

WIRRAL COUNCIL

HIGHWAYS AND TRAFFIC REPRESENTATIONS PANEL

11 SEPTEMBER 2013

SUBJECT:	PETITION & OBJECTIONS: LEVER CAUSEWAY, BEBINGTON - PROPOSED SHARED OFF-ROAD PATH FOR PEDESTRIANS AND CYCLISTS
WARD/S AFFECTED:	BEBINGTON WARD & PRENTON WARD
REPORT OF:	MARK SMITH, HEAD OF ENVIRONMENT & REGULATION
KEY DECISION?	NO

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report considers the receipt of a petition and objections received as a result of proposals to introduce a shared off-road path for pedestrians and cyclists located behind the tree line on the west side of Lever Causeway, Bebington. The report also considers representations of support for the scheme proposals.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

2.1 In April 2013 authority was received from the Cabinet Member for Highways & Transportation and Party Spokespersons to proceed with public consultation for this and a number of other potential Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) schemes, that would ultimately form part of the LSTF programme for 2013/14, prior to full approval by Cabinet, which was subsequently confirmed at its meeting of 13th June 2013.

2.2 The proposed programme of LSTF improvements have been made possible as a result of Wirral Council's successful national funding bid made through the Merseyside Transport partnership (MTP) to the Department for Transport (DfT) to deliver a programme of sustainable transport measures. With the many challenges facing the Council at a time of great austerity, it is particularly important that Wirral has been successful in acquiring this additional funding from Central Government.

2.3 This specific scheme has been designed to improve local cycling and walking infrastructure serving a key east-west commuter route for cyclists, improving access to local employment opportunities, links to tourism sites across the borough and connecting directly into National Cycle Network (NCN) Route 56.

2.5 The scheme itself comprises of a 2.0m off-road shared path for pedestrians and cyclists to be located behind the tree line on the west side of Lever Causeway. To ensure adequate room can be retained for equestrian use alongside the

proposed path some adjacent scrub growth will be removed and a large section of Japanese knotweed will receive long-term treatment to ensure its complete eradication.

- 2.6 Following preliminary scheme design, consultation letters were delivered in early May 2013 to all known potential user groups, including the Wirral Pedestrian Forum, the Wirral Cycle Forum, local Equestrian groups and land-owners. In determining the wider extent of the consultation, all properties in the immediate vicinity of the proposed scheme were consulted and provided with a detailed plan. The draft scheme proposals were also discussed with a local Ward member and a Committee member of the Storeton Residents Association prior to engaging in formal public consultation.
- 2.7 Following public consultation, 10 formal representations in support of the scheme proposals were received and 12 individual objections against. Following receipt of those objections, a formal objection was submitted in writing from all 3 local Ward members. Officers were informed that a Petition against the proposals would be submitted for consideration and a local Ward Member on behalf of lead petitioner and Secretary of the Storeton Residents Association, Mrs G Adgkoke, subsequently presented a 39 signature Petition (from 24 households) at Council on 15th July 2013.

3.0 OBJECTIONS & PETITION

- 3.1 The concerns raised by each individual Objector and Petitioner against the proposals are detailed below together with an Officer response. It should be noted that each individual objection received is also a signatory of the Petition.
- a) Concern has been raised that the scheme is 'not safe' and is a 'safety hazard'.

Pedestrians and cyclists wishing to travel along Lever Causeway currently have little choice other than to negotiate the rough grassed off-road area behind the mature tree line. For several months of the year, ground conditions are such that this is at best a difficult and unpleasant experience for pedestrians and totally impassable for cyclists. As a result, both pedestrians and cyclists are quite literally forced to walk or cycle along the main carriageway. The proposed off-road path will provide a safe and attractive route for both cyclists (particularly the more vulnerable or leisure cyclist) and walkers and a means of avoiding potential conflict with vehicular traffic on Lever Causeway. The proposals have been designed in accordance with current DfT guidelines on Cycle Infrastructure and Design and Sustrans guidance.

- b) It has been suggested that the funding allocated for this scheme should be spent elsewhere or on measures to lower the speed limit on Lever Causeway.

