

**Meeting date:** 28<sup>th</sup> May 2020  
**Report to:** Cabinet Member for Environment & Highways  
**Subject/report title:** COVID19 – Emergency Walking & Cycling Measures  
**Report from:** Head of Highway Management  
**Report author/lead contact officer:** Paul Tovey / David Keaney



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**Wards affected:**

- All Wards |  Bickenhill |  Blythe |  Castle Bromwich |  Chelmsley Wood |  
 Dorridge/Hockley Heath |  Elmdon |  Kingshurst/Fordbridge |  Knowle |  
 Lyndon |  Meriden |  Olton |  Shirley East |  Shirley South |  
 Shirley West |  Silhill |  Smith's Wood |  St Alphege

**Public/private report:** Public

**Exempt by virtue of paragraph:** Select an Exemption paragraph from the Quick Parts drop-down list

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**1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To comment on the draft COVID19 Active Travel Strategy and consider implementing an emergency programme of cycling and walking measures to aid social distancing and access to local employment, schools and retail facilities.

**2. Decision(s) recommended**

- 2.1 Cabinet Member is asked to:
- (a) Consider and approve the draft COVID19 Active Travel Strategy as set out in Appendix A,
  - (b) Approve, subject to successfully securing Government funding, the implementation of the 23 temporary cycling and walking schemes as detailed in Appendix B,
  - (c) Agree that the schemes associated with cycling and walking set out in Appendix C, should be subject to further consultation / consideration, and
  - (d) Agree to receive a further update on the temporary measures at the Environment and Highways Decision-making session in September 2020.

### **3. Matters for Consideration**

- 3.1 The Government announced recently that it will fund and work with local authorities across the country to help make it easier for people to walk and use bikes to get around. In support of this objective, the Department for Transport further announced that a £2 billion pound investment package will be forthcoming for measures to promote and support safe active modes of sustainable travel.
- 3.2 As part of this programme's first phase, and in specific response to the on-going COVID19 movement restrictions, further advice has been issued to suggest that measures such as pop-up cycle lanes with protected space for cycling, wider pavements, safer junctions, and cycle and bus-only corridors will be created in England within weeks as part of a £250 million emergency active travel fund.
- 3.3 At the time of drafting this report details had not been released by Government in respect of how the funding would be allocated (it is expected that an update will be provided at the meeting).
- 3.4 Initially, the type of examples being discussed focused on the problems being experienced around the world in areas of high population density including major cities. In these locations, large numbers of pedestrians and cyclists could be seen competing for limited space adjacent to areas of often empty carriage following the introduction of restrictions associated with the virus.
- 3.5 In a relatively short period of time, it became apparent that the social distancing problems being experienced are more wide spread and could equally apply to much lower levels of usage in confined parts of the public realm.
- 3.6 The subject of this report is, therefore, how the Council should respond quickly to the types of problems occurring in Solihull which include:
- Queuing on the public highway whilst waiting to access food, medical and other essential supplies.
  - Increased numbers of essential workers travelling to and from their place of work either on foot or bicycle as a result of concerns over the use of public transport.
  - Concerns over parents and carers waiting to collect children on narrow footways at the end of the school day, when they re-open in early June.
  - The potential for increased levels of short term private car usage following government messaging around the use and availability of public transport.
  - Groups of passengers waiting to access local bus services, and
  - More people and families cycling to work or for their daily exercise / leisure activity.
- 3.7 The subject of reallocating road space, on a temporary basis, has been promoted as an opportunity for not only providing additional space to help people cycle and walk safely, but also provide additional capacity from which to promote and encourage more sustainable modes of transport which bring with them a range of health and well-being benefits.

