

Minutes

Community Development Group

7th April 2021



Present

Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
Mrs C Dervish	No	Mrs L Walters	Apologies
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		

10 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

INFORMATION: There were no interests declared.

11 **MINUTES**

DECISION: The Minutes of the meeting of the Community Development Group held on 17th February 2021 were approved as a correct record.

12 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

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

13 **SCRUTINY REVIEW INTO CYCLING AND WALKING IN THE BRAINTREE DISTRICT - EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION**

INFORMATION: The Chairman reminded Members that the session marked the first evidence gathering session of the Community Development Group as part of the Scrutiny Review into Cycling and Walking in the Braintree District. The Chairman was also pleased to welcome Mr Peter Kohn, representative from the Earls Colne to Kelvedon Cycle Way Project (the EC2K Project), who was in attendance to support the evidence gathering of the Committee.

Mr Kohn was then invited to introduce himself and provide a summary of his experiences with the EC2K Project thus far, including the successes, challenges and future impacts. Mr Kohn thanked Members for the opportunity to speak and briefly outlined his position as both Chairman of the Coggeshall Neighbourhood Plan Group and, correspondingly, the EC2K Project. Mr Kohn's presentation to the Committee was divided into five headings, as follows: 1) "Understanding Local Government;" 2) "Project Management;" 3) "Advice;" 4) "Funding;" and 5) "Practical Issues."

Mr Kohn remarked upon the need for there to be a general understanding of the different tiers of Local Government and how these worked, as well as a good understanding of project management itself in order for projects such as EC2K was to be successful. An understanding of the stakeholders involved was also essential; as Chair of EC2K, Mr Kohn had undertaken a 'stakeholder analysis' exercise to help provide a clear snapshot of the different groups of people that were involved with or affected by the project. It was noted that a strong work ethic with regard to the project group members was fundamental in contributing towards a project's success, and this was demonstrated by the membership of the EC2K project (e.g. which included District and County Council Members).

In respect of "advice," national policy such as 'Gear Change' (July 2020) and the associated LTN1/20 document had provided invaluable technical guidance on the design of high quality, safe-cycle infrastructure. The EC2K project had also been fortunate in the support it had received from Authorities such as Essex Highways, where County Councillors had funded a feasibility study for the project, and also from 'Sustrans,' the national cycling network. It was noted that maintenance of the cycle way was vital towards ensuring its longevity as part of the future infrastructure for Braintree and Essex as a whole; in line with this, mention was also made Council's draft cycling strategy, which was due to go out to consultation in May 2021.

The importance of "funding" in respect of the EC2K project was underlined; the new cycle way would represent a substantial piece of infrastructure for the District that would incur notable costs; for example, to ensure its accessibility to various groups of people with appropriate surfaces (e.g. suitable for various groups such as cyclists and wheelchair users), and that it would have multi-purpose usage for both leisure seekers and commuters, offering connections to facilities such as train stations and even other cycle ways, such as the Flitch Way in Braintree. The intended cycle route for the project did include a number of 'obstacles' that would need to be addressed, such as the A1124 road crossing in Halstead and the dangers posed by fast moving traffic in this area. It was highlighted that secured funding and support from public bodies such as Local Authorities could potentially unlock alternative sources of funding and support for the project, such as grant making agencies and even community fund raising, especially with engagement from wider groups of people which Local Authorities could support.

There were a number of "practical issues" associated with the implementation of the EC2K project. One such issue was in relation to landowners along the intended cycle route, some of whom were notably reluctant to allow permission for their land to be used for cycle way purposes. This was due to number of reasons, such infringement on their land, access for farm vehicles, etc. Effective negotiation with private landowners, as well as the offer of support (e.g. through schemes such as 'set asides') was therefore essential towards ensuring that the planned cycle way route would be achievable. Support from Highways England and the advice that could be provided was also a vital element towards supporting the practical elements of the project, as was technical feasibility in terms of addressing issues such as cost and overcoming other technical issues (e.g. PV2 Assessments). The final element was in regard to the adoption and maintenance of the project in order to ensure its sustainability for present and future use by the District's residents.

Further to the presentation, Members were invited to ask their questions of Mr Kohn. The following information was subsequently provided:-

- Members were informed that the cycle route would have a tarmac surface. Technical advice from Sustrans stipulated that the width should be three meters which would allow enough space for two cyclists to pass safely in opposite directions; however, it was acknowledged that this width would not be possible along every section of the route. The route was approximately 60% off-road and approximately 40% on-road; the “on-road” sections were almost all in quiet country lanes, although it was the intention that all of these routes would be specified as ‘quiet lanes’ if possible.
- With regard to the different sections of the route, Members were advised that the route had been divided into three sections:
 - In terms of management, the ‘Coggeshall to Earls Colne’ section of the route was arguably the easiest to negotiate, due to the positive response of the two major landowners in the area: the Marks Hall Estate and the Earls Colne Business Park. Planning permission had also been granted in respect of the ‘Coggeshall’ section, and there were Section 106 monies available for part of the northern section of the route. The cost of this section had increased due to the need to ensure that the route surface was accessible to as many people as possible, and able to be used in all weathers.
 - With regard to the ‘Earls Colne to Halstead’ section, the majority of the route either ran along a quiet lane or the old Colne Valley railway track. It was advised that the landowner had given their permission for the use of the railway track, although the route would require cyclists to cross the A1124 road at two different points, and would include further costs (e.g. to include a bridge).
 - In respect of the ‘Kelvedon to Coggeshall’ section, there were three potential route options currently being explored; two of these were alongside the B1024 on the east and west side. There were a number of landowners involved, some of whom were in favour of the route and other who were less keen. The third potential route option was along the Feering Road and was owned by Essex Highways.
- The total distance of the EC2K cycle way would be approximately 15 miles, depending on which of the routes could be implemented between Coggeshall and Kelvedon.
- With regard to the possibility of additional surfacing along the old Colne Valley railway track, Mr Kohn advised Members that sections along this route could become quite saturated and “bog like” during rainy periods. Mountain bike users would be able to cope with such surfaces more easily, but this would pose a challenge for regular bike users.
- In response to a question raised about the types of people who used cycle ways, Mr Kohn advised that there were two large industrial parks along parts of the EC2K route; as such, it was expected that a number of commuters would make use of this, whilst others would make the journey to the train station at Kelvedon, as many currently did without the cycle way in place. Other users of the cycle way would include those who cycled for the purposes of leisure and, it was hoped, for tourism, especially with the District’s connections and train links with London. Cargo bike users might also make use of the cycle way, as well as pedestrians choosing to walk along the route instead.
- In terms of the cost of the overall project and what aspects this entailed, it was difficult to provide an outline figure due to the various challenges (e.g. around surfacing) associated with each section of the cycle way. The figure of approximately £800k was provided by Sustrans for the provision of a safe cycle way, which would encompass any obstacles, although it was unlikely to include the purchase of land. Currently,

