

CYCLING
(Report by the Cycling Working Group)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At their meeting held on 13th March 2007, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) decided to establish a Working Group to investigate the Council's expenditure on cycling in Huntingdonshire and its effectiveness in providing dedicated cycle paths and promoting cycling as a means of transport. The Working Group comprised Councillors K M Baker, P J Downes and P M D Godfrey and has met on a number of occasions in the ensuing months.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Panel's initial interest in the subject was prompted by concern expressed by a ward member over a lack of progress in providing a cycleway in his Ward, notwithstanding a financial contribution under a Section 106 Agreement. This led to a discussion in October 2006 when the Panel considered the level of expenditure on cycleway development in Huntingdonshire, vis-a-vis the provision made in the Council's medium term plan and in Section 106 Agreements with developers.
- 2.2 The Panel acknowledged at the outset that the authority with principal responsibility for cycling is Cambridgeshire County Council and that both Councils have agreed previously that it would not be practical to scrutinise the level of service provision by each other. Nevertheless, the Panel was conscious that the District Council plays an active role in cycling provision in a number of ways, namely –
- ◆ contributing towards expenditure on cycleway provision in Huntingdonshire;
 - ◆ the negotiation of Section 106 Agreements for transportation provision with money being paid by developers direct to the County Council and its expenditure through the market town transport strategies;
 - ◆ financial contributions towards the County Council's safe cycle routes programme;
 - ◆ the provision of cycle racks in the market towns;
 - ◆ the production of leaflets on cycle routes in Huntingdonshire;
 - ◆ working with Sustrans on the national cycle network, two of the major routes of which pass through the District; and
 - ◆ the adoption in 2000 of a cycling strategy for Huntingdonshire.
- 2.3 Having regard to that level of investment and involvement, the Panel sought information from the County Council on their programme and financial commitment to cycleway provision and the promotion of cycling in Huntingdonshire. In the context of the partnership arrangements between the two authorities, the relevant executive councillor and officer of the

County Council were invited to attend a Scrutiny Panel meeting but the invitation was declined.

- 2.4 The Panel therefore established a Working Group to review the Council's strategy, plans and expenditure on cycling in Huntingdonshire and examine the influence which the Council's financial commitment was having in the practical delivery of new routes and the growth of cycling in the District.

3. PROMOTION OF CYCLING

- 3.1 The Working Group recognised the many benefits of encouraging the use of cycles both in terms of reducing traffic congestion and town centre pollution and in improving the fitness and health of the cyclist. During the course of its study, other issues have emerged to reinforce that view, including the growing concern over climate change and each individual's carbon footprint and the development of the Council's Environment Strategy.

- 3.2 The evidence of the health benefits of physical activity is well documented. People who are physically active reduce their risk of developing major chronic diseases (such as coronary heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes) by up to 50% and reduce the risks of premature death by 20-30%. Regular physical activity also has benefits for mental health and a sense of well-being. The National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence published Public Health Guidance on 'Physical Activity and the Environment' in January 2008 which offers the first national, evidence-based recommendations on how to improve the physical environment to encourage physical activity. Recommendations are aimed at those developing Local Development Frameworks and Local Transport Plans and the emerging Huntingdonshire Sustainable Community Strategy seeks to promote active and healthy lifestyles, as well as tackle obesity in both children and adults. A major contributor to this work will be increasing local levels of physical activity, including the promotion of active travel.

- 3.3 Nevertheless the volume of traffic on Huntingdonshire's roads can tend to discourage cycling unless dedicated cycleways or paths have been provided. The Working Group did not seek evidence to support its perception but the view held by Members was that most casual cyclists would be deterred from using the more busy roads in the District. Observations suggest that cyclists often use footways adjoining carriageways in such circumstances which can lead to conflict between the pedestrian and the cyclist.

