

# MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

## **EXECUTIVE REPORT**

### SINGLE MEMBER EXECUTIVE DECISION

**Public Rights of Way Infrastructure Plan 2014 - 2024**

**Executive Member for Regeneration: Councillor Charles Rooney**

**Executive Director Economic Development and Communities: Kevin Parkes**

**30<sup>th</sup> June 2014**

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### PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to take the general actions recommended within the Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan and set out a ten-year infrastructure plan to achieve this. This will take advantage of funding opportunities as they arise as well as programmed works through the Local Transport Plan allocations.

### SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

2. The Executive Member for Regeneration is recommended to approve the ten-year Public Rights of Way Infrastructure Plan as outlined in the report.

### IF THIS IS A KEY DECISION WHICH KEY DECISION TEST APPLIES?

3. It is over the financial threshold (£150,000)  
It has a significant impact on 2 or more wards  
Non Key

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

### DECISION IMPLEMENTATION DEADLINE

4. For the purposes of the scrutiny call in procedure this report is

Non-urgent  
Urgent report

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

If urgent please give full reasons

## **BACKGROUND AND EXTERNAL CONSULTATION**

### **Background**

5. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 required all Councils to develop a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) by November 2007 that would consider local rights of way (defined as including cycle tracks) in the context of:
  - the present and likely future needs of the public;
  - opportunities for exercise and other forms of open air recreation; and,
  - accessibility to the network for blind or partially sighted people and those with mobility problems.
6. The ROWIP is required to be fully integrated into the Local Transport Plan. It is also intended to be the mechanism for improving the network of public rights of way and other non-motorised routes in light of the needs of all types of users. The rights of way network is an integral part of the wider transport infrastructure and through the implementation of the ROWIP and its action plan the Council hopes to improve the health and quality of life of its citizens.
7. Despite Middlesbrough being a mainly urban area, there are many open spaces and beck valleys that percolate the town. Many residents who live on the urban fringe have easy access to the countryside on their doorstep. A well maintained and well promoted public rights of way network is of value to people who live in Middlesbrough as well as those who visit.
8. Good quality rights of way will encourage walking leading to positive impacts on different groups in society. These include:
  - a) Health benefits (see paragraph 17-21 for more details);
  - b) Improved accessibility for employment and facilities;
  - c) Better quality of life for residents
9. Since 1999 significant progress has been made towards bringing the physical condition of the existing network up to an acceptable standard, whilst also attempting to ensure that Rights of Way are legally defined, correctly maintained and well publicised. However, despite all of these improvements, very few new rights of way have been created and there remains 160 km of unrecorded rights of way that have yet to be added to the Definitive Map. As such, these rights of way are at risk of being lost.
10. The Public Rights of Way Network in Middlesbrough still needs considerable investment to optimise benefits. A recent review of the Definitive Map and a survey of the recorded network identified many anomalies and long standing obstructions, along with large gaps in the recorded PROW network; all of which act as a barrier to people who regularly use the PROW network.

### **What we hope to achieve**

11. The ten year infrastructure plan draws on the objectives set out in the ROWIP and aims to increase walking levels within Middlesbrough by the following means:-

- Formally record on the Definitive Map 60Km of paths that cross Council land and which are currently under the Council's maintenance responsibility. An outline list of these unrecorded routes is shown in the table in appendix A and illustrated on Map 1 in appendix D. These routes could easily be recorded in a short space of time and at very little cost, and in doing so it would have a significant impact on the network.
  - Provide suitable routes and promote walking as a viable method for commuting to work including for easy walking access to public transport networks, thus promoting sustainable travel. Works would include the provision of infrastructure, signage of routes and furniture.
  - Provide a connected network and well publicised routes for recreation. These new routes will connect with locations within Middlesbrough, neighbouring local authorities and the North York Moors National Park. An outline list of these new routes is shown in the table in Appendix B and illustrated on Map 1 in Appendix D.
  - Improve the quality of specific existing rights of way to encourage greater use. An outline list of these routes is shown in the table in appendix C.
  - Investigate the 160 km of unrecorded rights of way, record paths where appropriate and provide signage where required.
12. Through the creation of a walking strategy and improvement in the infrastructure, it is hoped that walking will become the first choice for local journeys and together with public transport, a part of longer ones. People will be regularly walking along high quality, safe routes to work, school, the shops, for leisure and recreation. This shall result in reductions in vehicle traffic that lead to less congestion and emissions affecting local air quality, road safety, health and quality of life. All of which will contribute to achieving the Council's objectives and meeting the Mayors 2020 vision of a healthy, safe and clean town.
13. In order to realise the objectives set out in the ROWIP and increase walking levels within Middlesbrough, the existing network needs investment. It is intended that by addressing the missing links and surface defects and by improving the signage and furniture, a seamless network will be created that will be fit for purpose. Some of the goals contained within the ROWIP and the key targets within the action plan have been achieved, but many have been changed to long-term goals and hindered by reduced funding opportunities.