permissive rights were in place for landowner's land along the Coggeshall section of the route through to Halstead. It was expected that the exact costs of the project would become more apparent with the outcome of the feasibility study that was to be received from Essex Highways.

- Mr Kohn believed connecting the cycle route with the National Cycling Network in future would help to bolster tourism for the area.
- With regard to public safety when cycling at twilight or nighttime hours, Members were advised that there was currently no intention to include lighting along the cycle route, given that cycling itself tended to be a seasonal activity with less residents taking part in the activity during darker seasons. Furthermore, parts of the cycle way were within protected 'dark sky' areas.
- With regard to crossing the A1124 road in Halstead, Mr Kohn advised Members that there were a number of potential means through which this could be addressed, such as a bridge. These options were currently being explored by the EC2K project group; however, each option would have its own associated costs and specific permissions required to be in place.
- Mr Kohn believed there would be an opportunity in future to connect the cycle route with the National Cycling Network, although the aim was to build upon the route at a gradual pace. As such, the impetus for joining with the National Cycling Network would likely increase over time with the expansion of the route and, hopefully, a larger uptake in those cycling.

On behalf of Members, the Chairman expressed her grateful thanks to Mr Kohn for his participation in the meeting and the helpful information provided. Before leaving the meeting, Mr Kohn added that he would be happy to receive any further questions from Members at a later date. Mr Kohn then left the meeting at 8.29pm.

Members then gave consideration towards further lines of enquiry in order to progress the Scrutiny Review. Further to the discussion, the following actions were agreed:-

- Members had previously indicated that they wished to undertake a survey on the subject of cycling and walking in the District, and Governance Officers had agreed to explore this option (e.g. use of 'People's Panel'); however, it was relayed to Members that Officers were at that time unaware of the Special Meeting of Full Council which was to take place in September 2021, and would include the Draft Cycling Strategy and the results of public consultation around this. On the basis that there would be a much wider public engagement opportunity for the Council on the Cycling Strategy, it was considered appropriate for Members of the Committee to delay their survey on walking and cycling for the time being.
- The Lead Officers involved with producing the Draft Cycling Strategy, as well as the relevant Cabinet Member (Councillor F Ricci, Cabinet Member for Communities), would be invited to attend a meeting of the Committee in the Autumn to discuss the emerging Strategy and the feedback received from the consultation.
- Officers from Planning Policy would be invited to attend the next meeting of the Committee on 23rd June 2021 on the subject of the Council's policies around cycling and pedestrianisation, both within the current and emerging Local Plan.

- It was agreed that Neil Jones, Principal Planner at the Council, would also be invited to attend the next meeting of the Committee on 23rd June 2021 in order to share his knowledge around Section 106 monies, as well as Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA) provisions.
- Governance Officers agreed to explore the possibility of inviting an officer from Essex County Council to attend an upcoming meeting of the Committee in order to discuss Public Rights of Way (PROW) provisions.

14 **SCRUTINY REVIEW INTO CYCLING AND WALKING IN THE BRAINTREE DISTRICT - ONLINE RESOURCES FROM ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL**

INFORMATION: Emma Wisbey, Governance and Members Manager, was invited to introduce a report to Members which included a list of the online resources that were available on the Essex County Council (ECC) website in respect of cycling and walking.

Further to the report, the Chairman highlighted a number of her own observations from the resources identified within the report, and requested the assistance of Governance Officers with obtaining further information in respect of the following:-

- The Chairman asked whether there were any Minutes available from meetings of the Public Rights of Way (PROW) Essex User Group that the Committee Members that were publically available and Members could use for information purposes, as she had been unable to locate this herself when looking at the website.
- It was also asked whether there was any data available from the results thus far of the PROW satisfaction survey. The survey was not due to close until 2030.
- It was also noted that there were no walking groups listed on the ECC website for the Braintree area, although they did exist. The Chairman was keen to establish why these groups were not listed on the webpage.
- The 'Essex Walking Strategy' referred to the 'Essex Travel Diary 1999' at multiple points. The Chairman wished to locate a link to this document if possible, along with the implementation plan for the Strategy, as this could be useful for the Committee in terms of knowledge gathering.

DECISION: Members noted the online resources included within the report and from these identified any further enquiries or areas of research.

REASON FOR DECISION: To assist the Community Development Group with building a pervasive list of evidence that supports the findings of their Scrutiny Review.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 8.57pm.

Councillor Mrs D Garrod
(Chairman)