

Minutes

Community Development Group

23rd June 2021



Present

Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
Mrs C Dervish	Yes	Mrs J Pell	Yes
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	Yes
W Korsinah	Apologies	B Wright	Yes

1 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

INFORMATION: There were no interests declared.

2 **MINUTES**

DECISION: The Minutes of the meeting of the Community Development Scrutiny Committee (formerly the Community Development Group) held on 7th April 2021 were approved as a correct record.

3 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

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

4 **SCRUTINY REVIEW INTO CYCLING AND WALKING IN THE BRAINTREE DISTRICT – SECOND EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION**

INFORMATION: The Chairman, Councillor Mrs Garrod, welcomed two officers from Braintree District Council's (BDC) Planning department to the meeting; they were: Mr Alan Massow, Principal Planning Policy Officer and Mr Neil Jones, Principal Planner. Both of the officers had been invited to attend the meeting in order to share their respective knowledge of cycling and walking within the Braintree District from the perspective of the Council's current and emerging policies, as well as its development management function.

The Chairman then invited Alan Massow to introduce himself to Members first and share his experiences. Alan subsequently provided a verbal presentation to Members which included a brief explanation as to his role as Principal Planning Policy Officer within the Council's Local Plan team. Members were advised that the purpose of the Local Plan was to allocate sites for the District in order to meet and/or identify factors such as the level of housing, employment and retail need, as well as identify all draft policies which set out how the Local Authority should determine planning applications.

In respect of the Local Plan and national policy, Members were advised that factors such as cycling and walking were a priority; for example, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) set out a number of objectives for the promotion of cycling and walking that stemmed from two main aims; the first of these was the need to promote sustainable transport methods, and the second was the promotion of healthy and active lifestyles. The NPPF stated that opportunities to promote cycling and walking should be “identified and pursued” within the early stages of a development proposal, and also sought to support the provision of cycling infrastructure (e.g. cycle parking). The current Local Plan (2005) for the District also sought to promote cycling and was comprised of policies relating to transport assessment, as well as maps to identify potential cycling routes. Alongside the Local Plan, the Council’s Core Strategy (2011) included the policy ‘CS7,’ which sought to promote and contribute towards cycling and walking opportunities and improvements to current facilities.

It was explained that the Draft Local Plan (2017) contained additional policies for the promotion of sustainable transport with policies that sought the provision and contribution of cycle ways, which was supported by the infrastructure delivery plan. The Council’s policies in respect of its strategic growth location (e.g. land east of Great Notley, which included specific reference to cycling). There were also additional cycle routes identified on the inset maps within the Plan that were not previously a feature of the 2005 Plan. Mention was also made of neighbourhood plans; although these documents were not produced by the local planning authority, they could also identify potential cycle routes and include policies which were supportive of cycling.

Through the Council’s evidence base for the Local Plan on transport, it had been identified that there was a need for a modal shift away from car use and as such, the Local Plan needs to promote more sustainable modes of transport, like walking and cycling, if the District is going to be able to accommodate all the required housing growth.

A discussion with Members on the information provided then ensued. In response to the questions raised, Members were advised of the following:-

- With regard to cycle parking, Members were advised that this was generally in relation to a specific development. The Council used the Essex Parking Standards document (produced by Essex County Council (ECC)), which stipulated that there should be a minimum amount of cycle and parking spaces included in new developments.
- Members were advised that ‘Quiet Lanes’ were being considered as part of the Cycling Strategy. It was also highlighted that new cycle lanes could be quite large in terms of width, and might also require lighting which could have a potential impact on the surrounding countryside.
- Where cycle ways were introduced, they were required to be approximately three metres wide (or wider) in order to provide enough road space for cyclists to pass.
- Members were informed that the cycle routes identified within the Local Plan (2005) that had not yet been completed had been brought forward into the emerging Local Plan (2017), such as with the proposed link towards Millennium Way in Braintree. The delays with such routes were attributed to factors such as their narrowness and financing issues.