### **Strategic Approach**

14. The plan takes a strategic approach in delivering pedestrian improvements and establishes key links to the main town attractions, areas of employment and proposed development sites.
15. Our vision is to promote and support healthy, active and liveable communities throughout Middlesbrough through the provision of safe walking opportunities for all to enjoy and to encourage everyone to include walking as part of their daily lives.

16. Priority for investment will be given to those routes which form part of our identified strategic network (see maps 2 and 3). These will help contribute towards wider objectives and form a comprehensive and coherent network of high quality, multi use routes.

### **Health & Financial Benefits**

17. Walking is one of the best activities you can do for a healthy physical and mental body. Walking is a gentle, low-impact form of exercise that's easy, free and suitable for people of all ages and abilities. Unlike other forms of activities walking is the simplest form of social activities, walking in groups, especially, improves people's social well-being. Health benefits include:-
- It strengthens your heart;
  - It lowers disease risk;
  - It keeps weight in check;
  - It can help prevent dementia and osteoporosis;
  - It tones your legs bum and tum;
  - Boosts vitamin d levels;
  - Gives you energy;
  - It makes you happy;
18. Middlesbrough has a worse than average public health problem in terms of obesity, type 2 diabetes and coronary heart disease and Cancer to name a few. One way that we can assist in reducing the impact of these problems is physical activity. By encouraging walking and making it more accessible, the associated physical activity can go some way to decreasing the negative impact upon the National Health Service by acting as a preventative measure.
19. The recent information released by the Department for Transport on 'Local Area Walking and Cycling Statistics' in England during 2012/2013 indicate that nationally 86% of adults walk at least once per month and of these 44% walk at least 5 times a week and 77% walk at least once a week. The statistics further suggest that 43% of adults walk for 10 minutes at least once per week recreationally, and 47% do so for commuting purposes.
20. A comparison of the figures for Middlesbrough with national and regional averages, and those with the adjacent local authorities in the Tees Valley has been undertaken. This shows that 80% of adults walk at least once per month, which is less than the National and Regional averages and ranks us 5th in the Tees Valley, but by looking at the proportion of residents who walk 5 times per week for at least 10 minutes it can be seen that adults in Middlesbrough walk more frequently at 43%, and although this is lower than the regional and national averages it is the highest of the 5 Tees Valley Authorities.
21. A more detailed assessment reveals that 21% of those who walk 5 times a week do so for commuting purposes which is higher than both the National and Regional averages and is higher than the rest of the Tees Valley. However, 15% walk 5 times a week for recreational purposes which is lower than the National and Regional averages and is the lowest in the Tees Valley.

22. One interpretation of this difference is that due to the urban nature of the town and the good urban network of walking routes this encourages walking for commuting purposes. Additionally, the town has relatively low car ownership and its topography is fairly flat. However because the currently recorded recreational network is fragmented and some parts are in a poor condition it discourages walking for recreational purposes.

## **OPTION APPRAISAL**

### **IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IA)**

23. A walker, as a vulnerable road user, will gain increased safety through the adoption of the 10-year plan. As more walkers are encouraged to use the network, the increased safety in numbers will also become beneficial.
24. All proposed schemes would comply with Disability Discrimination Act legislation, ensuring that vulnerable people would not be impacted upon negatively.

### **CONSULTATION AND IMPLEMENTATION**

25. Individual proposals will be consulted upon in detail as funding is confirmed, through the normal design and community consultation process for such schemes.
26. The proposals within this report go a long way to meeting/achieving many of the actions within the ROWIP's action plan.

### **FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS**

#### Financial

27. Some schemes will be funded from the Local Transport Plan capital allocations. Funding levels will need to be determined annually based on competing transport priorities. Additionally, opportunities will be sought through the planning process and other funding opportunities as they arise to deliver schemes over a shorter period of time.
28. It is accepted that with the increase in the number of paths recorded that there will be an increase in the cost of maintaining the rights of way network. However it is planned to minimise the potential cost increase by using other sources to carryout the work such as, probation services, volunteers and also Askham Bryan College.

#### Ward Implications

29. The proposed PROW infrastructure programme is aimed across all wards, allowing a large proportion of residents to benefit from improved accessibility and health.

#### Legal Implications

30. The necessary traffic regulation order changes will be progressed for each scheme as required.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

31. It is recommended that: -

- The Executive Member for Regeneration approves the 10-year PROW infrastructure plan as outlined in the report.

## **REASONS**

32. In many areas, local rights of way help to boost tourism and improve the health of residents. The local rights of way can also provide a convenient means of travelling, particularly for short journeys, in urban areas.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

33. The following background papers were used in preparing this report:-  
-The local area walking and cycling statistics England 2012-13  
- Walking statistics table

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