

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET STEERING GROUP

10th NOVEMBER 2021 (DRAFT)

**ACTIVE TRAVEL STRATEGY, MEASURES AND ISSUES IN RHONDDA
CYNON TAF**

REPORT OF DIRECTOR, FRONTLINE SERVICES

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to outline the strategy of the Council developing active travel (walking and cycling) across Rhondda Cynon Taf, the investment that has either already been committed or is planned and the issues that need to be taken into account when implementing schemes.
- 1.2 This report has been prepared in the light of the climate change agenda and demonstrates the key role active travel can play in reducing the current level of carbon emissions.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 For the reasons set out in this report, it is recommended that Members of the Climate Change Sub-Committee:
- Note the contents of this report for information and the progress made by the Council implementing its active travel strategy.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Active travel (walking and cycling) is recognised as playing a key role in a suite of measures available to both Central and Local Government to address the climate change agenda as well as achieve other benefits that are related to the environment and health and well-being of residents. During the last few years the Council has made considerable progress implementing active travel schemes across Rhondda Cynon Taf and this report outlines the details for the information of Members of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Wales was the first country in the world to pass legislation (The Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013) that placed a statutory duty on local authorities

to consult, plan and develop a network of high-quality active travel (walking and cycling) routes within their area. Each local authority must produce an Active Travel Network Map which sets out its aspirations for proposed new active travel routes within its area and improvements to existing routes.

- 4.2 It should be noted that walking and cycling is often undertaken as a leisure activity by individuals. However, the focus of the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013 and supporting measures is on facilitating walking and cycling for regular, “purposeful”, short distance journeys made by individuals to key facilities and destinations, as a realistic alternative to making the same journeys by car. It should also be noted that by encouraging and facilitating a modal switch from car usage for these types of journeys, other benefits will include less traffic congestion in local communities, improved air quality and better health and wellbeing amongst local residents.
- 4.3 Since 2013, the Council has been undertaking its statutory duties, in accordance with the provisions of the legislation, and in the light of the emerging climate change agenda.

5. DETAILS OF ACTIVE TRAVEL STRATEGY, SCHEMES AND ISSUES IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF

- 5.1 In Rhondda Cynon Taf, there are a number of established, long distance active travel routes (such as the Taff Trail, Church Village Community Route and Cynon Trail) which were primarily built along the alignment of former railway lines or as part of a major highways scheme. These routes are primarily segregated from the highway and were constructed prior to the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013 becoming law. The original aim of these routes was to promote recreational walking and cycling and boost the local visitor/tourist economy.
- 5.2 However, following the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013, the focus is now on improving the network of existing active travel routes across Rhondda Cynon Taf, to bring them up to current standards, and to develop new routes that improve connectivity and serve key local facilities such as schools, colleges, places of employment and shops. These routes (or schemes) have been prioritised into the short (up to 5 years), medium (5 – 10 years) and long term (10 – 15 years) periods according to the following criteria and Welsh Government guidance:
- Estimated cost and chance of securing funding from whatever source.
 - Number of key facilities / trip attractors served by the active travel route.
 - Whether the proposed scheme will improve the quality of the streetscape or landscape.
 - Whether there are any major technical or engineering problems to be overcome.

- Whether the proposed scheme is a key component in the network of active travel routes in Rhondda Cynon Taf in terms of accessibility, convenience and connectivity for users.
- The extent to which the proposed scheme addresses comments / suggestions / observations made by respondents to the consultation exercises undertaken by the Council.
- Impact on reducing congestion and improving air quality and road safety.

5.3 Full details of these schemes, which inform the preparation of future funding bids, can be viewed on the Council's website. Realistically, it should be noted that proposed new active travel routes are to be developed over the longer term as the process to completion will involve design and construction, whilst the need to upgrade existing active travel routes, in order to meet current standards, could be carried out effectively within a shorter timescale and would potentially benefit more residents, more quickly.

5.4 The funding of the various active travel schemes implemented by the Council is, in many cases, provided through money secured by the Council from the Welsh Government as part of its Active Travel Fund. Other sources include developer contributions, the Council's own resources and other parties. Prior to the start of each financial year, the Council identifies the active travel schemes that it intends to progress (to the next stages of their development) and submits a bid to the Welsh Government for funding these particular schemes during the following financial year.

5.5 During the last few years, the Council has been relatively successful in securing funding from the Welsh Government to develop/implement active travel schemes. In the current financial year it has been awarded:

£1.123M, Active Travel Core Funding – targeted towards upgrading existing routes, removing barriers and installing items such as new controlled crossings on highways, etc.

£3.350M, Active Travel Fund – to fund specific active travel schemes.