4. CURRENT ARRANGEMENTS

- 4.1 The promotion of cycling is encouraged in the Local Transport Plan prepared by Cambridgeshire County Council and to which the District Council is a partner signatory. In the towns, the development of cycling initiatives is promoted through the market town transport strategies compiled by the County Council, again in partnership with the District Council, and approved by the Huntingdonshire Traffic Management Area Joint Committee. The picture is less clear outside the market towns and the Working Group found little or no evidence of any active district-wide policy to link settlements by the construction of cycleways or to connect those living on the outskirts of the market towns with the town centres.

4.2 That being said, the attention of the Working Group has been drawn to the existing cycling strategy adopted by the Council in 2000 which has the following objectives –

- ◆ to maximise the role of cycling as a transport mode in order to reduce the use of the private car;
- ◆ to develop a safe, convenient, efficient and attractive transport infrastructure which encourages and facilitates cycling within and beyond Huntingdonshire and which minimises reliance on and discourages unnecessary use of private cars;
- ◆ to ensure that policies to increase cycling and meet the needs of cyclists are fully integrated into the Local Plan and in all complementary strategies including transport, environmental improvement, leisure, tourism and Local Agenda 21 strategies;
- ◆ to ensure that the development of cycle networks in Huntingdonshire considers, where appropriate, the views of the general public and other interest groups through regular consultation.

4.3 In conjunction with the approval of the strategy, the Council approved a list of 41 priority routes for future consideration containing a mixture of urban and rural locations. The urban routes are considered as part of the market town transport strategies but progress on the rural routes that were identified has been slow. No specific provision is contained in the Local Transport Plan for new cycleways in Huntingdonshire and, given the relatively high cost of construction of dedicated cycle paths, it appears unlikely that the rural routes will be addressed unless additional resources are made available.

5. FINANCIAL PROVISION

5.1 The Working Group found that, over the past five years, the District Council's direct expenditure on cycling provision has amounted to just over £600,000, comprising –

safe cycle routes - £243,000
cycle shelters - £59,000
specific cycleway provision - £299,000.

Included in the MTP for the current and next four years is a total of £347,000 for safe cycle routes to school plus £524,000 for St. Neots pedestrian bridges (which can be used by cyclists) and £505,000 towards schemes (not specifically identified for cycling) in the market town transport strategies.

5.2 Section 106 contributions play an increasingly important role in the delivery of the latter strategies. Some contributions for specific schemes are negotiated with developers by the District Council, such as those relating to development west of St. Ives which make provision for a new cycleway as part of improvements to the St Ivo Outdoor Centre. Others form part of the wider transportation contribution which is paid direct to the County Council and spent under the market town transport strategies with individual schemes being approved by the Huntingdonshire Traffic Management Area Joint Committee.

- 5.3 The Working Group wished to establish the precise extent of any County Council funding that might be available for cycleway provision in the District.

6. WORKING GROUP INVESTIGATIONS

- 6.1 The Working Group found that, although not the authority with principle responsibility for this function, the District Council makes a significant contribution to the promotion of cycling in Huntingdonshire, both by way of financial expenditure and the promotion of cycling as an environmentally friendly and healthy alternative to the car.

- 6.2 On that basis, the Working Group was disappointed that officers of the County Council had not been prepared to attend a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel to discuss the subject. During the course of the Working Group's study, Councillor Downes, in his role as a County Councillor, met one of the highways officers to discuss the partnership arrangements and the County Council's expenditure on cycling provision in Huntingdonshire. This was followed up by a meeting between District and County Council officers.

- 6.3 Notwithstanding the efforts of the Working Group, it has not been possible to identify the precise extent of the County Council's past or planned expenditure on cycleway provision in Huntingdonshire. Principally this seems to be because, unlike the District Council, there is no specific allocation for cycling in the County Council's transportation budget. Similarly an analysis of recent Section 106 Agreements shows numerous references to contributions by developers towards transportation provision of up to £2,000 per dwelling but more limited references to cycleway provision which are usually site specific. Most of that expenditure is being allocated through the market towns transport strategies with little likelihood that rural routes will be progressed

- 6.4 Although expenditure on cycleway provision is dependent on a variety of sources from Government grant through the Local Transport Plan to County and District Councils budgetary allocations and Section 106 Agreements, the Working Group was disappointed that it was unable to establish the precise amount of available funding and plans for its expenditure, whether in the market towns or elsewhere.