- 4. What options have been considered and what is the evidence telling us about them?**
- 4.1 The demand for such measures has very much been driven by the Government recognising that despite all of the negative issues associated with the Coronavirus, the increase in the amount of people travelling either on bicycle or on foot has the potential to change future travel behaviours for the better in the short, medium and longer term, producing better air quality alongside a range of other health and well-being benefits.
- 4.2 In response to the Government's initiative, the Council's draft Emergency Active Travel Strategy (see in Appendix A), has been prepared for comment and to facilitate further discussion on how best to maximise the potential benefits of helping people to travel more sustainably. This strategy will form the basis of the Council's initial response and is aligned to the Government's phased recovery plan. It is expected that this will be a live document, which should be published on the internet to share with our stakeholders and residents both the scale of the task and the type of interventions being proposed.
- 4.3 This document will be part of a suite of strategy documents required to reset how transport will be managed during the COVID19 recovery phase and beyond. They will underpin the services provided to support the Council's new priorities but focused on Economic Recovery and the Growth Agenda, our Climate Change Prospectus and Air Quality Action Plan. These will also lead into further opportunities for Active Travel schemes as and when the Government release details relating to the rest of the £2billion investment programme they announced recently.
- 4.4 However, the Council can't make these changes on its own. To be successful the public needs to support this movement for change, and be prepared to travel differently throughout the whole year in future. In addition to the national information campaigns, one of the first options will be to reinforce and remind residents of the key social distancing requirements and the public health messages across all of our Town and Village Centres where high volumes of people are expected to visit in the coming weeks. It is proposed that this element of the plan is commenced immediately, in advance of confirmation of any COVID19 grant award, due to the need and importance of these measures being in place in time for the planned reopening of schools.
- 4.5 The Council's response could stop there, with a complimentary and comprehensive communication plan and simply expect the public to follow the latest travel guidance. Local people will always need to take responsibility for their own actions when travelling around the 1,000 km of public realm in the Borough, but it is recognised they may need some support in certain places.
- 4.6 Following the recent announcements, potential problem sites and safety concerns have been raised by members of our local communities. These requests, which include a request for improved cycle signage on Warwick Road at Knowle, and the provision of further cycle facilities associated with school journeys have been brought together alongside a a range of proposals prepared by the Highway Management Team to create a programme of recommended schemes. It is suggested that if implemented quickly, these measures could reduce the perceived safety risks and

help to sustain the move towards more people travelling sustainable throughout the year. The clear message here is that any measures need to also have potential for a longer term benefit in support of the Council's Climate Change Prospectus and developing Clean Air Strategy.

- 4.7 The associated COVID19 Emergency Travel Measures Action Plan is set out in Appendix B. The plan prioritises 24 priority schemes likely to provide benefits to the greatest number of road users in Solihull. In developing the priorities, officers have applied their detailed knowledge of how the highway network is performing at the present time, and considered schemes that must be capable of being delivered immediately; alignment to the funding objectives and feedback received from local residents.
- 4.8 It is recognised that several of the schemes may prove challenging to deliver as they will result in significant change to the existing network and how it is used. However, in the current climate and with the known changes to many peoples' travel behaviours, schemes that reduce road space for the bus and other motor vehicles are now considered by some, as the right thing to do; however, others may oppose these measures, particularly those who rely on driving motor vehicles and who may experience additional congestion at peak times. Whilst the option of giving a higher priority and additional space to those cycling and walking is important, the Government messages of promoting the need to continue working from home, for those that can, should continue to be encouraged and promoted locally, so that in turn, agile working from home will continue to help reduce congestion levels and improve Air Quality in the borough.
- 4.9 To be clear, the proposed interventions are planned to be temporary at this stage, and will be monitored, amended or removed depending on their impact and in line with the Government's phased recovery plan as this is implemented over the coming weeks.
- 4.10 The anticipated amount of Government funding available to Solihull, is unlikely to be sufficient to respond to every concern around the Borough, and therefore, the suggested first phase of the Action Plan contains a range of temporary schemes to trial and demonstrate just what may be possible in the new post COVID19 world, and these include:
- **Provision of social distancing messaging** across the borough. These will be in the form of footway stencilling and signage in areas of high footfall across the borough including in town and village centres, transport interchanges and public parks.
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  - **Widening existing cycle lanes** that will provide a safer space for these vulnerable road users and create narrower lanes with lower traffic speeds.
  - **Closure of on-street parking spaces**, relocating parking into the adjacent off-street car parks and allowing walking and cycling to take place safely in these car free environments.
  - **Road closures to motor vehicles** in local centres to create wider pavements for customers to queue in safety; allow pedestrians to pass and

comply with the social distancing advice. Longer term, such measures may help to transform and rejuvenate local centres, reducing noise and air pollution whilst potentially providing more hospitality space for pavement cafes. Whilst allowing cycling through the closures, traffic will be diverted to access nearby parking space or to continue their onward journey.