- In respect of 'Quiet Lanes,' it was advised that these were designated by ECC as the Highway Authority. Furthermore, although 'Quiet Lanes' gave priority to non-vehicular traffic, it was noted that they were not intended to prohibit motor vehicles either.
- ECC have produced the Braintree Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) which identifies key walking and cycling routes within the town of Braintree and will provide a focus for future improvements. Also in Braintree ECC have won Central Government funding through the Emergency Active Travel Fund to help deliver transformational new local cycling schemes. ECC are currently consulting on their plans for Braintree, as well as other schemes in Brentwood, Wickford Colchester and Chelmsford.

The following action was agreed in response to the questions raised by Members:-

- Alan Massow agreed to forward a link to the LCWIP to the Governance and Members Team. Emma Wisbey, Governance and Members Manager, requested that any other such documents for circulation to the Committee be forwarded to the Governance and Members Team in the first instance, who will then forward these onto Members.

Further to the presentation, the Chairman thanked Alan Massow for his attendance and the information that was subsequently provided for Members.

Neil Jones, Principal Planner introduced himself to the Committee and began his respective presentation. Neil subsequently provided Members with a brief explanation as to his role within the Planning Development Management team at the Council. Whereas the Planning Policy team were responsible for policies and the development of the Local Plan, the Development Management team dealt with the day-to-day applications (e.g. households, extensions, new housing estates, etc). Much of Neil's role was in relation to large scale residential schemes, and he was also the lead officer for Section 106 related matters and infrastructure.

Neil then began his presentation which covered the different ways in which the Development Management team were involved with walking and cycling, including deciding where development happened within the District and ensuring that this was in the most sustainable locations through use of the Local Plan and the Spatial Strategy within the Plan. Planning conditions could also be imposed when planning permission is granted in order to ensure that developments incorporated features such as new cycle paths and cycle parking (e.g. Rivenhall Park, North East Witham). With regard to improvements for cycling that were outside application sites, it was advised that planning obligations, which were a legal agreement, were used to secure improvements, such as through the payment of a financial contribution to the District or County Council, or imposing a requirement for the developer to undertake the necessary work instead (e.g. highway works to create new cyclepaths). These planning obligations are secured through a Section 106 agreement.

In terms of barriers to increasing the cycling and pedestrian facilities across the District, factors such as the availability of land for new or improved links beyond application sites, and the management of road space were highlighted.

With regard to opportunities, there was increased importance being attached to walking and cycling by the District Council, as well as transformational schemes (e.g. Emergency Active Travel Fund), acceptance of the need by some developers to promote active travel, possible future grant funding from Central Government and planned agricultural reforms

which may encourage farmers to allow public access across their land in return for public subsidies.

A link to the presentation slides was circulated to Members of the Committee following the meeting, and a webcast of the full presentation and details was available via the Council's YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCwX0X9mAHKp42SA1QOB6qjQ%20www.youtube.com/braintree-district-council-committees>

Further to the presentation, the Chairman invited Members to ask their questions of Neil. In response to the questions raised, the following information was provided:-

