

**19 November, 2020**

NCN5 Better Streets Project Update

**Ward(s):** Pelsall, Rushall-Shelfield, St. Matthews

**Portfolios:** Councillor A Andrew – Deputy Leader and Regeneration

**1. Aim**

The NCN5 Better Streets Project provides a response to a community petition, calling for improvements to complement the National Cycle Network Route 5 (NCN5), in north Walsall. The Better Streets Community Fund, has provided Walsall Council with the opportunity to take some of these improvements forward, for implementation in summer 2021. This report builds on the initial NCN5 cycle route report taken to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2019, and provides an update on the progress made by Walsall Council since the report was published. Since that time, national COVID-19 restrictions have impacted on the scheme development and delivery programme, which has been amended accordingly.

**2. Recommendations**

That the committee note the ongoing work by Walsall Council to deliver improvements to National Cycle Network Route 5 (NCN5), between Pelsall and Walsall Town Centre, using funding from the West Midlands 'Better Streets Community Fund'.

**3. Report**

**Walsall Community Petition**

- 1.1. A petition was received by Walsall Council, with over 1,000 signatures, requesting a marked, safe route from the National Cycle Network Route 5 (NCN5) at Ryecroft Cemetery, on-street to Walsall Town Centre – see Appendix A. Additional improvements included a cycle crossing at Harden Road/Station Road in Rushall, as well as modified anti-motorcycle P-barriers, to make the cycle route more accessible for various users.

**Better Streets Community Funding**

- 2.1. In 2019, The West Midlands Mayor and Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) launched a 'Better Streets Community Fund' to help improve local streets, by making them better places to live and move about in. Across the West Midlands, £2 million was made available for community-led projects, which made it easier for people to walk and cycle.

- 2.2. Several proposals were put forward for Better Streets Community Funding in the Walsall area, including a bid which was in line with the community petition. Initial assessment of the various bids, by officers at the local authorities and TfWM, concluded that this bid, alongside several other bids, was worthy of further consideration from Walsall Council.

### **NCN5 Better Streets Project**

- 3.1. Walsall Council were awarded a funding allocation from the Better Streets Fund, in order to develop and deliver two 'Better Streets' schemes, aimed at improving cycling and pedestrian facilities for local communities, with a focus on improving accessibility to cycle networks.
- 3.2. This report covers one of those schemes, which is focused on delivering improvements on and around National Cycle Network Route 5 (NCN5). Walsall Council anticipates that the improvements outlined below will be delivered by the end of August 2021 (or before), to ensure maximum usage over the summer period.
- 3.3. The NCN5 Better Streets project aims to improve the cycle route between Pelsall and Walsall Town centre/Arboretum utilising parts, or all, of the NCN5 cycle route. The cycle route should be accessible for all users. The project scope is as follows:
- Improve the highway crossing over Harden Road on the NCN5.
  - Improve the cycle route between Ryecroft Cemetery and Walsall Town Centre.
  - Install modified P-barriers at approved locations on the NCN5.
- 3.4. There is currently one option being explored for Harden Road, which includes a raised table and/or a Tiger crossing, as well as additional traffic calming measures. There are three possible cycle route options for the section of NCN5 between Ryecroft Cemetery and Walsall Town Centre/Arboretum. All of three of the cycle route options and the improved crossing are explored in more detail below.

### **Harden Road Crossing Improvements**

- 4.1. The location of the Harden Road crossing is mapped in Appendix B. The proposal is to install a raised table and/or a Tiger crossing at the road crossing, on the NCN5 route, to control traffic speeds. Further traffic calming measures are also being explored either side of the crossing, to try and further improve road safety. For example, increased signage could be implemented further down Harden Road, to make drivers more aware of the crossing.
- 4.2. Walsall Council's Major Projects and Minor Improvements (MPMI) Team were commissioned to draw up preliminary designs and cost estimates for the crossing improvements. These preliminary designs have now been passed onto an external contractor (Amey), to conduct Stage 1 Road Safety Audits (RSA's). The external contractor has indicated that Walsall Council will receive the results of the Stage 1 RSA's by December 2020.

