

# Minutes

## Community Development Scrutiny Committee

1<sup>st</sup> September 2021



### Present

Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
Mrs C Dervish	Apologies	Mrs J Pell	Apologies
Mrs D Garrod (Chairman)	Yes	Mrs L Walters	Yes
A Hensman (Vice-Chairman)	Yes	Miss M Weeks	Yes
Mrs A Kilmartin	Yes	Mrs S Wilson	No
W Korsinah	Apologies	B Wright	Yes

### 5 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

**INFORMATION:** There were no interests declared.

### 6 **MINUTES**

**DECISION:** The Minutes of the meeting of the Community Development Scrutiny Committee held on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2021 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### 7 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

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

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

**INFORMATION:** The Chairman was pleased to welcome two Officers from Essex County Council (ECC) to the meeting; they were: Ms Tracey Vickers, Head of Sustainable Development and Mr Kris Radley, Cycling Strategy Lead at Essex Highways. Tracey and Kris had been invited to the meeting in order to speak with Members about their individual roles at ECC, share their experiences and provide further detail on the design concept of highways in the District.

Firstly, the Chairman invited Tracey Vickers to introduce herself to Members. Before beginning with her presentation, Tracey explained that at ECC, the remit of 'Sustainable Transport' encompassed all aspects of sustainable travel, from cycling and walking to e-scooters and alternative fuels.

The full presentation may be viewed on the Council's YouTube channel via following link:-

The main points were as follows:-

- It was reported that in early 2021, ECC had agreed upon a new 'vision' for sustainable transport to deliver travel that was "safer, greener and healthier" for current and future users of the transport network in Essex. It was stressed that the need for increased sustainable transport options was a moral one, and that it was not the intention to penalise car drivers but instead to emphasise the need for there to be a range of sustainable choices available that catered to the needs of all (e.g. through "sustainable corridors"), thus making Essex "safer, greener and healthier."
- The three main aims of increasing sustainable transport in Essex were to limit unnecessary travel; encourage residents to switch to more sustainable means of travel, such as walking and cycling, although it was acknowledged that this was not always possible for those living in more rural areas and as such travel by car would still remain an option; and to improve current means of transport through methods such as vehicle electrification.
- There were a number of significant benefits to increasing sustainable transport, including improved physical and mental health; safer, quieter streets; improved air quality through congestion reduction; revitalised High Streets; increased local jobs and, ultimately, a blueprint for the future of sustainable transport in Essex.
- It was noted that the Government was undertaking a number of initiatives to help increase cycling and walking nationally; for example, the cycling and walking budget had been increased to £338 million in order to fund high quality cycle lanes, deliver walking schemes and improve the National Cycle Network. The Highway Code was also to be updated in order to improve the safety of cyclists and walkers through the inclusion of a "road-user hierarchy," strengthening priority to pedestrians, new guidance on 'safe-passing' distances and speeds and priority to cyclists at junctions.
- Other initiatives being undertaken by the Government included the "Network management duty guidance" which acknowledged that there was sometimes difficulty with introducing new schemes, and that public reaction was not always positive. As such, the guidance encouraged Local Authorities to allow time for new schemes to embed and not to abandon them too hastily, as this could jeopardise future grants. In terms of other initiatives, "Gear Change" and "Local Transport Node" ("LTN 1/20") set out both the Government's ambitions and a clear picture for Local Authorities as to what high-quality cycling infrastructure should look like. Furthermore, there was the introduction of the e-cargo bike grant for businesses to fund alternative delivery vehicles.
- Members were advised that there was a myriad of initiatives being undertaken by ECC in order to increase cycling and walking. Some of the key initiatives were:-
  - Update Cycling Maps: The current cycling maps available for residents to use in order to identify suitable cycling and walking routes in their local areas required updating. When revised, the maps would be available to access in libraries and as a download for smartphones.
  - Community Rail Partnership: Branch rail lines, such as the Flich Line between Braintree and Witham were referred to as "community rail lines." These were often adopted by local residents who wanted to "drive patronage"

and make stations more accommodating, attractive places to be (e.g. by providing space for cycling and walking).

- Cake Escape: A loyalty scheme for cycling offered at several cafes throughout the Braintree District.
  - 'Love to Ride Essex' and 'Go Jauntly.' Referred to respective cycling and walking partnerships which aimed to advise residents as to where they could take part in such activities and also build a sense of community within localised areas.
  - Active Travel Fund (ATF) Braintree: The Government had previously allocated funding for improvements to the active travel scheme: one of the five schemes was in Braintree. It was stressed that improvements made under the scheme had to be transformational and in line with LTN 1/20 requirements in order to ensure that there was high quality infrastructure.
- Reference was also made to the Spin E-Scooter trial, which was being led by the DfT. It was stressed that only those scooters that had been assessed for safety by the by the DfT in named locations and by approved providers were legal. Any other scooters in use could be seized by the police. The trial had been undertaken in six locations across Essex, including Braintree, although a different model aimed towards longer-term hire was being trialed. Usage was generally low in Braintree when compared against the rates in other areas, with only 14 members. The trial had been extended to March 2022, after which it would be brought before Parliament for a decision as to whether the scheme should be legalised or not.
- Challenges to increasing active travel related largely to entrenched beliefs around car usage and other forms of transport, as well as the availability and affordability of feasible alternatives. Furthermore, ECC as an Authority was reliant on budgetary allocations from the DfT, of which could only fund limited infrastructure; however, it was noted that the cycling and walking aspirations of ECC were gradually gaining more recognition and prominence at Government level, which could lead to future funding opportunities.
- Lastly, Members were advised that the Essex Climate Action Commission had made a number of recommendations to ECC which it was felt would help it to achieve its net zero emissions targets. Most notably, the recommendations that the Commission felt would be the most impactful centered on walking and cycling, improving passenger transport and behavioral change.

