key contacts for the review.

The Terms of Reference for the scrutiny review were set out in Appendix 1 to the report and a list of 'on-line' resources" was set out in Appendix 2. The timetable of meetings and future work programme for the Community Development Group for the remainder of the current Civic Year and for 2021/22 were included in Appendix 3 to the report. In an update to the timetable, it was stated that the Group's final report may not be presented to Full Council and Cabinet until Autumn 2021.

There followed a general discussion on the proposed scrutiny review, Terms of Reference and future work programme during which a number of potential lines of enquiry were determined. These included carrying out an on-line survey to obtain information from the community, including Parish / Town Councils and the Council's 'People's Panel' about walking and cycling activities; investigating the 'Dutch round-about' initiative which gave greater priority to cyclists and pedestrians and which had been introduced in Cambridge and was being considered by Essex County Council; how the needs of cyclists and pedestrians were being accommodated within town centre pedestrianisation schemes eg. the provision of places to park bicycles; and whether the provision of a 'bike ability' scheme (previously known as the 'cycling proficiency' scheme) would be supported if introduced.

In discussing the proposed review, Members of the Group acknowledged the main reasons why people may cycle or walk. These were for leisure, or for commuting to and from work. It was proposed that the review should, at first, consider the type of journeys people could do by cycling and walking and, subsequently, identify what barriers existed to such journeys. Members suggested that the barriers could include fear of danger from cycling on roads, lack of designated cycle paths, fear of theft of a bicycle and lack of facilities to secure a bike in town centres, work places and at home, and lack of knowledge about how to repair a puncture and of the Highway Code. It was also acknowledged that where there were designated cycle paths, there could be safety issues, particularly as most of these paths were unlit. This could mean that use would be seasonal with less activity during Winter months. Also, there may be problems with cyclists not being visible if they did not wear fluorescent clothing, difficulties if people cycled 'two by two', and possible danger from deer running out into a cyclist's path. With regard to walking, it was acknowledged that people may only be prepared to walk a certain distance. It was proposed also that the review should consider the 'Dutch round-about' concept and that consideration could also be given to the advantages / disadvantages of E-scooters and E-bikes. Reference was made to the former 'cycling proficiency' scheme, which had taught people how best to ride a bike. This had been

replaced by the 'bike ability' scheme. Local Authorities could provide such a scheme, but currently nothing existed locally.

With regard to calling witnesses for the review, it was suggested that these could include Mr P Kohn who had involvement with local cycling initiatives; Councillor F Ricci, Braintree District Council's (BDC) Cabinet Member for Communities, Culture and Tourism and Chairman of the Climate Change Working Group; BDC Planning Officer Mr N Jones, who dealt with planning applications for major housing developments and had knowledge of the benefits which could be secured from developers via Section 106 planning agreements; and BDC Planning Policy Officers, who dealt with the District's Local Plan and its policies.

It was suggested that research should be undertaken to establish what resources currently existed in the public domain, which would assist with the review. It was also proposed that a survey should be conducted on-line to ascertain current cycling / walking activity in the District, the perceived barriers to such activity and how it might be improved. This survey would be directed particularly at Parish and Town Councils and BDC's 'People's Panel'.

Further to the report, Members agreed to the following actions going forward:

- Councillor Miss M Weeks agreed to look into the resources that were currently available in the public domain in respect of cycling and walking and to report back to the Community Development Group.
- It was agreed that an on-line survey should be set up to establish the current level of cycling and walking activity across the District and the perceived barriers to this. Parish / Town Councils and BDC's 'People's Panel' would be invited to participate in the survey. Members of the Group were requested to submit possible questions for inclusion in the survey by the end of February 2021. The survey could focus on fear of cycling on roads, lack of designated cycle paths, fear of bicycle theft, lack of facilities to secure bicycles in town centres, work places and at home, insufficient knowledge regarding puncture repair and the Highway Code, seasonal cycling, safety issues regarding unlit paths, and interest in a 'bike ability' scheme if it was to be made available.
- It was agreed that the 'Dutch round-about' concept should be investigated and information about this sought from Cambridge City Council and Essex County Council.
- It was agreed that a programme of witnesses to be called should be established including Mr P Kohn, Councillor F Ricci, Mr N Jones and BDC Planning Policy Officers.
- It was agreed that consideration should be given to the District's proposed town centre pedestrianisation schemes and how these assisted cyclists and pedestrians.

DECISION: That Members:-

1. Agreed the Terms of Reference for the scrutiny review into 'Cycling and Walking in the Braintree District';
2. Noted the Future Work Programme for 2021/22, and;

3. Considered the steps they wished to take to commence the scrutiny review, including agreeing any additional meeting dates.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure that the scrutiny review into the role of 'Cycling and Walking in the Braintree District' is completed within the stipulated timeframe and that it complies with the Council's procedural rules for Scrutiny.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 8.32pm.

Councillor Mrs D Garrod
(Chairman)