

Meeting date: 5 January 2021
Report to: Cabinet Member for Environment and Highways
Subject/report title: Emergency Active Travel Fund project
Report from: Head of Highway Management
Report author/lead contact officer: Paul Tovey / David Keane & Tina Wiggin



Wards affected:

- All Wards | Bickenhill | Blythe | Castle Bromwich | Chelmsley Wood |
 Dorridge/Hockley Heath | Elmdon | Kingshurst/Fordbridge | Knowle |
 Lyndon | Meriden | Olton | Shirley East | Shirley South |
 Shirley West | Silhill | Smith's Wood | St Alphege

Public/private report: Public

Exempt by virtue of paragraph:

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide an update on the COVID19 Emergency Active Travel Fund (EATF) Tranche 1 project and to consider taking forward a new Tranche 2 programme of permanent improvement schemes under the Active Travel Fund (ATF).

2. Decision(s) recommended

2.1 Cabinet Member is asked to:

- (a) Note the update and lessons learnt from Tranche 1 of the EATF programme,
- (b) Refer the two temporary 20mph speed limit orders in Knowle and Meriden for consideration as part of to the Borough wide review of speed limits due to take place in 2021, and
- (c) Agree to accept the Tranche 2 Active Travel Funding capital allocation of £841,141 and progress the four named schemes in paragraph 4.14, through preliminary design and public consultation phases.
- (d) Agree to receive a further report in late 2021 on the outcome of the design and consultation stage of the project.

3. Matters for Consideration

- 3.1 As a result of the initial impact of the COVID19 pandemic, many of our residents were encouraged to participate in daily walking and cycling activity on the public highway network.
- 3.2 The Government through the EATF, recognised the opportunities this presented to help change travel behaviours and were keen to support this increased level of activity, with the associated health and environmental benefits. The programme also implemented temporary schemes to support the 2m social distancing requirements along some of our busiest routes.
- 3.3 This opportunity led to the Council receiving an initial allocation of £195,000 (£160,000 capital and £35,000 revenue) from the West Midlands overall regional allocation. A further £19,496 was awarded to Solihull, as part of the Transport for West Midlands regional allocation. Appendix A provides a summary of the individual schemes that made up the £214,496 EATF Tranche 1 funded programme of work.
- 3.4 To support the Governments COVID-19 response, the Active Travel Fund has been developed. The Active Travel Fund announced in November 2020, continues the cycling and walking momentum gained through the EATF Programme.
- 3.5 The Active Travel Fund removes the 'emergency' element of the EATF programme and the objective of the fund is to develop longer term active travel projects. The fund seeks to deliver high quality cycle provision including pop up segregated cycle lanes. The fund will give people more opportunities to choose cycling and walking for their day-to-day journeys, as part of wider government plans to boost active travel.
- 3.6 Solihull is anticipated to receive a capital allocation of £841,141 from the West Midlands overall regional allocation.

4. What options have been considered and what is the evidence telling us about them?

- 4.1 It is worth reminding Members that the original funding was made available at extremely short notice and was directly related to the COVID19 pandemic. The individual schemes re-allocated space within the boundary of the public highway to meet the Government's sustainable travel objectives, at that time.
- 4.2 There have been lessons learnt which need to be recognised and shared so that improvements in service can be taken on board in the future.
- 4.3 The key learning point identified is the need to keep people informed throughout the lifetime of the project. Whilst there was insufficient time on this occasion to consult local residents beforehand, it is accepted that more could have been done to explain the reasons for the temporary measures, keeping customers updated and informed of when changes were planned. Fundamentally, this starts with the need to set up a communication / promotional allocation within the overall project plan. The project was initially focused on the measures being in place for a few weeks, which turned out to be nearer 5 months for the majority of the measures.

