

# Report to Cabinet

**13 November 2024**

<b>Subject:</b>	Active Travel Fund Tranche 4 Extension: A4034 Cycle Route – Oldbury to Blackheath, Phase 1
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Infrastructure Councillor Peter Hughes Cabinet Member for Environment & Highways Councillor Keith Allcock
<b>Director:</b>	Executive Director of Place Alan Lunt
<b>Key Decision:</b>	Yes Type (b) - an executive decision which is likely to result in the Council incurring expenditure, the making of savings or the generation of income amounting to more than £1m.
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Phil Walton - Transportation Project Manager <a href="mailto:phil1_walton@sandwell.gov.uk">phil1_walton@sandwell.gov.uk</a>

## 1 Recommendations

For the reasons set out in the report, it is recommended that:-

- 1.1 approval in principle be given to the proposed Blackheath to Oldbury Cycleway Phase 1 for the purposes of carrying out public consultation as shown on Drawing nos. CBCW-SMBC-HGN-A4034-SK-CH-0001, CBCW-SMBC-HGN-A4034-SK-CH-0002 and CBCW-SMBC-HGN-A4034-SK-CH-0003 (attached at Appendix A);
- 1.2 any representations received in connection with 1.1 above be considered by the Cabinet Member for Environment & Highways in

conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration & Infrastructure at a future Decision Making Session;

- 1.3 the Cabinet Member for Regeneration & Infrastructure and the Executive Director – Place, in conjunction with the Section 151 Officer and the Monitoring Officer, be authorised to accept Active Travel Fund Tranche 4 Extension grants from Transport for West Midlands under the Terms and Conditions contained in the Grant Agreement;
- 1.4 following public consultation, consideration of objections, and detailed design, a further report be received by Cabinet seeking approval to the final scheme design.

## **2 Reasons for Recommendations**

- 2.1 Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council in partnership with Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) submitted a bid to Government for Active Travel Fund Tranche 4 Extension funding for a cycling and walking scheme along the A4034 Churchbridge from Oldbury Ringway to Park Street in accordance with the funding guidelines which stipulated that only those schemes which aim to deliver high quality, off road, segregated cycle lanes, new footways and pedestrian crossings in accordance with national cycle design standards would receive funding. This scheme aims to deliver the first phase of a high-quality cycle and pedestrian measures to improve accessibility by active modes will provide a cycleway from Oldbury Town Centre to Blackheath Town Centre along the A4034. The cycleway will provide a route for cyclists along a key network which links two of the towns which make up Sandwell Metropolitan Borough. Sandwell MBC was successful in receiving the full funding requested to implement the scheme in accordance with the funding guidelines.
- 2.2 The Funding Grant Agreement between West Midlands Combined Authority and Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council stipulates that the project should be completed by the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026. The recommendations contained in this report will enable the project to

progress in a timely manner thus ensuring that the scheme is completed on time and within the budget, that funding guidelines are met so that the risk of the funding being withdrawn or being subject of clawback is minimised.

### 3 How does this deliver objectives of the Council Plan?

Growing Up in Sandwell	The funding will deliver cycling and walking improvements to public transport services as well as near schools and will encourage active travel which is good for our physical and mental health. Switching more journeys to active travel will improve health, quality of life and the environment for children and young people.
Living in Sandwell	Successful communities need access to jobs, services and facilities to enable them to remain healthy and vibrant. Improving access to the transport network via active travel modes is an important enabler of this.
Thriving Economy in Sandwell	Transport plays a vital role in connecting people to jobs and learning opportunities. Health-promoting transport systems are pro-business and support economic prosperity. They enable optimal travel to work with less congestion, collisions, pollution, and they support a healthier workforce. The provision of improved high-quality cycling and walking connectivity will therefore play a key role in connecting Sandwell residents and businesses to economic and social opportunities.
Healthy in Sandwell	The provision of improved high-quality cycling and walking connectivity will encourage active travel which is good for our physical and mental health.
One Council One Team	Stakeholders and residents will be engaged with and consulted on the proposals. Updates will be published on Council Social Media pages.

## 4 Context and Key Issues

4.1 As stipulated by Government guidance, the awarded Active Travel Fund must deliver schemes that provide:

- better streets for cycling and people
- put cycling and walking at the heart of decision-making
- empowering and encouraging local authorities to enable this
- enabling people to cycle and protecting them when they do

The Department for Transport (DfT) requires all funded schemes to adhere to published design guidance, policies and plans otherwise the Department reserves the right to reduce, suspend or withhold future DfT grant payments to Local Authorities.

4.2 The Blackheath to Oldbury cycleway will provide a dedicated route from Oldbury Town Centre to Blackheath Town Centre along the A4034. The cycleway will provide a route for cyclists along a key part of the network which links two of the towns which make up Sandwell Metropolitan Borough.