These proposals are funded by the award of a Grant allocation that has only been made possible as a result of Wirral Council's successful national funding bid made through the Merseyside Transport partnership (MTP) to the Department for Transport (DfT) to deliver a

programme of sustainable transport measures designed to improve access to local employment opportunities and links to tourism sites.

Lever Causeway is currently 'derestricted' (60mph) for the greater part of its length, with a 30mph speed limit for traffic through Storeton Village and entering Bebington.

Following new guidance for the setting of local speed limits published by the Department for Transport (DfT), all local authorities were recently tasked with reviewing speed limits on their A and B classified road network. Wirral Council, working alongside independent consultants and Merseyside Police to assess the suitability of existing speed limits, taking into consideration various factors such as road safety history, existing measured speeds, road characteristics and development activity, have recently completed this task. Following this assessment, a number of speed limit recommendations were proposed and subsequently implemented that were based on robust evidence and follow the guiding principles published within DfT guidance.

In addition to this task, Wirral Council took the opportunity to review other local distributor routes with the Speed Limit Review Panel and Merseyside Police. However, using DfT guidance and criteria the decision was taken not to make changes to the existing speed limit or introduce any speed reduction measures along Lever Causeway at the present time. 'Gateway' type speed reducing features are currently in place at the entry into the residential 30mph zones at each end of Lever Causeway and a speed activated warning sign has recently been introduced for drivers approaching the bend adjacent to Little Storeton Lane at the southern end of Lever Causeway.

Notwithstanding this however, in light of concerns raised by residents regarding the speed of traffic, this will be given further consideration as a separate matter to the proposed provision of an off-road shared path for pedestrians and cyclists.

- c) Concern has been raised that the proposals with 'destroy habitat for local wildlife', including in particular, 'bats and bees' and would result in 'further urbanisation of Wirral',**

To ensure an appropriate response to these particular concerns, the Council's Parks Development Officer has been consulted for a professional viewpoint.

It has been confirmed that the scheme does not fall into any area formally designated for its wildlife interest and any impact on biodiversity is not considered to be significant.

Some minor pruning of trees may be necessary to allow clearance for horse riders and a few small-stemmed young trees will need to be

removed. It has been confirmed however that no trees that could provide roosts for bats will be affected by the scheme.

Alongside the current bridleway, the vegetation has been allowed to grow long. This verge, (or field layer) of vegetation includes grasses and a limited variety of flowering plants. Part of this verge - a strip approximately 1m wide - may need to be cut more frequently as a result of the scheme, however there is space to retain a wildlife verge between the new bridle path and the field boundary that will provide a habitat suitable for bees and other invertebrates.

In places along the verge, bramble is forming a dense thicket. Any clearance or trimming of this bramble will be undertaken outside the nesting season to avoid any risk of disturbance to birds and their nests (RSPB define nesting season as from beginning of March to end of August).

Soil disturbance will be kept to a minimum and any disturbed areas will be allowed to re-vegetate naturally. If residents are in agreement it is proposed that the verge could be enhanced with additional planting of wild flowers.

- d) Concern has been raised that the path is too wide and there will be insufficient space to accommodate pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians that will lead to potential conflict between those different user groups.

The proposed path is just 2.0m wide, the minimum recommended in accordance with current DfT and Sustrans guidance on Cycle Infrastructure and Design. It will be located discretely behind the mature tree line and a 2.0m wide grassed area running parallel to the path will also be provided for continued equestrian use.

- e) Concern has been raised that the scheme will result in 'parking problems' and people would come from across the Borough and park outside the objector's property to use the proposed path.

An Officer has discussed this particular concern in detail with the objector. It was explained that the path was not a 'stand alone' leisure facility and that it was designed to serve a key east-west commuter route for cyclists linking into a Borough-wide network of on-road and off-road cycle routes and footpaths.

- f) One objector raised concern that the extent of public consultation process entered into, was not in accordance with that required of the Authority. In accordance with the Council's constitutional process regarding public consultation, all known, potential user groups were formally consulted by Email or letter, including the Wirral Pedestrian Forum, the Wirral Cycle Forum, all local Equestrian groups and adjacent land owners. In determining the wider extent of the consultation, all properties directly fronting or directly adjacent to the proposed scheme were formally consulted by letter.