7. OUTCOMES

- 7.1 A significant development from the working party's inquiries is an offer by County Council officers to update the District Council's cycling strategy to align its content with the Local Transport Plan and to prepare, in conjunction with District Council officers, an action plan for its implementation, including the identification of inter-urban routes. A similar exercise has already been carried out for South Cambridgeshire District Council which has led to an allocation of funding from the Local Transport Plan each year for cycleway provision in that District.

- 7.2 With limited exceptions where an individual scheme can be identified, Section 106 Agreements do not tend to make specific provision for a financial contribution towards cycleway development. The adoption of an action plan to implement the cycling strategy will enable more Agreements to target expenditure on specific cycleway provision. If those receipts were

to be made payable to the District Council as opposed to the County Council, this should establish a clearer link to the implementation of the cycling strategy.

7.3 With regard to the market towns, the Working Group has been unable to distinguish with any accuracy how much money is available for expenditure on cycleway provision through the market town transport strategies. Where the Council itself has allocated specific funding, the Working Group has been informed that this is released on a scheme by scheme basis following approval by the Area Joint Committee with District officers often designing the individual projects. The Working Group feels that this practice should continue.

7.4 The Working Group had hoped, at the outset of the study, that it might be possible to establish what influence the District's Council's expenditure and involvement in cycling provision had in encouraging and promoting investment in cycleway development in Huntingdonshire. Despite the enquiries made, it has not been possible to identify the amount of funding available nor a programme for cycleway development outside the market towns. The Working Group has therefore concluded that it is impractical to pursue this matter any further.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 Members of the Working Group wish to extend their appreciation to the District Council's officers in the Planning Division for their assistance during the course of the review and for their candid advice and views.

8.2 The Working Group had hoped to establish a clear link from Section 106 contributions for transportation to its expenditure on individual cycleway schemes but this has not proved possible. The updating of the cycling strategy and an associated action plan will however enable the Council to distinguish between contributions for cycleway provision and transportation generally in appropriate cases. Given the District's existing commitment to cycling provision, the Working Group considers that the contributions negotiated for cycling should be paid by developers to the District Council as opposed to the County Council. The funding available for expenditure can be monitored by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) in the same way as existing Section 106 receipts with the money being committed to individual schemes approved by the Area Joint Committee as currently.

8.3 The updated strategy and action plan should hopefully attract specific funding through the Local Transport Plan which, together with targeted Section 106 receipts, will enable progress to be made in the creation of inter-urban cycleway routes in Huntingdonshire and thereby encourage more people to cycle with all of the associated benefits in terms of reduced traffic congestion, improved air quality and a healthier population.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 The Working Group therefore

RECOMMEND

- (a) that the offer by the County Council to update the Council's existing cycling strategy and to prepare an action plan for its implementation be welcomed and officers requested to conclude this work within the next six months;
- (b) that, following completion of the strategy and action plan, specific contributions be sought in Section 106 Agreements for cycleway provision in Huntingdonshire in appropriate cases;
- (c) that contributions negotiated under (b) above be retained by the District Council for expenditure on implementation of the cycling strategy action plan;
- (d) that the District Council seek the allocation of specific funding through the Local Transport Plan for cycleway provision in Huntingdonshire;
- (e) that the approval of individual cycleway schemes continue to be the responsibility of the Huntingdonshire Traffic Management Area Joint Committee with District Council expenditure continuing to be allocated on a scheme by scheme basis.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Notes of the Cycling Working Group

Medium Term Plan

Reports and Minutes of meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) and the Section 106 Agreement Advisory Group


Market Town Transport Strategies

Cycling Strategy for Huntingdonshire 2000

Local Transport Plan

National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (2006). Transport Interventions Promoting Safe Cycling and Walking: Evidence Briefing.

National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (2008). Promoting and creating built or natural environments that encourage and support physical activity.

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