## **NCN5 Cycle Route: Option 1**

- 5.1. In addition to the cycle crossing at Rushall, the scheme also includes improvements to the NCN5 cycle route itself, between Ryecroft Cemetery and Walsall Town Centre. Option 1 involves an alternative on-street route along Cartbridge Lane South, Lichfield Road and through The Butts – see Appendix C. There are two key ‘improvement areas’ that will need to be upgraded to improve on-street cycling accessibility.
- 5.2. The first improvement area is on the A461 Lichfield Road. There are two potential options for accommodating a safer cycle route; a shared route on the footway or an on-road marked route. The aspiration appears to be to develop a shared route on the footway along Cartbridge Lane South and the A461 Lichfield Road to Westbourne Road, before continuing through the Butts.
- 5.3. This will involve widening the A461 Lichfield Road western footway between Cartbridge Lane South and Westbourne Road to an appropriate width, to accommodate a shared use path for cyclists and pedestrians (assumed 3 meters). The initial assessment is that this may potentially affect pedestrian refuges and the centre hatched area on Lichfield Road, in the section between Butts Road and Westbourne Road. A possible alternative may be to develop a route using Borneo Street, which is already a 20mph Zone and has also been the subject of requests for further traffic management measures.
- 5.4. Consideration needs to be given to how visibility and safety for both cyclist/pedestrians and vehicle users can be improved at several road crossing along the proposed route. For example, there are currently no drop kerbs, or tactile paving at the crossing over Borneo Street, and traffic flow is heavy (especially in the AM and PM peak). Consideration also needs to be given to the crossing on Hawley Road. However, there is already existing tactile paving and drop kerbs in this location. The link between Cartbridge Lane South and Lichfield Road also needs to be considered, at the junction of Cartbridge Lane South/Lichfield Road.
- 5.5. The second improvement area is on the pavement near to the junction with Butts Street and The Butts. The proposal would be to create either a drop kerb or a cut out in the footway, to allow cyclists to pass seamlessly.
- 5.6. Walsall Council’s MPMI Team were commissioned to draw up preliminary designs and cost estimates for all the elements of this cycle route option. These preliminary designs have now been passed onto an external contractor (Amey), to conduct Stage 1 Road Safety Audits (RSA’s). The external contractor has indicated that Walsall Council will receive the results of the Stage 1 RSA’s by December 2020.

## **NCN5 Cycle Route: Option 2**

- 6.1. The second option is to improve the existing NCN5 path between Ryecroft Cemetery and Mill Lane (Option 2) – see Appendix D. There are a number of factors that make the existing path unfit for purpose, these are listed below:
  - Poor drainage;
  - Poor path construction;
  - Poorly lit

- 6.2. In order to address these issues, the path needs to be built to a higher standard with drainage, as well as surface and lighting improvements (if possible). The section of path to improve is approximately 665 meters long. However, indicative cost estimates from the MPMI Team suggest that this is likely to be an expensive option. Furthermore, the steep gradients on this route would not be suitable for disabled cyclists.

### **NCN5 Cycle Route: Option 3**

- 7.1. The third option involves a new path being created on a section of Walsall Council owned public space, which runs adjacent to the back of Borneo Street (Option 3) – see Appendix E. The path is accessed via a small path from Cartbridge Lane South. There is currently no paved area in the highlighted section, this option is therefore assumed to require the following improvements:
- New cycle path;
  - Vegetation clearance;
  - Improved/new lighting;
  - Improved security (proposed path backs onto residential properties).
- 7.2. Nevertheless, after consulting with both the MPIMI and Community Protection Teams, the initial assessment is that this option might not be feasible, due to high utilities costs, as well as the increased potential for anti-social behaviour, near residential properties.

### **Anti-Social Behaviour and P-barriers**

- 8.1. Separate to the proposal for an improved cycle route, the NCN5 has also seen a high level of anti-social behaviour, especially concerning the unauthorised use of motorcycles on the cycle route and on the adjacent public footpaths. A multi-agency response to anti-social behaviour in 2016 saw the introduction of anti-motorcycle P-barriers. Whilst these barriers have curtailed some of the anti-social behaviour, work is still ongoing to develop a corridor-wide strategy to tackle these issues.
- 8.2. An element of the NCN5 Better Streets project includes modification of some of the anti-motorcycle P-barriers, to facilitate easier access for wheelchairs and recumbent cycles. The NCN5 Better Streets applicants have designed their own modified P-barrier, which can be opened by disabled users, using a radar key. However, due to prevalence of anti-social behaviour along the NCN5 route, there are concerns that modified P-barrier users could fall victim to crime (there have been several cases of radar keys being stolen in the past), and that the modified P-barriers themselves could be vandalised. Installation of modified P-barriers therefore requires the consideration and acceptance of local authority officers, agencies (West Midlands Police) and landowners (Sustrans), before suitable locations can be agreed.
- 8.3. Walsall Council's Community Protection Team, suggested that anti-social behaviour is currently most prevalent on the approach into Walsall Town Centre and least prevalent further north of the NCN5, near Pelsall. With the permission of the landowner Sustrans, it was therefore agreed that Walsall Council would install the modified P-barrier (designed by Better Streets applicants) at a trial location in

Pelsall, in order to monitor motorcycle usage and anti-social behaviour. Station Road in Pelsall has therefore been selected as the pilot location for the modified P-barrier to be installed on the NCN5.

- 8.4. Initial P-barrier design drawings for Station Road in Pelsall have been produced by Walsall Council and shared with the Better Streets applicants. Walsall Council's P-barrier supplier has been briefed to install the modified P-barrier, at the agreed pilot location, as soon as the design drawings have been finalised, and the modified P-barrier has been collected from the Walsall Civic Centre (where it is currently being stored).