- g) It has been suggested that the land in question is not in Council ownership.

Council records clearly confirm that the land in question is designated as Adopted Highway.

- h) It is suggested that the scheme is 'not needed', 'not necessary' and 'not wanted':

In response, Officers would advise the Panel that this specific scheme has been designed to improve local cycling and walking infrastructure serving a key east-west commuter route for cyclists, improving access to local employment opportunities, links to tourism sites across the borough connecting directly into National Cycle Network (NCN) Route 56. It is acknowledged that some individuals do not believe the scheme is 'wanted, needed or necessary'. However, it is quite likely that many other potential users who have not had the opportunity to comment would benefit from the schemes implementation.

- i) It is suggested that the scheme will result in 'additional traffic' and an 'increase in crime'.

Whilst these proposals would, by their very nature, be expected to result in an increase in cycle journeys that will continue beyond the proposed path and passing by frontages of a number of properties in Storeton Village; I would respectfully suggest that an increase in crime would not be considered to be a reasonably expected outcome of such journeys.

- j) It is suggested that the scheme is an 'expensive waste of money'.

These proposals form part of a programme of LSTF improvements that have only been made possible as a result of Wirral Council's successful national funding bid made through the Merseyside Transport partnership (MTP) to the Department for Transport (DfT) to deliver a programme of sustainable transport measures.

- k) For information, I would also advise Panel that a number of signatories have simply stated that they are 'against' the proposals with no further explanation.

4.0 REPRESENTATIONS OF SUPPORT

- 4.1 The content of each of the 10 formal representations of support for the scheme proposals so far received are as follows;

- a) The Secretary of the CTC National Cycling Charity (on behalf of 50+ members) - who states that **Lever Causeway is part of a busy cycling commuter route** and reiterates the fact that they have **lobbied via the Wirral Cycle Forum for safety improvements for cyclists using Lever Causeway for several years.**

- b) The Secretary on behalf of Merseyside Cycling Campaign (MCC) - who states that **the proposals will provide a safe and attractive route and a means of avoiding the many dangers faced by cyclists using Lever Causeway.**
- c) The Secretary on behalf of Wirral Cycling Campaign (WCC) - who states that **the WCC have long considered that cycling along Lever Causeway is unsafe both for individual cyclists as well as cycling in a group and that the proposals would form an important link for cyclists between east and west Wirral.**
- d) A Wirral Cycle Forum member - who feels that **improvements to the causeway are long overdue as walkers, cyclists and horse riders have all experienced problems.**
- e) Another Wirral Cycle Forum member - who is concerned that Lever Causeway is **one of the most dangerous roads in Wirral for cyclists** and welcomes the proposals to **promote safer cycling in Wirral and help create a safer environment.**
- f) A member of the National Cycling Charity (CTC) - who highlights that **Lever Causeway is a busy cycle commuter route and connects well with the National Cycle Network (NCN route 56) and the proposals to provide an off-road shared path have the potential to save lives and serious injuries.**
- g) An adjacent land-owner - who has expressed **wholehearted support** for the proposals.
- h) A resident of Storeton Village - who states that **a path for both cyclists and pedestrians is very much needed as currently Lever Causeway is nothing more than a death trap for all who use it.**
- i) Another resident of Storeton Village - who wishes to disassociate himself from the views expressed by some residents of Storeton Village and thinks the proposals are a **great idea that offer long-term improvements to the area with no cost to Wirral Council.**
- j) Another resident of Storeton Village - **who simply states that the scheme seems to be an excellent idea.**

5.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1 Consideration was given to locating the proposed facility on the opposite (south-east) side of Lever Causeway behind the mature tree line. However, to eliminate the need for cyclists and pedestrians to cross both Marsh Lane and Lever Causeway (adjacent to Little Storeton Lane) should they wish to continue their journey off-road along Landican Lane, this option was discounted on road safety grounds.
- 5.2 Consideration was also given to the provision of an on-road cycle lane in each direction along Lever Causeway. The available carriageway width (6.9m

average) however is insufficient and any such scheme would not cater for pedestrians.