4.3 As part of Sandwell's Active Travel Fund submission, Phase 1 of the Oldbury to Blackheath route was approved for Government funding. Phase 1 runs from Oldbury Town Centre to Park Street along A4034 Churchbridge where it will join with a cycleway which will be provided as part of the major scheme at Birchley Island which is programmed to start construction in 2025. It will also serve the Park Street industrial area.

4.4 At the Oldbury Town Centre end of the scheme the cycle way will interface with a cycleway on A457 Oldbury Ringway which is currently under construction, and forms part of the wider A457 Oldbury to Birmingham corridor programme of works.

4.5 In 2023, the Government announced the Active Travel Fund Tranche 4 Extension (ATF4e), stipulating that any cycling and walking schemes submitted must be ambitious. Only those schemes with high level

scheme designs, and that meet certain funding criteria would be considered for funding.

- 4.6 The scheme has the potential for a major shift towards cycling, walking, and improving public transport in the borough, whilst reducing reliance on private cars. It also provides interventions which support sustainable access between Blackheath and Oldbury. The section, as detailed at 4.2 to 4.4 of this report, has been prioritised for early delivery through ATF4e. This is based on the scheme meeting criteria such as deliverability; compliance with LTN 1/20 cycle design guidance; and proximity to large local centres thereby maximising benefits for local communities.

## 5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 The options submitted for funding approval as part of the ATF4e submission to Central Government must be implemented.
- 5.2 Any alternative options will not be funded as part of the Active Travel Fund 4 Extension and there is a risk of funding being withheld should local authorities not meet the criteria set out in the funding guidelines and initial submission documents and proposals.

## 6 Implications

<b>Resources:</b>	The cost of delivering the projects will be met by the approved and allocated funding as part of the Active Travel Fund. Staff resources to manage the project are already in place within the Strategic Planning & Transportation Team and within Highway Services for delivery of the schemes.
<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	The Grant Agreement shall be governed by and construed in accordance with the Law of England and Wales and the Parties irrevocably submit to the

	<p>exclusive jurisdiction of the English and Welsh courts once this report is approved. Under section 65 (1) of the Highways Act 1980, a highway authority may, in or by the side of a highway maintainable at the public expense by them which consists of or comprises a made-up carriageway, construct a cycle track as part of the highway; and they may light any cycle track constructed by them under this section. To convert all or part of a footway to a shared pedestrian and cycle route, all or the appropriate part of the footway must be removed under section 66 (4) of the Highways Act 1980, and a cycle track 'constructed' under section 65 (1) of the act. No physical construction is necessary but there needs to be clear evidence that the local highway authority has exercised these powers. This can be provided by a resolution of the appropriate committee or cabinet member.</p>
<b>Risk:</b>	<p>The main risks are delaying the delivery of the schemes on site until approval is given and therefore missing the spend deadline, resulting in a loss of funding for Sandwell MBC</p>
<b>Equality:</b>	<p>An equality impact assessment was carried out during the development of the Sandwell Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan and the proposed infrastructure adheres to latest Government Guidance. Furthermore, an independent Road Safety Audit has been undertaken to ensure the schemes facilitate the safety of all users of the highway.</p>
<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	<p>A transport system that is easily accessible, reliable, and affordable contributes to life satisfaction and wellbeing in multiple ways. It enables access to work, friends, and family, as well as health-supporting facilities such as schools, colleges, parks, libraries, and health care centres. The proposed walking and cycling scheme will have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of local communities by</p>

	encouraging active travel and the associated health benefits of increasing physical activity and minimising the time spent sitting down.
<b>Social Value:</b>	Providing high-quality walk and cycle links to the stops will give greater opportunity for composite active travel and tram journeys, providing better access to local jobs, education, and facilities, as well as providing access to the wider West Midlands Region through the rail network and existing metro. This will improve opportunities, reduce inequality, and will reduce car dependency, improving air quality and wellbeing. The proposed cycle route will also form part of a network that will link communities to employment, education, transport hubs, town centres and other services.
<b>Climate Change:</b>	Sandwell Council has joined other councils in England that have declared a Climate Emergency and as a result developed and adopted a Climate Change Strategy 2021-2041. Within Sandwell's Climate Change Strategy Action Plan 3 for Transport states that Sandwell Council will "Implement highway measures and transport facilities that fully accommodate and promote the use of public transport, cycling and walking, making journeys by such methods easier, faster and safer, alongside measures to discourage car use. This active travel scheme aims to do this.
<b>Corporate Parenting:</b>	The funding will deliver cycling and walking improvements to public transport services as well as near schools and will encourage active travel which is good for our physical and mental health. Switching more journeys to active travel will improve health, quality of life and the environment for children and young people

## **7. Appendices**

Drawing No CBCW-SMBC-HGN-A4034-SK-CH-0001

Drawing No CBCW-SMBC-HGN-A4034-SK-CH-0002

Drawing No CBCW-SMBC-HGN-A4034-SK-CH-0003

Drawing No CBCW-SMBC-HGN-A4034-SK-CH-0004

## **8. Background Papers**

West Midlands Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan

Sandwell Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan

West Midlands Combined Authority ATF4e Grant Letter