

**Forward Plan reference no: FP/073/05/21**

<b>Report title:</b> Adoption of the Essex County Council Walking Strategy 2021	
<b>Report to:</b> Cabinet	
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<b>Date:</b> 22 June 2021	<b>For:</b> Decision
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<b>County Divisions affected:</b> All Essex.	

**1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 There are numerous benefits to walking as a mode of transport. Walking improves people's health, reduces traffic congestion, and has environmental and community safety benefits.
- 1.2 This report asks the Cabinet to adopt the Essex County Council (ECC) Walking Strategy 2021 which outlines the actions the Council will take to achieve its strategic priorities around active and more sustainable travel.

**2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 Agree to adopt the proposed ECC Walking Strategy in the form appended to this report.

**3. Summary of issue**

**Background**

- 3.1 Essex County Council is the highway authority for Essex. Some of our towns are congested and traffic levels can be high. This adversely impacts on travel times and on carbon emissions. The Council takes many measures to promote alternatives to using private cars.
- 3.2 If we can increase the proportion of journeys which people undertaken on foot then we will reduce car journeys, carbon emissions, congestion and improve the resilience of our transport networks. It will also result in a more active and resilient population and a safer, greener, healthier environment, bringing public health benefits too.
- 3.3 Promoting and enabling walking can have wider benefits beyond transport, it can help improve access to jobs and skills, higher footfall can contribute

towards a sense of good natural surveillance and safer streets. There are also clear health benefits in terms of improving mental and physical health including increasing physical activity and reducing the risk of heart disease and other non-communicable diseases. Furthermore, increasing walking, particularly if more older people walk regularly, will help achieve the Council's strategic aim of helping more people will to live well for longer.

- 3.4 The aim of the strategy is to highlight the opportunities for walking as a mode of travel for shorter journeys and how increasing walking can help reduce congestion and carbon emissions.
- 3.5 The strategy sets out aims that will help to increase walking, it recognises walking as a mode of travel and provides a context for the emerging Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) which aim to create coherent walking networks and high-quality walking infrastructure over a ten-year period as of increasing walking trips for shorter journeys.
- 3.6 Furthermore, it will provide a coherent set of policies which clearly demonstrate the role of walking in responding to the challenges set out by the Essex Climate Action Commission. It will contribute towards the policy framework which aims to create new Walkable Neighbourhoods and will encourage Healthy and Active environments which enable people to walk to maintain and improve Physical and Mental Health.
- 3.7 Essex County Council's statutory umbrella transportation strategy can be found in its third Local Transport Plan (LTP3), which was formally adopted in July 2011. Often referred to as the Essex Transport Strategy, the LTP3 remains broadly relevant in terms of its vision, the challenges it identifies, the outcomes it seeks and the policy framework within which it exists. There have however been important changes at the council since the adoption of LTP3, with ECC now an outcome-led organisation.
- 3.8 The council has since developed a new Vision for Essex that replaces the previous Essex Works and Corporate Outcomes Framework. The council is also currently developing a new Transport Vision, which will show the various ways in which transport policy can help to deliver the objectives of Vision for Essex. The Transport Vision will also provide an updated strategic context for LTP3 and will be adaptable to a variety of formats.
- 3.9 The emerging Transport Vision, which has not yet been approved, aims to achieve:
  - Greater focus on the need to decarbonise transport.
  - Better communication with the public (including a new website), so that people can more easily understand ECC's transport strategies and responsibilities.
  - Better communication with Government, through providing a clear context for investment.

- More efficient and informed decision-making thanks to a more transparent context.
- A more 'joined-up' framework for transport planning, which links LTP3 to the range of revised plans and strategies adopted since LTP3 was introduced.
- More productive discussions with partners (including district planning authorities, neighbouring transport authorities, Highways England, Network Rail) thanks to a clearer policy framework.
- Greater efficiency and clarity when producing funding bids.

3.10 The Essex Walking Strategy is consistent with this vision in terms of the strategies it suggests both for planning new developments and enhancing existing ones. When finalised, this strategy will therefore be well-positioned for integration with the wider LTP3 vision.