- 5.3 Consideration was also given to the provision of an off-road shared path for pedestrians and cyclists positioned between the kerbside and the mature tree line. The construction of such a path would however risk substantial and potentially irreparable damage to the tree roots system, be visually intrusive and ultimately a potentially far less safe option.

6.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 6.1 Due to the impending conclusion of Wirral Council's current Highway Term Maintenance Contract and associated demobilisation of the workforce, there is a risk that it may not be possible to develop and deliver a replacement scheme within the contractual financial timescales for 2013/14 LSTF Grant funded schemes with a potential resultant loss of up to £110,000 of 2013/14 LSTF grant funding to the Authority.
- 6.2 Any such failure in delivery of 2013/14 LSTF grant funded schemes within those contractual financial timescales may also introduce a risk to securing the full indicative grant funding allocation of £676,000 for the 2014/15 programme of LSTF schemes.
- 6.3 Failure to undertake the proposed scheme would also result in a lost opportunity to address key LSTF and LTP3 Objectives to encourage sustainable transport and reduce carbon emissions, drive economic growth and improve health in line with the Council's Corporate Goals and Objectives and to ensure that Wirral's roads are safe and well maintained by reducing the number of people killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents.

7.0 CONSULTATION

- 7.1 As part of the consultation exercise for this scheme, letters were delivered to local residents directly fronting or adjacent to the proposed path informing them of the proposals. In addition, consultation was undertaken with Party Spokespersons, local Ward Members, Wirral Cycle Forum, Wirral Pedestrian Forum, local Equestrian Groups and adjacent landowners.
- 7.2 Following receipt of the objections, further correspondence between the objectors, local Ward Members and Council Officer's were undertaken to discuss the concerns raised.

8.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

- 8.1 There are no specific implications under this heading arising from this report.

9.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

- 9.1 The budget allocation for this scheme based on initial estimates is £110,000, financed from the 2013/14 Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) grant allocation. Current projections indicate that the total scheme costs are expected to be around £142,000. The projected additional £32,000 funding allocation

required will be financed from current projected under-spend on the 2013/14 Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) grant allocation. Should the current projected under-spend be insufficient to cover the projected additional £32,000 required, funding will be brought forward from the approved 2014/15 Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) grant allocation of £676,000.

9.2 Existing staff resources will be utilised in the progression of this scheme.

10.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no implications under this heading.

11.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The proposed scheme to provide a shared off-road path for pedestrians and cyclists was included within the Local Sustainable Transport Fund 2013/14 programme approved by Cabinet on 13th June 2013, for which an Equalities Impact Assessment has already been undertaken.

12.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

12.1 The scheme will assist cyclist and pedestrian movements and thereby support a reduction on reliance upon the private motor vehicle and therefore assist in reducing the Borough's overall carbon footprint - key aims within the Merseyside Local Transport Plan and Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) objectives.

13.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

13.1 There are no implications under this heading arising from the recommendation of this report.

14.0 RECOMMENDATION

14.1 The report recommends that the Panel note the representations made and, on the basis that officers conclude the benefits of the scheme as shown in drawing no. DR&E/4/13 attached outweigh the objections raised, recommend to the Regeneration & Environment Policy and Performance Committee that the scheme is approved for implementation.

15.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION

15.1 These proposals will improve local cycling and walking infrastructure serving a key east-west commuter route for cyclists, improving access to local employment opportunities, links to tourism sites across the borough and connect directly into National Cycle Network (NCN) Route 56. They will also provide a safe and attractive route for both cyclists and walkers and a means of avoiding the many dangers faced using Lever Causeway.

15.2 The provision of cycling and pedestrian crossing facilities also help to reduce congestion and pollution, encourage everyday exercise and enough children and other vulnerable highway users to be more active and healthy.

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APPENDICES

Drawing no. **DR&E/4/13** indicating the proposed layout of the shared off-road path for pedestrians and cyclists.

REFERENCE MATERIAL

Letters, Emails and a Petition from residents objecting to the scheme and in support of the scheme, have been used in the preparation of this report.

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Cabinet - Local Sustainable Transport 2013/14 programme	15 th June 2013