

CABINET

Report Title	Approval of the Black Country Walking, Wheeling and Cycling Plan
Date of Meeting	Wednesday, 7 May 2025
Report Author	Wayne Moore
Lead Officer	Executive Director - Place
Lead Cabinet Member(s)	Cabinet Member for Environment and Highways
Why is this a key decision?	1. Expenditure over £1 Million+ yes / no 2. Significant impact on 2 or more wards yes
Wards Affected	(All Wards);
Identify exempt information and exemption category	Choose an item.
Is the report urgent?	No
Reasons for urgency (only where applicable)	N/A
Appendices (if any)	1. Appendix 1: Black Country Walking, Wheeling and Cycling Plan core walking zone and cycle route proposals within Sandwell 2. Appendix 2: Black Country Walking Wheeling and Cycling Plan consultation results. 3. Appendix 3: Black Country Local Cycling Walking Infrastructure Plan – Full Document.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Cabinet approval is required adopt the Black Country Walking, Wheeling and Cycling Plan. The plan identifies gaps in the walking, wheeling and cycling network that were not covered by the West Midlands Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan and Sandwell Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan.

2. Recommendations

The Cabinet is recommended to:-

- 2.1 Approve the Black Country Walking, Wheeling and Cycling Plan subject to consultation and approval of detailed proposals by the Cabinet Member for Environment and Highways.

3. Proposals – Reasons for the recommendations

- 3.1 The Government's Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy was published in April 2017 with the aim of making cycling and walking the natural choices for shorter journeys, or as part of a longer journey. The strategy seeks to double the 2013 number of journeys, or part journeys, made by cycle by 2025. It recognises that achieving this will require a sustained investment in cycling infrastructure by Central Government, Local Transport Authorities and third parties. The Government anticipates that Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) will be the principal vehicle for targeting this investment.
- 3.2 The West Midlands Combined Authority has developed an LCWIP that identifies and enables a plan to develop strategic cycling and walking networks throughout the West Midlands up to 2028. Subsequently Sandwell developed an LCWIP that identifies and enables a plan to develop strategic cycling and walking networks throughout the Sandwell up to 2030.
- 3.3 To complement the WMCA and Sandwell LCWIP's Black Country Transport commissioned work to develop a BCWWCP that identified and enabled a plan to develop local cycling and walking networks throughout the Black Country till 2032. The BCWWCP has been approved by Dudley, Walsall and Wolverhampton Councils and will be published in May 2025 subsequently to Sandwell cabinet approval.
- 3.4 Consultants AECOM were appointed by Black Country Transport to prepare BCWWCP to support mode shift to active modes across the four local authority areas. The process undertaken conformed to the Department for Transport (DfT)'s defined six-stage LCWIP process. The geographical scope was the whole of the area within the four authority's boundaries.
- 3.5 A policy and data led analysis was carried out to establish areas of highest cycle and walking demand. The areas within Sandwell were then reviewed by Sandwell's Transportation team to select those which aligned with Sandwell's policy objectives. These included: air quality improvement areas, regeneration corridors, proximity to secondary schools, proximity to transport hubs, current and planned 20mph zones and areas of high congestion. A map of the selected cycle routes and core walking zones can be found in Appendix 1. The Black Country Transport carried out a Walking, Wheeling and Cycling Plan public consultation between 29/07/2024 and 30/09/2024, which included

BCWWCP proposals in Sandwell, please see Appendix 2. The BCWWCP in Appendix 3 will be reported to all four Council's cabinets for approval.

- 3.6 The West Midlands has secured £1.05bn funding to expand the regions tram, train, bus, walking and cycle networks and drive a green transport revolution. The funding comes from the government's City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS), which will kickstart a wide range of projects including walking and cycling Infrastructure in a move to decarbonise the region's transport system, create new jobs and opportunities for local people and bolster the fight against climate change.
- 3.7 The BCWWCP is complementary to the strategic West Midlands LCWIP and the local Sandwell SCWIP. As such it is primarily aimed at improving facilities for cycling and walking as modes of transport (utility routes) rather than as leisure or physical activities. Routes look to link residents with local facilities, health centres, hospitals, town centres, and centres of employment.
- 3.8 The SCWIP however, does seek to provide routes along canal towpaths and through parks and green spaces as a further adjunct to the utility route network that also make a contribution to opportunities for physical activity for leisure, health and wellbeing purposes. A review of the SCWIP will commence later in the year and the details will be reported to Cabinet in due course. The SCWIP provides the framework against which bids can be prepared for funds from bodies such as Sport England that aim to promote cycling and walking as activities in general, not just as modes of transport.

