

# Minutes

## Community Development Scrutiny Committee

### 27<sup>th</sup> October 2021



#### Present

Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
Mrs C Dervish	Yes	Mrs J Pell	Yes
Mrs D Garrod (Chairman)	Yes	Miss M Weeks	Yes
A Hensman (Vice-Chairman)	Yes	Mrs S Wilson	Apologies
Mrs A Kilmartin	Yes	B Wright	Yes
W Korsinah	Yes		

#### 9 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

**INFORMATION:** There was one Interest declared:-

Councillor Mrs J Pell declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 5, 'Scrutiny Review into Cycling and Walking,' as she was a member of Braintree District Council's Cycling Strategy Steering Group.

#### 10 **MINUTES**

**DECISION:** The Minutes of the meeting of the Community Development Scrutiny Committee held on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2021 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

#### 11 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

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

#### 12 **SCRUTINY REVIEW INTO CYCLING AND WALKING IN THE BRAINTREE DISTRICT – FOURTH EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION**

**INFORMATION:** Members were advised that Councillor F Ricci, Cabinet Member for Communities, and Ms Louise Flavell, Economic Development Officer, were in attendance at the meeting in order to speak in further detail about the Council's Cycling Strategy (the Strategy) following its presentation to all Members at the Special Meeting of Full Council on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2021.

Councillor Ricci thanked Members for the opportunity to attend the Committee meeting and provided a brief explanation of his role as Cabinet Member for the Communities portfolio, the remit of which included development of the Strategy. Ms Flavell was also invited to briefly explain her role and responsibilities, which included that of infrastructure.

Members were advised that the Strategy had been in development over the last year; originally a draft document, the Strategy had recently been adopted by Council and was now at the delivery stage. Over the course of the year through to its adoption, the Strategy had been through the Council's various governance and management structures, including consideration by a Cycling Strategy Steering Group (the Steering Group) which was comprised of Members of the Council across the political spectrum, alongside public figures such as Mr Peter Kohn, Chairman of the Earls Cole to Kelvedon (EC2K) Cycle Way Group. Through the medium of the Steering Group, a series of public engagement questions were established around what the District would like to see as part of a draft 'Cycling' Strategy and then circulated in early 2021. The response to the consultation was very positive, with a broad spectrum of responses provided from individuals across the District, as well as Town and Parish Councils, clubs and group members. The responses and feedback provided were subsequently factored into a draft Strategy and implementation plan, which was later presented at Full Council on two separate occasions, the latter at which it was formally adopted.

In terms of building policy, Members were advised that the new Strategy incorporated elements such as behavioural change in order to cultivate a mindset for cycling; for example, increased accessibility to bikes through affordability and schemes such as e-bikes. The Strategy also addressed issues raised previously by objectors to cycling and aimed to quantify the benefits of increased cycling activity.

With regard to partnership working, the Council had expanded upon this by working with representatives from Essex County Council (ECC). It was noted that some of the plans and ambitions within the Strategy would have an effect on highways and traffic; as such, the successful implementation of the Strategy was dependent on the organisation working in partnership with the relevant planning Authority. Partnership working with ECC also allowed the Council to access support such as funding (e.g. match funding, increased funding, grant funding, etc) towards the delivery of some of the projects within the Strategy, including those in relation to infrastructure.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Ricci and Ms Flavell for the information provided and congratulated all those who were involved with bringing the Cycling Strategy together. Members were then invited to raise any questions they had in relation to the Strategy. In response to the questions asked, the following information was provided:-

- The Council's Cycling Strategy was in alignment with that of ECC's own Strategy, which allowed the two Authorities to compliment individual project resources and funding and thus experience the shared benefits of this.
- Although ECC was the responsible Authority for Highways, amenities such as footpaths and cycle ways which already existed in the Braintree District were within the District Authority's power to manage and improve (e.g. in order to create links with road network), with assistance from ECC if this was needed for larger-scale projects.
- Members were reminded that at the previous meeting of the Committee on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2021, Tracey Vickers, Head of Sustainable Transport (ECC) and Kris Radley, Cycling Strategy Lead (Essex Highways), were in attendance. Part of the evidence provided to the Committee at the meeting revolved around the work that ECC were undertaking with the District Council in order ensure that there was a coordinated approach to the development of their respective cycling strategies.