- **One-way traffic systems** – The road network in Solihull is broadly structured around a “wheel and spoke” design, which has several arterial routes converging in the Town Centres and Birmingham City Centre. This design isn’t well suited to a large scale one-way network like the alternative “Grid” street design, but there are some limited opportunities to trial this option in the plan.

- 4.11 At this stage the available funding is unknown, the suggested Action Plan as set out in Appendix B, is shown in draft priority order. The actual cost of each scheme will also depend on how long they remain in operation. The initial set up and removal costs have been estimated, based on current contract rates. Whilst the on-going weekly maintenance costs are also known, the expected duration is less certain. For cost estimating purposes an assumption has been used that the measures may be in place for up to 6 months. Should the temporary measures be required for a long period then the costs shown in the plan will increase.
- 4.12 Some of these schemes will require the support of a temporary traffic regulation order and it is suggested that the orders should be set to the maximum permissible time period of 18 months. This approach will reduce legal costs and the orders can be revoked at any time to coincide with the outcome of the associated monitoring. Because the Council will be using its temporary highway management powers to implement these scheme there will be no formal consultation, but they will be supported with a full communications plan to ensure as many road users and residents as possible are aware of the proposals.
- 4.13 To overcome the lack of prior engagement, there will be a mechanism put in place to capture feedback after the schemes have been implemented via the Council’s website. Any views received will then be used to help inform the monitoring and evaluation stage of the project and form part of the next monitoring report planned to take place in September.
- 4.14 In addition to the engagement referenced above, a full communications plan will be developed in partnership with the Councils Communications Team utilising social media, highway variable message signage and the Councils web portal. These will be used to promote latest guidance and ensure members of the travelling public are kept up to date and aware of the measures being implement by the Council in response to the current situation. As part of this process we will also utilise and promote the One.Network portal to provide up to date information on the network.
- 4.15 It is suggested that the schemes contained in the Action Plan ( Appendix B) provide a balanced response that will initially help support the need for people to keep 2m apart whilst the Social Distancing advice remains active; promote and support people who wish to travel safely on sustainable modes of transport and work towards the Council’s objectives which are set out in the Climate Change Prospectus and Clean Air Strategy.

4.16 In addition, a number of other more localised cycling and walking projects and services have also been promoted since the announcement of this funding opportunity was announced. These schemes are captured in Appendix C and either require further consideration or are not as well aligned to the funding objectives. Therefore at this stage, it is recommended that these should not progress at this stage and be subject to further consideration and updates provided in the next Cabinet report.

**5. Reasons for recommending preferred option**

- 5.1 The draft Emergency Active Travel strategy at Appendix A, sets out the Council’s initial response to the COVID19 situation and is expected to be a live document that will need to be updated in line with the latest government advice and local need. The document provides a position statement in all of the key areas of Active Travel and is structured in line with the Government’s phased recovery plan.
- 5.2 Whilst it will be necessary for the majority of essential journeys to be taken in accordance with the general Social Distancing advice, it is recommended that the proposed Action Plan provides a balanced response and includes opportunities to support local communities and demonstrate the type of changes in travel behaviours that are at the centre of the strategy and may be required longer term. Subject to the review and recommended approval by Cabinet Member, the final version of the strategy document will then be published on the Council’s website.
- 5.3 The impact of the main schemes will be appropriately monitored. There will not be time to carry out wide spread traffic modelling and therefore, it is recommended that a more outcome focused monitoring process is developed appropriate to each scheme.
- 5.4 Results from monitoring and feedback from the local communities will then be used to determine the next steps and way forward. It is also recommended that a further monitoring report should be produced after an initial 3 month period, thereby providing sufficient time to consider whether the individual projects need to be modified, extended or removed.
- 5.5 Should there be a need to take action sooner, it is further recommended that such decision should be made by the Head of Highway Management in consultation with the Cabinet Member, which is in accordance with the Council’s existing Scheme of Delegation.
- 5.6 It is suggested that reporting back in 3 months’ time will enable the impact of each scheme to have been evaluated, receive feedback from the local communities and ward members and all be brought together in a report at the scheduled meeting in September.