- 4.4 The use of the Common Place web based engagement portal, which was used on a Solihull highway project for the first time, enabled the project to have a wide reach during a period when the Authority was adapting to new ways of working. In addition, other more traditional methods of communicating with our stakeholders, such as temporary signs, press releases etc. were also used following the introduction of measures.
- 4.5 It is noted however that our inability to formally engage and consult widely with residents prior to the physical introduction of measures did mean that for some residents the first time that they were aware of a scheme was when they encountered it on the ground. This, combined with the form of the measures, which in many instances may have appeared to be road works, led to some uncertainty and frustration from the public around why the measures had been introduced.
- 4.6 Despite this, it is still disappointing that much of the feedback received was negative or not supportive of either the programme or individual projects. This is good evidence that effective promotion of schemes along with their benefits is critical to the successful long term delivery and acceptance of such initiatives. It makes a strong case for enhanced and effective engagement and communications strategies being built into this type of initiative from conception and then continued throughout the life of the project as a key function. It's important to note that the projects did receive some support and that noticeably calls were received for some of the measures to be reinstated after they had been removed.
- 4.7 There was also an ambition to create a new Cycle Hub in Solihull Town Centre to provide advice, promote activities and provide a link to other retail providers. Whilst there were good intentions, it quickly became evident that the cost to lease a suitable premise, refit it and sign up to all of the required services (water, electricity, telecoms, security etc.) would have been prohibitive based on the funding available through the project. As a result, the lease on the unit in Mell Square was not taken forward and some additional resources were able to be prioritised and transferred to the pop-up events project that can be taken around to parks, schools, and other shopping centres in the future.
- 4.8 Whilst most of the 22 schemes were envisaged as being temporary from the outset, the two temporary 20 mph speed limits operating in Knowle and Meriden village centres remain in operation. The feedback has generally been positive about these two schemes and Ward Members and community groups are supportive of making both of these permanent.
- 4.9 Due to the short timescales, no prior traffic speed data was recorded so the true impact and benefits are difficult to demonstrate. The reduced activity on the highway network continues and this also brings into question the validity and reliability of any traffic data collected at this time. There are 3 options to consider:
- a) **Revoking** the temporary 20 mph speed limit
 - b) **Retaining** the temporary 20 mph speed limit and referring it to be reviewed as part of the overall review of speed limit in the Borough due to take place in 2021, or
 - c) **Making** the 20 mph speed limit permanent.

4.10 At the November 2020 Cabinet, approval was granted to undertake the planned review of the Borough's speed limits into the 2021/22 financial year. It would seem sensible and efficient to refer this matter to be considered alongside a number of other similar requests. As such it is recommended option (b) above is now taken forward.

4.11 Initially, the information coming from Government, indicated that the initial tranche of emergency funding would be the first phase as a much larger programme. This was confirmed following further announcements and commitments towards the end of last year to commit £13m to the West Midlands region, which will be funded as part of the £2bn national funding announcement from earlier this year for walking and cycling.

4.12 The Government's aims for this transformational programme include:

- Building thousands of miles of protected cycle routes in towns and cities; setting higher standards for cycling infrastructure, to be overseen by a new inspectorate; and improving the National Cycle Network.
- Boosting investment by creating a long term cycling programme and budget to ensure a guaranteed pipeline of funding.
- Making streets safer by consulting to strengthen the Highway Code to better protect pedestrians and cyclists; improving legal protections for vulnerable road users; raising safety standards on lorries; and working with the police and retailers to tackle bike theft.
- Supporting local authorities by empowering them to crack down on traffic offences; and consulting to increase powers over key road networks.
- Improving air quality and reducing traffic by creating more low traffic neighbourhoods to reduce rat running, including by consulting on communities' right to close side streets; putting in place more "school streets" to reduce traffic by schools; intensive funding of 12 new areas to become more cycle friendly, known as 'Mini Hollands'; and creating at least one zero-emission transport city centre.
- Helping people live healthier lives by piloting a new approach in selected places with poor health rates to encourage GPs to prescribe cycling, with patients able to access bikes through their local surgery.
- Increasing access to e-bikes by setting up a new national e-bike programme, to help those who are older, have to travel long distances or are less fit to take up cycling.

4.13 In Sustainable Transport terms, news of this level of investment is to be welcomed and along with it, the longer term environmental, health and well-being benefits this will bring forward for the residents of Solihull.

4.14 To support the Active Travel Fund's objective of delivering aspirational long term projects, the following four schemes that met these objectives were put forward:

A - Dickens Heath to Solihull Town Centre cycleway along the B4102 corridor,

B - Knowle to Solihull Town Centre cycleway along the A4141 corridor,

C - Milsons Wood to Meriden Village cycleway along the B4014 corridor, and

D - Borough wide cycle parking

4.15 The evidence gathered through the Solihull Cycling and Walking Strategy and national transport surveys has identified safety as the key barrier to cycling. The introduction of high quality cycle provision through the three cycle ways proposed, will address safety issues and enable more people to take up cycling.

