

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CABINET**

**13<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER 2021**

**OUTCOME OF ACTIVE TRAVEL CONSULTATION EXERCISE : NEXT STEPS**

**REPORT OF DIRECTOR, FRONTLINE SERVICES IN DISCUSSION WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER**

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**1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to consider the outcome of a statutory active travel consultation exercise that the Council has recently undertaken, in accordance with the requirements of the Welsh Government.
- 1.2 This report asks Members to note the outcome of this exercise, the Council's response to the comments received and the next stage of the active travel consultation process, which is the submission of an Active Travel Network Map and supporting documents to the Welsh Government by no later than 31<sup>st</sup> December 2021.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 For the reasons set out in this report, it is recommended that Members:
  - Note the comments received during the period this active travel consultation exercise was live and the response of the Council to these comments, including making proposed changes to the draft Active Travel Network Map – as set out in Appendix B.
  - Note the next stage of the active travel consultation process and endorse the submission of the final version of the Active Travel Network Map and supporting documents to the Welsh Government – by no later than 31<sup>st</sup> December 2021.

**3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 The Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013 places 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. Since this legislation was enacted, the Welsh Government has been providing support to local authorities to assist them in their duties implementing the provisions of The Act.

- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 The most recent active travel consultation exercise is the third such exercise undertaken by the Council since the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013 was passed. These exercises have formed part of the policy of putting public consultation at the heart of measures to develop and encourage modal switch towards achieving more walking and cycling journeys over short distances.

#### **4. BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 For a period of almost 14 weeks, from 18<sup>th</sup> August 2021 until 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2021, the Council conducted a public consultation exercise over a draft Active Travel Network Map (ATNM) for Rhondda Cynon Taf. This document contains details of existing and proposed active travel routes which had been put forward following previous consultation exercises and had been prepared using software provided by the Welsh Government. Close liaison was undertaken with neighbouring local authorities in order to ensure consistency over the mapping of cross boundary routes.
- 4.2 Respondents were asked to comment on the details contained within the draft ATNM, particularly in relation to any walking or cycling routes (that they use) that are not shown or where possible new routes could be provided to form a more comprehensive network across Rhondda Cynon Taf. It should be noted that respondents were made aware during the consultation exercise that the details shown on the draft ATNM are considered as aspirational, that the Council will seek to deliver, but these details do not commit the Council to implementing any of them.
- 4.3 This public consultation exercise is a requirement, as part of the Council's duties under the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013, and involved the following activities:
  - Placing the draft ATNM on the Council's website, together with English and Welsh language survey forms which focus on the main settlements in RCT.
  - Producing an “Easy Read” version of the consultation to assist respondents with learning difficulties.
  - Undertaking public engagement events at various locations across Rhondda Cynon Taf. These were publicised through social

media and arrangements were made to ensure compliance with current social distancing guidelines.

- Contacting key external stakeholders (such as organisations representing local businesses, environmental groups, disabled groups) and providing a link to the Council's website.
- Publicising the consultation exercise in local newsletters and on the Council's Education Department "Wicid TV".
- Contacting members of the Council's Citizens' Panel, local Members, neighbouring local authorities and local Town/Community Councils and directly notifying members of the public who had originally asked to become involved in this consultation exercise.

## **5. OUTCOME OF ACTIVE TRAVEL CONSULTATION EXERCISE AND NEXT STAGE**

- 5.1 Appendix A contains background details of the respondents who took part in the active travel consultation exercise. It can be seen that a broad demographic profile of residents across Rhondda Cynon Taf became involved.
- 5.2 A total of 146 responses (combined online and at public engagement events) were received by the Council which are summarised in Appendix B, together with the response of the Council. It can be seen that these comments are varied and cover a wide range of issues, some of them not necessarily in line with the aims and objectives of the active travel legislation and measures. A number will require the Council to take action in some form, in response, but this will be dependent upon the timescale involved, resource implications, practicalities and existing duties and responsibilities of the Council. Other comments and feedback will be used to inform feasibility studies that the Council is either currently (or likely to) commission at some stage as part of the design and development of these new active travel routes.
- 5.3 However, where indicated in Appendix B, the draft ATNM is to be amended in order to form the finalised version for submission to the Welsh Government – together with a number of supporting documents.
- 5.4 One of these supporting documents is a table (shown as Appendix C) containing details of all the proposed active travel schemes set out in the final version of the ATNM over the short-term period (up to 5 years), medium term period (5 - 10 years) and long term period (10 - 15 years) that the Council would like to progress. Realistically, 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.

5.5 The table in Appendix C is based on 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.
- Impact on reducing congestion and improving air quality and road safety.

5.6 It is intended that the details shown in the final version of the ATNM, that is to be submitted to the Welsh Government, together with the details in Appendix C, will represent the Council's aspirations for developing a safe and high-quality network of active travel routes in Rhondda Cynon Taf over the next 5, 10 and 15 years. These details will inform the preparation of future funding bids in order to promote active travel and construct new infrastructure / upgrade existing infrastructure as well as develop future strategies and policies.

## **6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) screening form has been prepared for the purpose of this report. It has been found that a full report is not required at this time. The screening form can be accessed by contacting the author of the report.

## **7. CONSULTATION**

7.1 This report relates to a significant, statutory consultation exercise that was undertaken and which has drawn responses from 146 stakeholders.

7.2 Certain actions of the Council, in response to consultee comments set out in Appendix B, will in themselves require further public and stakeholder consultation to enable implementation.

## **8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 In terms of the consultation work undertaken by the Council, and preparation of the draft ATNM, the Council has been awarded

£1,123,000 of Core Active Travel Fund grant by the Welsh Government to carry out these tasks as part of a wider programme of works.

- 8.2 It should be noted that the schemes set out in the finalised ATNM and Appendix C will have a financial implication for the Council. However, at this stage, the potential financial cost will only become known following more detailed study and analysis. The Active Travel Act demands continuous improvement of the active travel network and this expectation has been matched by increases in annual Welsh Government grant funding in recent years. In the 2021/22 financial year, the Council was awarded over £3.7M in grants for active travel (in addition to core funding) and it will shortly be preparing bids for active travel funding in the 2022/23 financial year.
- 8.3 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 many of the active travel schemes set out in Appendix C and the ATNM (including any related Business Cases) are 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. The level of public response to the Council's recent active travel consultation exercise was very encouraging as Covid-19 guidelines are still in place. This consultation exercise demonstrated the level of interest that exists amongst residents to improve walking and cycling facilities and / or remove the barriers which can cause difficulties for them and prevent additional walking and cycling journeys from being made.
- 11.2 Over the last 15 years, the Council has been actively involved in the development of an extensive network of Community Routes and Safe Routes in Communities that provide residents with an alternative means of accessing local services and facilities in their neighbourhood. This is particularly the case in communities where households do not own a car and where there are underlying levels of deprivation associated with poor health.
- 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, the outcome of the recent active travel consultation exercise will help to build upon the Council's achievements to date and inform the Council in its preparation of future bids for funding Community Routes and Safe Routes in Communities Schemes.