- With regard to the e-cargo bike grant scheme, Members were advised that members of the (Cycling) Steering Group explored this and had agreed that there was incentive for the Council's participation due to the expanding nature of the scheme and increasing local interest.
- Members were advised that there was parking for bikes available at Braintree Town Train Station, Causeway House in Braintree and the Witham town area. In Halstead, there was cycle parking available at the Halstead Leisure Centre.
- Councillor Ricci agreed to examine whether there was a need for any additional cycle parking in Witham. Members were reminded that the issue of cycle parking was given detailed consideration during the meeting of the Committee on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2021, at which officers from the Council's Planning Policy team were in attendance. It was added that although the Cycling Strategy was not a 'Planning' document, there were elements which related to Planning.
- It was agreed that the presence of 'Quiet Lanes' in the District helped to encourage residents to cycle. Councillor Ricci was happy to support local Parishes in identifying new routes that could be submitted for status as a Quiet Lane as this could help to increase connectivity between town and rural communities. Councillor Ricci also requested that Members notify himself or officers of any such areas within their own Wards.
- In terms of the process for adopting new Quiet Lanes, there needed to be engagement from ECC and the local Parishes, as well as a public consultation where the views of all roads users (including cyclists and car drivers) were taken into account.
- The concept of a 'mini-Holland' was discussed as part of the Emergency Active Travel Fund programme, led by Essex County Council, and there was at least one location in Braintree which was considered as a potential area for such development. However, feedback from a variety of local sources, which included regular cyclists, indicated that there were other, perhaps more suitable and safe cycling initiatives which could be undertaken for the Braintree area, rather than a 'Holland style' roundabout.
- It was stressed that the Strategy had encompassed all groups of people within its development, which included groups such as the elderly. One of the key aims of the Strategy was to help address safety concerns around cycling for the District's residents, especially for those who perhaps lacked confidence with cycling, irrespective of their age group. For instance, suitable cycling routes and networks were identified for those who lacked confidence, and there was signposting to support groups or clubs that could assist cyclists at a younger or later age.
- Members were advised that with the adoption of the Cycling Strategy, the Planning team at the Council would be undertaking a more proactive approach around connecting cycle way networks that were already in place. There was the potential to utilise Section 106 monies in terms of delivering some of the plans within the Strategy going forward, which would help encourage connectivity between different developments, as well as rural and urban areas.
- In order to support modal shift, one of the key aims of the Strategy was to help make cycling a convenient mode of transport when compared with alternatives such as travelling via car. The intention was to double the amount of cycling journeys in the District, but this could only be achieved once the option to cycle became the more

favourable, safer choice (e.g. by having the appropriate infrastructure in place, such as more dedicated cycle and walking paths in the District).

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman expressed her sincere gratitude to Councillor Ricci and Ms Flavell for their attendance and contribution to the meeting. Councillor Ricci and Ms Flavell were then invited to leave the meeting if they so wished.

Members were then invited to consider any further lines of enquiry that they wished to pursue as part of their Scrutiny Review into Cycling and Walking in the Braintree District. To assist Members, Mrs E Wisbey, Governance and Members Manager, read through the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the Scrutiny Review as a reminder. It was acknowledged that when the concept of the Scrutiny Review was put forward, Members were unaware of the emerging draft Cycling Strategy. Members were therefore requested to reflect on the evidence gathered over the course of the Review in light of the now adopted Strategy.

Due to the length of the document, it was requested that Members looked back over the Strategy and the agenda for the Special Meeting of Full Council on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2021 (where the Strategy was adopted), which included details around the consultation exercise that was undertaken during the development of the Strategy, and how the responses helped to shape the final document. In giving consideration to the outcomes of their Scrutiny Review, Members could conclude that many elements of the Strategy had covered the initial questions they had. Nonetheless, Members should still look back over the Strategy in their capacity as 'Scrutiny' Councillors and determine whether the document did adequately answer the questions within the TOR, or if there was room for recommendations to be made to the Cabinet. It was stressed that any such recommendations needed to be evidence based.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Wisbey for her input and stated that the Committee's explorations as part of the Scrutiny Review had been largely positive with much evidence gathered from a myriad of sources.

The following potential recommendations were then identified:-

- The Chairman queried whether there was a way that a 'map' of sorts could be produced which could assist local cyclists with identifying suitable bike parking locations (e.g. on business sites, town centres, etc), as it was acknowledged that bikes were prone to theft. A visual aid such as a map which identified suitable parking locations would help to encourage more residents to undertake cycling activities with the knowledge that their bikes could be left in a secure area when not in use.
- It was highlighted that 'Quiet Lanes' were still classed as public highways, and any signage displayed at such locations would need to be in line with public highway regulations. Members were advised that Quiet Lanes were required to go through a statutory consultation process and road traffic orders before being designated as such. In terms of 'barriers' to residents undertaking cycling and walking activities along Quiet Lanes, Members could examine how the Authority promoted Quiet Lanes as part of the recreation network, rather than the traffic network, and how road users might view them in comparison with cyclists and walkers. In considering this as a potential recommendation, Members were asked to be mindful that there were already many resources on the Essex Highways website around the use of Quiet Lanes, cycling routes and Public Rights of Way. A possible recommendation was that the Council had a list of Quiet Lane areas that were available for the public through its website.

- A leaflet which helped to promote the tourism aspect of cycling was another area for that could be developed as a potential recommendation to Cabinet. Members were reminded of the 'Cake Escape' which identified different cycling routes and highlighted cafes where cyclists could stop or sign up to for discounts on food items as part of the scheme. The Economic Development team would be able to provide a link for this which could then be circulated to Members for them to consider how the scheme might be more effectively promoted. However, Members were reminded that any recommendations made in relation to tourism would need to give broader consideration to practicalities such as parking provision along identified routes.
- In relation to tourism, another potential recommendation revolved around the digital aspect. For example, where digital apps were being produced to help promote tourism, could cycling and walking routes and associated initiatives such as the 'Cake Escape' be included within this, incorporating aspects such as safe cycle parking (e.g. promote by way of a 'safe parking' logo).
- A final recommendation could be to request that the Councillor Ricci, as Cabinet Member for Communities, reported back to the Committee in 12 months on the progress of the Strategy at that point.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 8.13pm.

Councillor Mrs D Garrod  
(Chairman)