4.16 National data has also shown a lack of safe cycle storage as a barrier to cycling for commuter and retail journeys. This fund will provide an opportunity to improve cycle storage provision across the borough.

5. Reasons for recommending preferred option

5.1 It is recommended that the two 20 mph speed limit schemes are transferred to the Borough wide speed limit review as set out in option (b) in section 4.8 of this report.

5.2 There were some valuable lessons learned from this project and it is recommended that these will be shared with the members of the Highway Infrastructure team who will be taking forward Tranche 2 of the Active Travel programme, and build into the project delivery plan a suitable allocation to ensure promotion and engagement form a core element of the projects delivery.

5.3 To carry on with progress and lessons learnt through EATF, it is recommended to proceed with the Active Travel Fund and to accept the anticipated allocation of £841,141. The four schemes proposed will provide a significant improvement on the cycle provision within the borough and enable more cycling journeys to take place. This will provide significant health, environmental, social and economic benefits.

5.4 The Dickens Heath and Knowle cycle ways have been identified as priorities within the Solihull Cycle Network Plan developed as part of the Cycling and Walking Strategy (currently out to consultation). The data gathered through the development of the Cycle Network Plan, identified these two corridors as having high potential for increased cycle journeys.

5.5 During public engagement undertaken in February 2020, improvements to cycle provision from Knowle and Dickens Heath to the town centre were identified as priorities.

5.6 The proposals put forward as part of the Active Travel Fund support the Cycling and Walking Strategy of enabling modal shift and, align closely to public feedback gathered earlier this year.

6. Implications and Considerations

6.1 State how the proposals in this report contribute to the priorities in the [Council Plan](#):

Priority:	Contribution:
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<p>Economy:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Revitalising our towns and local centres. 2. UK Central (UKC) and maximising the opportunities of HS2. 3. Increase the supply of housing, especially affordable and social housing. 	<p>No direct links as these measures were only temporary and in place to support the Borough's response to the COVID19 pandemic.</p>
<p>Environment:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Enhance Solihull's natural environment. 5. Improve Solihull's air quality. 6. Reduce Solihull's net carbon emissions. 	<p>The programme helped to create temporary additional safe places by reallocating road space to more sustainable modes of transport.</p>
<p>People and Communities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Take action to improve life chances in our most disadvantaged communities. 8. Enable communities to thrive. 9. Sustainable, quality, affordable provision for adults & children with complex needs. 	<p>The temporary measures helped people travel safely and sustainably during the COVID19 restrictions.</p>

6.2 Consultation and Scrutiny:

6.2.1 Due to the temporary nature of these measures time did not allow prior consultation on the temporary restrictions on movement of traffic along the highway network. The project did however, use the Commonplace engagement platform to help communicate and seek feedback that informed the on-going monitoring process.

6.3 Financial implications:

6.3.1 The Council's EATF Tranche 1 allocation of £214,496 has been fully committed and a grant declaration form setting out the schemes funded from this has been submitted to the West Midlands Combined Authority who administered the funding on behalf of the West Midlands Region.

6.3.2 It is anticipated that the council will receive a Tranche 2 capital allocation of £841,141 as part of the overall West Midlands Active Travel Fund allocation. The funding will be used to deliver the four schemes outlined in paragraph 4.14. The funding will need to be committed by March 2021 with the delivery of schemes no later than March 2022.

6.4 Legal implications:

6.4.1 None expected, as the temporary measures have all been supported with an appropriate temporary traffic regulation order.

6.5 Risk implications:

6.5.1 No net RED risks were identified as part of the programme of temporary measures.

6.6 Equality implications:

There were questions asked about the impact on the Blue Badge Parking Spaces and the potential impact on disabled people. The impact was being regularly monitored during the period of restrictions to ensure a reasonable balance was achieved between the competing environmental, safety and needs of disabled people.

7. List of appendices referred to

7.1 Appendix A – Summary of EATF Tranche 1 schemes

8. Background papers used to compile this report

8.1 COVID19 – Emergency Active Travel Fund – Update Report (1st September 2020 - Environment and Highways Cabinet Member Decision Session)

8.2 COVID19 – Emergency Walking & Cycling Measures Report (28th May 2020 - Environment and Highways Cabinet Member Decision Session)List of other relevant documents.