### **The Goals of the Strategy**

3.11 There are nine walking objectives have been identified as part of this strategy, reflecting the fact that walking intersects with so many key aspects of development and planning – including Road Safety, Better Streets, Health, Accessing Schools, Leisure and Greenspace Economy, Planning New Communities and Changing Attitudes and Behaviours.

3.12 The objectives are as follows:

- Objective 1 Increase walking for everyday trips
- Objective 2 Improve road safety for pedestrians
- Objective 3 Better design and enhanced accessibility
- Objective 4 Enable physical activity and walking for health
- Objective 5 Enable more walking to schools
- Objective 6 Promote walking for leisure
- Objective 7 Support economic development
- Objective 8 Improve neighbourhoods and support the development of new communities
- Objective 9 Encourage walking by changing attitudes and behaviours

3.13 ECC's role in helping to achieve these outcomes will be to work alongside partners to support the actions set out in Strategy linked to the emerging Organisational Plan These include:

- Enabling inclusive economic growth by improving access to core walking zones, town centres, high streets and encouraging leisure walks on PRow, country parks and coastal paths.
- Helping people to get the best start in life and to age well by enabling all residents to achieve more active travel, improve road safety and encourage social walking.

- Helping to create great places to grow up, live and work by making walking the norm for short journeys, and develop walking infrastructure in line with DfT guidance to ensure people feel safe.
- Helping the Council to achieve more with less including reduce private car journeys by offering a flexible working approach and using technology to enable modern working styles.

## **Consultation**

- 3.14 The Council consulted on the draft strategy over an 8-week period from 5 June 2019 to 31 July 2019. One comment was that this was not long enough, so the consultation was re-opened from 2 September until 18 October in order to give residents longer to respond. The result of each consultation have been combined into one report. Colchester had the highest number of respondents with 244. Chelmsford and Tendring followed with 172 and 80 respondents respectively. Epping Forest (26) and Harlow (10) had significantly lower response rates than any other location. Over half of the respondents (598) stated that 'leisure' was the main purpose for walking whilst 286 people stating they walk for functional reasons such as walking to work. The main purpose for people walking was to enjoy green spaces with 602 out of 884 doing so at least once a week and 220 of these doing so more than 5 times a week. This was closely followed by going to the shops with 546 people walking for this purpose at least once a week. Natural England made no comment on the strategy. There were a number of additional comments in a table in the appendix.
- 3.15 Responses from district level local authorities highlighted support for the strategy, a willingness for joint working to develop walking infrastructure and networks, on-going maintenance issues and changes to the document were suggested in order to make it easier to read, review some of the background data, improve referencing, format, and structure of the document to provide greater clarity. These points were taken on board and in response and the final version has been amended to improve readability and make the document more coherent and improve accessibility
- 3.16 A number of issues were raised by the public and stakeholders including support for the strategy, issues around footway maintenance, raising the importance of linking new developments to cycle and walking routes. Cycling on footways, the importance of leisure walking and walking in greenspace, issues around the public right of way network, overgrowth on rural footways and the need for enhanced mapping of the network to enable promotion of leisure walks. A summary report of consultation themes and responses is appended to this report.
- 3.17 The key conclusions from the consultation was that over half of the respondents (598) stated that 'leisure' was their main purpose for walking, their main purpose for people walking is to enjoy green spaces and on average 77% of respondents who are Essex residents walk for more than 15 minutes a day. For 10-15-minute distances, 728 out of 884 residents would walk rather than use other modes of transport such as driving.