The Chairman then expressed her thanks to Tracey for the presentation and invited Members to ask their questions. The following responses were subsequently provided:-

- Members were informed that the width of cycle lanes was dependent on their usage and the amount of traffic close by. Cycle lanes were required to be a minimum of 2 metres in width to allow for "non-standard" cycles, such as trailers or Tricycles, as narrower lanes would exclude these and there would be less room for overtaking. The need for there to be some form of segregation on cycle lanes which clearly delineated between cyclists and pedestrians was also emphasised.
- In terms of appropriate segregation, white lines were not considered to be suitable on the grounds of safety concerns. The LTN 1/20 design guidance from the DfT provided Authorities with the opportunity to observe speed and traffics in different locations and from this, determine what the most suitable type of segregation on cycle lanes would be; for example, a buffer of 1 metre between a cycle lane and carriageway where

traffic was known to be fast moving. The challenge faced by many historic areas and towns revolved around the need for there to be enough space to accommodate such buffers.

- Members were informed that e-scooters were a net zero form of transport and so had a low impact on the environment. Although there was some uncertainty about the level of impact posed by the batteries used to charge e-scooters, it was advised that 'Spin,' the company that operated the scooters in Essex, were undertaking work to ensure that the scooters were not overcharged. It was added that Spin now only used electric vehicles and cargo bikes to distribute e-scooters in order to help mitigate any other environmental impacts.
- It was acknowledged that funding provisions for improved or new cycling and walking networks was a challenge, and that Authorities such as ECC would likely have to identify opportunities from outside central Government as well. For example, it might be that ECC explored potential partnerships with other businesses, or developing a direct income stream from active travel which could then subsidise other aspects of the initiative.
- Members were assured that e-scooters could be locked when they were not in use and would only be accessible via the user's account.

Further to questions from Members, Tracey advised Councillor Hensman that she would relay his comments back around the fitness of e-scooter users and the need for wider engagement to Spin.

The Chairman once again thanked Tracey for her detailed presentation and the responses provided.

The Chairman invited Kris Radley, Cycling Strategy Lead at ECC, to make his presentation to the Committee, which provided Members with further detail as to how ECC had progressed from strategic planning on new sustainable transport initiatives, through to the delivery of schemes on the ground. As the Cycling Strategy Lead for Essex, the objectives of Kris' role centered on encouraging residents to undertake cycling, engage with behavioral change and give consideration to alternative modes of transport.

The full presentation may be viewed via the Council's YouTube channel via following link:-

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o2RTSJc96WM>

The main points were as follows:-

- The impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns had resulted in a national increase in active mode travel. In 2020, the sale of bikes increased by 40%, and the number of cyclists on roads increased to approximately 46% when compared with the numbers in 2019. As a result of the emerging trends regarding active travel, the Government was able to explore new funding schemes such as the Emergency Active Travel Fund (EATF) and the Active Travel Fund Phase Two (ATF), as well as 'Gear Change' in July 2020. As of 2021, it was recognised that many of the schemes and initiatives that had emerged in response to the increase in active travel had been rapidly implemented; as such, a pursuant document, entitled 'Gear Change: One Year On,' was introduced in July 2021, which focused on the importance of best practice design for active mode travel in order to help ensure the longevity of new schemes.

- In May 2020, the Government announced £2bn of new funding for cycling and walking schemes over the course of the current parliament, which represented a significant increase in the amount of dedicated funding for active modes of travel.
- In order to ensure that the District Council's plans and objectives going forward were in alignment with that of the County's vision, ECC and Braintree District Council (BDC) had worked in partnership to produce their respective Cycling Strategies.
- With regard to coherent networks, the purpose of the programme was to help ECC build upon the Cycling Action Plans commissioned by the District and Borough Authorities and develop network plans for both walking and cycling across Essex. The programme would enable ECC to prioritise investment decisions based upon a robust methodology which considered future demand and the propensity to both walk and cycle. The longer term vision was for Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) to be developed in all major urban areas across Essex as and when resources became available.
- Members were advised that the current format of funding for cycling and walking infrastructure was on a one-year basis, and posed a significant challenge for the Authority. To help combat this, a key aspect of ECC's capital programme delivery was ensuring that advanced scheme designs were in place to help identify where design funding could be appropriately directed.
- There were a number of different funding streams for that ECC could potentially utilise to help support its programme for delivery, including the EATF and ATF, Capability Fund (revenue funding), Active Travel Fund 3, SELEP, Developer Contributions, ECC Capital Programme, external funding from Sustrans and Active Modes funding from the DfT of £2bn.
- On the subject of "barriers" to cycling, it was reported that a survey conducted by Savanta in 2020 indicated there were five key worries which prevented people from cycling: cars, HGVs, poor road conditions, buses and a lack of appropriate cycle infrastructure. Furthermore, there was an overall perception that cycling was "too dangerous." It was the intention of ECC to address these primary concerns within its strategic planning going forward. Other "barriers" included the belief that cyclists needed to be at a certain level of fitness, a lack of room to carry items on bikes, accessibility to bikes and choice.