Context and Key Issues

- 3.9 The population of Sandwell is rising with ONS 2023 estimates showing that there are 344,210 people living in the district of all ages. Sandwell borough has a complex network of places within which people exercise their choice of location for residence, business and their destination for employment, shopping, education, health treatment, leisure and entertainment. Consequently, the borough supports considerable trips on a daily basis.
- 3.10 Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs), as set out in the 2017 Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy, are a new, strategic approach to identifying cycling and walking improvements required at the local level. They enable a long-term approach to developing local cycling and walking networks, ideally over a 10-year period, and form a vital part of the Government's strategy to increase the number of trips made on foot or by cycle.
- 3.11 The BCWWCP has a prioritised plan for improvements to the local network within the, which align with existing Sandwell and West Midlands strategies for planning and transport. It will be refreshed in a three to five-year period,

incorporating new and updated data sources to support walking, wheeling and cycling interventions in the Black Country.

- 3.12 The BCWWCP was developed in partnership with stakeholders. This included local community groups such as walking and cycling groups. The projects that deliver the BCWWCP programme will be subject of individual consultations in line with exiting highway and transportation procedures and processes.
- 3.13 Actions to manage and improve air quality are required by EU legislation via the 2008 ambient air quality directive (2008/50/EC) which sets legally binding limits for concentrations in outdoor air pollutants that impact public health. This was transposed into UK legislation by the Air Quality Standards Regulation 2010 and came into force on 11th June 2010. There is the potential for the UK Government to be fined if EU limit values are continually exceeded. There is a risk to the Council as the reserve powers in the Localism Act 2011 have the potential to pass EU fines to local authorities and public bodies (where they have failed to take action when they could) unless air quality standards are met locally.
- 3.14 Part IV of the Environment Act 1995 and Part II of the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 requires local authorities in the UK to review air quality in their area and designate air quality management areas if improvements are necessary. Where an air quality management area is designated, local authorities are also required to work towards the Strategy's objectives prescribed in regulations for that purpose. An air quality action plan describing the pollution reduction measures must then be put in place. These plans contribute to the achievement of air quality limit values at local level.
- 3.15 In 2005 Sandwell was designated as an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) due to exceedances of the National Air Quality Objective for nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), a pollutant which is closely linked with petrol and diesel vehicle emissions. This link was clearly evidenced in 2020 where NO₂ levels dropped by over 20% across the borough due to reduced motor vehicle usage because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Although NO₂ has been on a general downward trend since 2005, some sites still record levels that persist close to or above the national air quality objective. Sandwell Council's Air Quality Action Plan 2020-2025, has identified actions to help improve air quality in the borough, including "implementing a range of measures to promote alternative and sustainable travel" and "encouraging walking, cycling and take up of public transport". The LCWIP clearly supports these measures by creating new transport options that can help avoid a return to pre-pandemic travel patterns and underpins both long term air quality and climate change goals.
- 3.16 The recommendations in this report do not result in the collection or retention of personal data.

4 Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 For each scheme within the BCWWCP, the options considered and the reasons for the recommended option will be set out in the individual approval reports as they are submitted to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Highways.

5 Consultation

- 5.1 A Public Consultation will be carried out for each individual scheme, which will include letter drops at addresses along the proposed routes, user groups, social media posts and in person exhibitions where applicable.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 Most of funding for 'standalone' cycle infrastructure projects comes from CRSTS. This capital allocation will also fund temporary staffing resources as and when required.
- 6.2 All 'on-road' cycle infrastructure and those 'off road' routes that are parts of the public rights of way network form part of the Borough's highway network and the cost of their maintenance is covered by the overall highways maintenance budget. The canal-based routes remain the responsibility of the Canals & Rivers Trust.

7. Legal and Governance Implications

- 7.1 Under s65 (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.
- 7.2 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 s66 (4) of the Highways Act 1980, and a cycle track 'constructed' under s65 (1) of the Act. No physical construction is necessary for the proposals set out in this plan, 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.

8. Risks

- 8.1 There are no Crime and Disorder issues arising from the recommendations set out in this report. Individual projects require Cabinet Member approval and will be subject of risk assessments as part of the approval process. Any resultant implications for crime and disorder will be included in the report.

9. Equality and Diversity Implications (including the public sector equality duty)

- 9.1 As stated in the Black Country Walking, Wheeling and Cycling Plan. Walking and cycling are among the cheapest modes of transport and so help build equality throughout the Black Country as it offers affordable options of travel to employment and higher education which in turn will encourage economic

growth of the borough. The routes and zones identified are spread across the entire sub-region to benefit as many communities as possible.