- On the topic of the Braintree District Cycle Action Plan, Members were advised that larger villages such as Sible Hedingham could also be considered for potential cycle routes as part of the Plan (along with the District's main towns). Primary responsibility lay with Essex County Council (ECC) as the Highway Authority, and any such considerations would be subject to a public consultation. There were also potential issues around a lack of financial resource to fund such schemes in addition to other resource barriers; for example, where Section 106 monies were secured from developers, there is a requirement that the value of the contribution or the works to create a new cycle link needed to be proportionate to the development .
- In respect of modal filters, Members were informed that any plans for these would be subject to a public consultation, as was currently underway for the scheme proposed between Rayne Road and Coggeshall Road, Braintree. If the proposal was widely supported, this would be used as evidence by ECC for the Department for Transport (DfT) that the scheme should be implemented, and equally if there was significant opposition to the proposal, ECC would need to discuss the possible options going forward with the DfT (e.g. such as alternatives if only particular elements of the proposal incited strong opposition, rather than the entire plan). Members were encouraged to add their comments to the consultation if they so wished, as there was only a narrow time frame left in which to do this.
- The cycle park located at the Witham Train Station currently had no electric charging facilities within the bike stores. The general view was that the majority of cyclists charge electric bikes at home and as such there was little demand to accommodate these within the District's cycle parks.
- It was acknowledged the hillier terrain in Witham might discourage some cyclists, but overall it was not considered to be a major barrier. Options such as electric bikes, and potentially e-scooters in the future, were possible alternatives.
- The storage of e-bikes did not require additional space; therefore, regular bike stores should be able to accommodate those cyclists who chose to use them.
- A concern was expressed about new developments sometimes encroaching on the highway. ECC as the Highway Authority had ultimately responsibility for its assets, including taking the appropriate action where developers had encroached onto land designated as highway. A possible course of action for Members was to take the issue forward as a recommendation as part of their Scrutiny Review to consider making representations to ECC in future.

- Members were informed that Greater Anglia were gradually installing a multi-storey car park at Witham Train Station in order to increase the car park capacity for vehicles. With regard to cycle parking at the site, new cycle racks with built in ramps were to be installed to help increase the amount of storage for bikes in the area. In terms of safety and security, bikes would still be able to be secured in the same way as they were in regular storage facilities, and it was added that CCTV would also be in operation at the bike sheds, along with appropriate lighting.
- With regard to the use of Section 106 monies, there were certain requirements that had to be met in order for such funds to be granted, which included a clear link for the scheme proposed to the development (e.g. as seen with the cycle way and development at Forest Road, Witham). It was explained that the planning application stages, the Council encourage developers to consider where their residents will want to travel to (e.g. schools, town centres etc), the routes already in place and what might be required in future to meet with the demand.
- On the possibility of having cycle decking at Braintree Train Station, Members were advised that there was already cycle decking in place at the Council owned car park next to the station, funding for which had been received as part of the Council's climate change initiative.
- Shorter cycle routes around developments such as roundabouts were likely a design feature by ECC intended to provide cyclists with as much space as possible from other vehicles as part of safety measures.

Further to the conclusion of the evidence gathering session, the Chairman expressed her grateful thanks to Neil for his presentation and the information that was provided to Members. Neil added that he would arrange for the presentation slides to be circulated to the Committee Members, along with a link to the Essex Travel Fund consultation.

The Chairman then requested Members to give consideration to any potential lines of enquiry they might wish to undertake next in order to progress the Committee's Scrutiny Review. Emma Wisbey, Governance and Members Manager, responded that it might be helpful at this stage of the Review for Governance Officers to undertake a 'health check' of the evidence gathered thus far and to compare this with the Terms of Reference in order to establish where there were gaps in knowledge, and, from this, who were the most appropriate set of witnesses to invite to the next meeting of the Committee. One such witness had already been identified from ECC on the subject of Highways, in addition to Councillor F Ricci, Cabinet Member for Communities at Braintree District Council.

Documents referred to at earlier sessions of the Review, such as Gear Change, would be revisited in order to identify any potential evidence streams. Where witnesses could not be identified for any reason (e.g. due to Officer diary constraints), Governance Officers would invite Members to submit written questions to the team which could then be circulated out for response. Members were also reminded that questions around aspects of cycling and walking, such as the perceived barriers, would be explored by the Committee in greater detail following the end of the cycling strategy consultation. Governance Officers therefore agreed to assemble a summary of sorts as to where the Committee currently was in terms of its progress against the Terms of Reference and to identify potential witnesses going forward from this.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 8.42pm.

Councillor Mrs D Garrod
(Chairman)