The Chairman thanked Kris for his presentation and invited Members to ask their questions. The following responses were subsequently provided:-

- Members were advised that the "Essex Pedal Power" scheme which was being piloted in Jaywick and Clacton-On-Sea had recently commenced, and that approximately 70 free bikes had been distributed thus far. There was a waiting list of approximately 600 people who had already applied for the scheme, with successful applicants needing to meet specific criteria. Much of the funding for the scheme was derived from SELEP and the Local Delivery Pilot. By the end of the scheme it was hoped that a total of 1,500 bikes would be distributed. It was added that conversations were currently underway about the possibility of expanding the scheme across wider areas of Essex in future.
- Members were informed that ECC worked with 'bike kitchens,' which were community-led volunteer facilities where local residents could learn more about the maintenance

of bikes. It was added that where Members were involved with similar community-led schemes, there was potentially the opportunity for them to link in with the bike kitchen representatives.

- On the subject of the Savanta study and the barriers that needed to be addressed in order to increase cycling uptake, Members were advised that ECC was confident in the plans it had in place; for example, where roads were being inspected as highways, they would also be examined from a cycling perspective in order to ensure that surfaces were suitable and safe for cyclists, or areas that required segregation were identified. Members were assured that such work was already being undertaken and that it was the intention of the Authority to build on this going forward.
- It was reported that Essex had a high usage of HGVs, although this was not uncommon across the UK in other areas and much of this freight was on roads. In terms of meeting sustainable transport demands and environmental needs, long-term aspirations centered on moving freight onto rail in order to reduce the amount of traffic in future.
- Many of the e-scooter bikes had detachable batteries in order to keep them charged, but this depended on the type of model.
- In response to a concern raised regarding the amount of funding available to meet sustainable transport goals for the County, it was acknowledged that meeting budgetary demands would be a challenge; however, Members were reminded that ECC relied heavily on external funding, as seen with the allocations from the EATF and ATF, as well as its own internal sources.
- Members were advised that Active Essex, which helped to co-fund Essex Pedal Power, sat within the health remit. One of the elements that allowed applicants to secure a bike was through social prescribing, further to a GP recommendation. In the latest bid for funding, a request had been raised for submissions in relation to social prescribing and the health and wellbeing benefits of cycling and walking. Although the funding did stem from the DfT, the inclusion of the social prescribing pilot was likely to provide an evidence base for future funding from the Department of Health and Social Care.
- There were currently no Dutch Roundabouts in Essex, although one had been given brief consideration as part of the Braintree network, it was ultimately decided that this would not be feasible from both a location and budgetary perspective. It was added that although the Army and Navy Roundabout in Chelmsford was not classed as a Dutch Roundabout, it was similar in that it included priority lanes for active modes. ECC Officers agreed to send video links in respect of the Dutch Roundabout 'model' to Members if this was of interest.

Following the end of the session, the Chairman expressed her grateful thanks to both Tracey and Kris for their presentations and the valuable information provided.

Members were then invited to discuss any ideas they had for further lines of enquiry in order to progress the Scrutiny Review. In response, Emma Wisbey, Governance and Members Manager, explained that the Braintree District Council's draft Cycling Strategy was due for presentation at the Extraordinary Meeting of Full Council on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2021. It was therefore proposed that Councillor F Ricci, Cabinet Member for Communities, be invited to attend the next meeting of the Community Development

Scrutiny Committee on 27<sup>th</sup> October 2021 in order to speak to Members in further detail about the draft Strategy, following its submission to Full Council. Members were reminded that they would need to examine the draft Strategy through their capacities as both District and 'Scrutiny' Councillors, Furthermore, Members were advised that it was not the purpose of scrutiny to resolve any perceived 'issues,' but to examine the topic in accordance with the Terms of Reference and from this, make recommendations to the Executive if it was considered appropriate to do so.

Governance Officers also agreed to forward the web and videos links referred to by Tracey and Kris (ECC) in their respective presentations to Members once these had been received.

Members were advised that the anticipated target date for the conclusion of the Scrutiny Review into Cycling and Walking was March 2022. Should Members have any other lines of enquiry that they wished to pursue in respect of the Scrutiny Review, it was requested that these be submitted directly to the Governance and Members team at the subsequent e-mail address: [governance@braintree.gov.uk](mailto:governance@braintree.gov.uk).

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 8.51pm.

Councillor Mrs D Garrod  
(Chairman)