- 9.2 Where AECOM have identified cycle interventions, the preferred (and costed) options are for segregated provision. Safety and not wanting to mix with traffic is the main barrier given for why people don't cycle. This is especially true for women who make up only 25% of those cycling (Sustrans). Women are also more likely to make 'escort' trips with children (National Travel Survey). Good quality cycle infrastructure is designed to be suitable for a child who has completed their level 2 Bikeability (previously known as Cycling Proficiency). Cycle facilities to schools and colleges provides greater freedom for children, and the ability for families to travel in an active way.
- 9.3 Cycle infrastructure and good walking environments also gives older people, and those with physical disabilities more transport options and greater independence. Cycles are available for almost every type of disability and can act as a mobility aid for those who find walking difficult. Evidence where high quality cycle infrastructure has been built has shown it is often shared with wheelchairs, mobility scooters and other assistive modes of transport.
- 9.4 When considering the recommended interventions for walking, wheeling and cycling, the user hierarchy, as set out in Manual for Streets 2 (20010) has been followed. This considers the most vulnerable user's needs, pedestrians, first, followed by cyclists and then users in motorised forms of transport.
- 9.5 As individual schemes from the BCWWCP are developed they will be subject of Equality Impact Assessments as part of their formulation and the results reported to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Highways to further ensure an inclusive approach, so all groups are considered.

10. Other Relevant Implications

Health and Wellbeing:

- 10.1 Nationally Sandwell is the 12th most deprived local authority out of a total of 326, with unemployment rates at 7.2%, which is higher than both the West Midlands 5.3% and the national average of 3.8%. In Sandwell 34% of households do not have access to a car or van, compared with 25.6% in England and Wales. Limited travel choices and high costs of public transport can limit social mobility by restrict residents from accessing employment, education and services. Sandwell residents that have limited travel choices and sparse resources can be disadvantaged in their aspirations. This has implications for council budgets in terms of benefits, housing, health, social care, and council tax revenue.
- 10.2 In 2020 43.1% of Year 6 children and 77.7% of adults in Sandwell were classified as overweight or obese compared with England averages of 35.2% and 62.8% respectively; levels physical activity and life expectancy were worse than the England average. Obesity and lack of exercise costs the Black Country £37 million a year and data published in 2018 showed Sandwell was the sixth worst area for obese children in the country. The West Midlands on the Move 2017-30 Physical Activity Strategy identifies that nearly two million adults or 29% of the West Midlands population are doing less than 30 minutes

of activity a week. Inactivity is holding back economic growth and the better life chances, raised aspirations and better quality of life and leads to:

- Poorer health
- Less productivity at work
- More isolated society
- Reduced educational attainment

- 10.3 In order to mitigate the health impacts of inactivity in the West Midlands, the LCWIP's aim to provide a working partnership with local authorities and Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) "to create an extensive, safe and coherent network of well-designed off and on-road links connecting key destinations irrespective of administration boundaries to promote walking, cycling and running".

Social Value

- 10.4 The proposed walking and cycling infrastructure Improvements will give communities more travel choice to access employment, education and services.

Climate Change

- 10.5 The BCWWCP will contribute towards the UK governments commitment to become net zero by 2050.

Corporate Parenting

- 10.6 The BCWWP will contribute to the corporate parenting strategy by improving the outcomes for looked after children and care leavers and ensure they have positive experiences in travelling around the borough by walking, wheeling and cycling.

11. Background Documents

[The second cycling and walking investment strategy \(CWIS2\)](#)

[West Midlands Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan](#)

[Sandwell Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan](#)

[Sandwell Trends Data](#)

12. How does this deliver the objectives of the Strategic Themes?

- Growing Up in Sandwell - Create an environment where children and young people can walk and cycle safely and travel in a healthy and sustainable way.
- Living in Sandwell - Create an environment where communities can walk and cycle safely and travel in a healthy and sustainable way.
Create a balanced transport network where communities have travel choice to overcome barriers to accessing education, employment and service.
- Thriving Economy in Sandwell - Decarbonise the region's transport system will create new jobs and opportunities for local people and bolster the fight against climate change Create a walking and cycling network connecting communities to retail, employment, education, service & public transport hubs.

Relevance Check**Budget Reduction/Service Area:****Service Lead****Date:**

In what ways does this Budget reduction have an impact on an outward facing service? How will the service feel different to your customers or potential customers?

N/A

If not, how does it impact on staff e.g. redundancies, pay grades, working conditions? Why are you confident that these staff changes will not affect the service that you provide?

N/A

Is a Customer Impact Assessment needed? No