- 3.18 Responses to the consultation included the top three barriers which prevented people from walking which were: it is easier to drive (7.1%), the roads are too dangerous (5.0%) and joint third at 4.8% is it is too difficult to get to my destination on foot as my end-to-end journey involves multiple trips.
- 3.19 We asked residents 'what would encourage you to walk more?' 52.8% said better maintained footways while 30.5% said more green infrastructure but there were 20.7% that said none of these as they already walk a lot which suggests at least 20% of Essex residents are satisfied with the amount of walking they already do. There was an option to comment 'other' reasons as to what would encourage people to walk more with the most mentioned 'other reason' being fewer cyclists on footways.
- 3.20 The option to drive alone is overwhelmingly preferred when travelling to work/school (preferred by 18%) and when visiting family/friends (preferred by 27%). It is interesting that 26% of people stated that their motivation for walking is because it is the most convenient way to travel however the top barrier which prevents people walking was 'it is easier to drive'.
- 3.21 Colchester, Chelmsford, Rochford and Uttlesford said their top barrier was that it is easier to drive. Colchester and Chelmsford respondents said that it was easier to drive due to the size of the area and residents undertake multiple trips in one go. However, in Rochford and Uttlesford this is due to cyclists using pavements, making walking unsafe and the speed of vehicles - residents said they would like more traffic calming measures in place
- 3.22 The actions to deliver the strategy will continue to be updated as the impacts of the pandemic are better understood e.g. individuals in Essex being less active as a result of working at home, the increased appreciation of green spaces and evolving DfT guidance to ensure that walking and cycling can be undertaken safely. This could be done during formal reviews or as part of ongoing work to ensure that it remains relevant.

## **4 Options**

### **Option 1 – Adopt the ECC Walking Strategy (Recommended Option)**

- 4.1 This is the recommended option given the anticipated benefits that adopting an ECC-owned Strategy developed through internal and external stakeholder engagement will achieve. The Strategy is a way of signalling ECC's ambitions on active travel and updates our policies and ambitions in line with the Department for Transport's Cycling and Walking Strategy (2017) and connects Highways to ECC's revised Organisational Strategy and Green Infrastructure Strategy.

### **Option 2 – Do not adopt the ECC Walking Strategy (not recommended)**

- 4.2 This option would prevent ECC from developing approaches to encourage more active travel (including walking as a mode of travel) delivered in isolation from the ECC's wider ambitions to create healthy communities across the county. This option would not allow for the anticipated benefits of publishing a strategy as outlined in paragraph 4.1.

## 5 Next steps

- 5.1 ECC will work with external partners to monitor progress against the strategic goals and carry out an annual review of progress towards the objectives to ensure it remains relevant. ECC will explore the value in developing joint local strategies and action plans with willing Borough, City and District partners to reflect local context.
- 5.2 ECC will continue to work with ECC officers to ensure the Walking Strategy continues to be aligned with the emerging ECC Organisational Strategy.

## 6 Issues for consideration

### 6.1 Financial implications

- 6.1.1 This Strategy does not commit ECC to any new expenditure, with all current activity included in existing budgets and delivered using existing allocated resources. Any additionality is planned to be funded through the sources outlined in 6.1.2 below. A summary is shown below of future years' budgets as per the Local Authority's Medium-Term Resource Strategy (MTRS).

	2022/23	2023/24
	£	£
<b><u>Revenue</u></b>		
Footways	1,200,000	1,200,000
PROW	900,000	900,000
<b><u>Capital</u></b>		
Footways	7,200,000	7,200,000
PROW	360,000	360,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9,660,000</b>	<b>9,660,000</b>

- 6.1.2 The strategy provides a context for future funding opportunities from government for investment in walking infrastructure. Any new funding bids aligned to this strategy will focus on both the initial infrastructure and any ongoing maintenance implications for the authority going forwards, so as not to create an additional revenue burden on the organisation.

## **6.2 Legal implications**

- 6.2.1 The Council is not required to have a strategy of this nature. The report explains how the strategy will benefit the Council's strategic priorities.
- 6.2.2 Adoption of the strategy does not commit the Council to any future commissioning or spending decisions.

## **7 Equality and Diversity implications**

- 7.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty applies to the Council when it makes decisions. The duty requires us to have regard to the need to:
  - (a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act. In summary, the Act makes discrimination etc. on the grounds of a protected characteristic unlawful.
  - (b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
  - (c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
- 7.2 The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, gender, and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).
- 7.3 The Equality Impact Assessment indicates that the strategy will not have a disproportionately adverse impact on people who share a protected characteristic.
- 7.4 Any new equality and diversity considerations will be considered as part of the annual review and refresh of the action plan.

## **8 List of appendices**

**Appendix 1** Draft Essex County Council Walking Strategy 2021

**Appendix 2** Equality Impact Assessment

**Appendix 3** Consultation summary