5.6 During 2021/2022, this money is being spent on progressing the following active travel schemes to different stages such as feasibility study, planning, design and/or further development:

- Development of Rhondda Fach Phases 1 and 2.
- Study - town centre enhancements – Aberdare, Ponypridd, Porth.
- Re-opening of the Abernant to Merthyr Tunnel.
- Development of active travel links to Church Village, Treforest Industrial Estate and between Talbot Green to Llanharan.
- Study – development of active travel route between Glyncoch and Pontypridd.
- Re-alignment of Taff Trail near Cilfynydd.

- Various route enhancements and upgrades including the Taff Trail and Cynon Trail. Additional funding recently secured.
- Construction of Treorchy Active Travel Route Phase 1 and the Development of Phase 2.
- Development of Brook Street footbridge.
- Development of an active travel link between the centre of Aberdare and the Cynon Trail.
- Design of new pedestrian crossing facility in Llanharan and provision of new pedestrian crossing facility within Trefforest Industrial Estate, the latter forming part of a proposed, new active travel route which funding has been received for design.

5.7 It can be seen that the above list of planned and ongoing active travel schemes across Rhondda Cynon Taf reflects the Council's strategy which is to promote and facilitate short distance, "purposeful" walking or cycling journeys as opposed to the more longer distance, leisure and recreational based journeys.

6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) screening form has not been prepared for the purpose of this report. However, in terms of the implementation of the individual active travel schemes set out in this report, an EqIA may be required if deemed necessary.

7. CONSULTATION

7.1 The implementation of the various active travel schemes identified by the Council will involve extensive consultation with the public and key stakeholders at a future stage of their development.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Depending upon the funding sources, it should be noted that the active travel schemes currently being developed / progressed will not have a financial implication for the Council in terms of capital funding but the infrastructure created will require future maintenance and this creates an additional revenue demand that must be covered by the Council. It is recognised that these routes must be maintained in good condition to attract users and to continue to deliver the benefits of the initial capital investment.

8.2 It should be noted that the Active Travel (Wales) Act demands continuous improvement of the active travel network and, to date, this expectation has been matched by increases in annual Welsh Government grant funding in recent years. Notwithstanding this, it is recognised that in future years, funding constraints may limit the ability of the Council to achieve continuous improvement to active travel routes in Rhondda Cynon Taf unless appropriate funding continues to be made

available by Welsh Government or other sources to meet the new legislative requirements.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

9.1 Progressing the active travel schemes identified by the Council (including any related Business Cases) is governed by various legal documents and pieces of legislation. These include:

- Wales Transport Strategy 2021
- Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
- Environment (Wales) Act 2016
- Planning (Wales) Act 2015
- Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013
- Highways Act 1980
- Traffic Management Act 2004

10. LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES / SIP / FUTURE GENERATIONS - SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

10.1 The aim of the Active Travel legislation and related policies is to promote more sustainable forms of transport amongst the population, such as walking and cycling for short journeys and non-recreational purposes. The aims and objectives being to improve the health and well-being of local residents and their access to key facilities and services, as well as reduce congestion and improve local air quality and road safety.

10.2 These aims are linked to the objectives covering health and prosperity as set out in the Council's Corporate Plan. They also meet a number of the goals set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015; for example, a prosperous Wales, a more equal Wales, a healthier Wales and a Wales of cohesive communities.

10.3 It is considered that promoting active travel journeys amongst local residents, and developing a network of routes throughout RCT also supports the objectives set out in the current Well-being Plan (2018 - 2023) prepared by the Cwm Taf Public Services Board.

11. CONCLUSION

11.1 Developing a network of high quality active travel routes across Rhondda Cynon Taf and promoting active travel journey opportunities to local residents and visitors is an ongoing process of 'continuous improvement' which has no 'cut off' date or deadline. Appendices A – C contain details of the measures undertaken by the Council (which are reported annually to the Welsh Government) during the last few years.

11.2 Since the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013 became law, the Council has undertaken (and is currently undertaking) a number of consultation

exercises covering active travel. The level of public response to these exercises has been very encouraging and the feedback received has enabled the Council to (a) publish an Active Travel Network Map for Rhondda Cynon Taf, (b) identify potential new routes to form a continuous network and (c) address possible barriers and concerns raised by residents and stakeholders that are preventing more walking and/or cycling journeys from being made. These can include the speed and volume of traffic along the highway, topography, lighting, lack of crossing points and provision of suitable parking stands for bicycles. Officers also liaise closely with colleagues in neighbouring authorities over the provision and alignment of cross-boundary active travel routes.

- 11.3 Delivering an expanded network of active travel routes in Rhondda Cynon Taf, and maintaining this network to high quality standards, will present a challenge to the Council in the current financial climate. Notwithstanding this, increasing the proportion of active travel journeys made amongst the resident population and visitors, away from car journeys, can make an important contribution towards the decarbonisation agenda and towards tackling climate change.