**6. Implications and Considerations**

6.1 How the proposals in this report contribute to the delivery of Council Plan priorities:

Priority:	Contribution:
Securing inclusive economic growth.	The measures are proposed to support people having access to local facilities. How quickly the

	local economy recovers will be key to then moving forward with the Council's economic growth programmes.
Planning & delivery for Solihull's low carbon future (to include biodiversity implications).	The measures to support more people cycling and walking is at the heart of the Low Carbon agenda and the recommendations in this report have the potential to help drive the type of changes necessary.
Managing demand and expectation for public services.	The Action Plan is considered to be an appropriate balanced response to how best to use the Government's recent funding announcement. There may be a need to consider future phases of the Action Plan depending on the duration of the recovery phase and public reaction.
Developing our approach to services for adults and children with complex needs.	Not applicable.
Making the best use of our people and physical assets.	The additional financial support from Government has provided a means for bringing these temporary measures forward.

## 6.2 Consultation and Scrutiny:

6.2.1 Due to the current COVID19 restrictions no consultation or oversight by the Scrutiny Board has taken place. It is proposed to use the Council's highway management powers to introduce these proposals, initially on a temporary basis, and should any permanent changes be considered necessary, then these will be subject to the statutory Traffic Regulation Order consultation process.

## 6.3 Financial implications:

6.3.1 The total costs of all of the individual potential schemes detailed in Appendix B are estimated to be £1.429million and are based on the measures being installed and maintained for an initial 6 month period.

6.3.2 Early indications suggest that the Council might expect to receive funding from the initial £250million of the Government's first phased allocation from the £2billion walking and cycling investment plan.

6.3.3 Priorities 1 and 2 from Appendix B are required to be progressed prior to receipt of any funding referenced above at 6.3.2 in order for key cycling and walking lining and signing intervention measures to be in place at the earliest opportunity to aid social distancing and access to local employment, schools and retail facilities. In the event that the funding is not forthcoming, the £16,000 costs of these will be incorporated into the Council's monitoring of the financial impact to the Council of COVID19.

6.3.4 There are no additional financial implications associated with the schemes set out in Appendix C, other than the cost of officers' time, which will be funded from existing Highway Management revenue budgets, to support the on-going consideration and evaluation processes.

**6.4 Legal implications:**

6.4.1 None as a result of the recommendations in the report.

**6.5 Risk implications:**

6.5.1 Making changes to how the public highway is used will come with safety risk and these will very much depend on the level of compliance and road users' behaviours.

6.5.2 Which the additional walking and cycling activity is welcomed, it should be noted that this may come with an additional risk of an increased number of road traffic collisions involved our most vulnerable road users.

6.5.3 To minimise these risks all of these schemes will be monitored and reviewed by our Highway Management Team. Nevertheless, without the introduction of such measures the risks may be higher.

6.5.4 The financial risks will be managed through the regular and well established monitoring process already in place with our colleagues in the Finance Team.

**6.6 Equality implications:**

6.6.1 None expected as the schemes

**7. List of appendices referred to**

7.1 Appendix A – Draft Emergency Active Travel Response

7.2 Appendix B – Action Plan of temporary cycling and walking schemes.

**8. Background papers used to compile this report**

8.1 Government advice papers.

**9. List of other relevant documents**

9.1 None.