### **Next Steps**

- 9.1. Given the strong local support for cycle improvements from the NCN5 to Walsall Town Centre, and the availability of capital funding from the Better Streets Community Fund to implement such improvements, the proposed way forward is as follows: -

- **Internal Consultation** – complete an initial feasibility assessment of the suitability of the proposals with various stakeholders, including Community Protection, Public Rights of Way, Road Safety and Urban Traffic Control colleagues, as well as Sustrans and West Midlands Police. This will involve an internal review of the initial cost estimates and Stage 1 RSA's for the cycle route design options and road crossing, in addition to implementing the modified P-barrier trial at Station Road, in Pelsall. This work will take up to three months, and be complete by mid-January 2021.
- **Public Consultation** – depending on the latest COVID-19 restrictions, a Public Consultation will take place in late-January 2021, to give members of the public an opportunity to feedback on the proposed design option(s).
- **Final Development & Design** – providing that all feasibility issues can be resolved to the satisfaction of all stakeholders, further development and design work will be undertaken in preparation for scheme implementation. This will take up to three months, and will be complete by mid-April 2021.
- **Implementation** – subject to all design issues being resolved and the availability of Walsall Council's highways contractor, the scheme will be delivered in late-spring to early summer 2021.
- **Monitoring & Evaluation** – upon implementation, the improvements will then be monitored and evaluated for a pilot period, with this work concluding in autumn 2021.

- 9.2. If the monitoring and evaluation outcome required no changes to the implemented scheme, no further action will be taken, except routine maintenance by the various infrastructure asset owners. However, if there were unintended negative impacts as a result of the measures delivered, remedial action would be required before the conclusion of the Better Streets Community Funding period.

- 9.3. It should be noted that the initial design options will be kept within Walsall's internal teams in the first instance. However, they will be made available at the public

consultation stage for comments/feedback. This way, all the evidence can be displayed at one time i.e. preliminary designs, costs, safety audits, internal views and stakeholder comments (West Midlands Police and Sustrans).

#### **4. Financial information**

Better Streets Community Fund capital monies, up to £150,000, have been identified to develop and implement this scheme, from the Transforming Cities Fund. A funding agreement for the Better Streets Project was signed on the 15<sup>th</sup> September 2020, by the West Midlands Combined Authority and Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council. The project has also been included in the Walsall Council Capital Programme for 2019/20 and 2020/21. The risk of any abortive spend (should a capital asset not be enhanced or created as a consequence of the feasibility work not being able to demonstrate safe, effective and affordable physical measures) is being underwritten by the Council, from an appropriate revenue budget. Whilst the likelihood of this risk occurring is 'medium', the value of this risk is 'low'.

The risk of time and cost overruns is being managed by reserving an element of the overall capital budget as a contingency fund. This risk is being actively monitored and managed by the designated project manager.

#### **5. Reducing Inequalities**

As part of the delivery of 'Movement for Growth' and 'Transport in Walsall', consideration has been given to ensuring that the needs of all sections of the community are considered in transport projects. 'Movement for Growth' has been subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment.

Delivery programmes will assist in improving facilities for all modes of transport by focusing on improving access to key services and facilities such as education, job opportunities and health care facilities. The improvements envisaged will help reduce inequalities, by ensuring that NCN5 is easily accessible to recumbent cyclists, mobility-aid users and disabled people.

'Movement for Growth' and 'Transport in Walsall' delivery programmes have been tested against the 'Marmot Objectives'. These are:

- Giving every child the best start in life – programmes include measures to support travel to school by sustainable modes, which is part of a rolling programme across the Borough;
- Enabling all children, young people and adults to maximize their capabilities and have control over their lives – measures to promote sustainable modes help promote healthy and independent travel choices;
- Creating fair employment and good work for all – improved transport networks help people access employment and training opportunities;
- Ensuring a healthy standard of living for all – access to paid employment is facilitated by improved transport networks;
- Creating and developing sustainable places and communities – programmes include active travel, public transport and road safety measures, which all support sustainable places and communities;

- Strengthening the role and impact of ill-health prevention – healthy travel choices, such as walking or cycling, can help prevent ill health.

The proposed improvements make sustainable active travel (cycling and walking) available to all residents and stakeholders in the NCN5 corridor.

## **6. Decide**

Should stakeholder and public support be obtained, and the final scheme cost be within the budget allowance, Walsall Council already has the necessary capital funding from the Better Streets Community Fund to implement improvements to the NCN5. In accordance with the community petition, it is proposed that Walsall Council utilises the Better Streets Funding to improve the following elements of the NCN5 route, in between Pelsall and Walsall Town Centre:

- Improve the highway crossing over Harden Road on the NCN5.
- Improve the cycle route between Ryecroft Cemetery and Walsall Town Centre.
- Install modified P-barriers at approved locations on the NCN5.

Walsall Council's initial cycle route options are still being refined and are therefore subject to change. A copy of the finalised designs will be circulated during public consultation and again before implementation.

## **7. Respond**

Following this meeting, Walsall Council will continue to work in partnership with various stakeholders, (including: Community Protection, Public Rights of Way, Road Safety, Urban Traffic Control, Sustrans and West Midlands Police), as well as TfWM and the Better Streets applicants themselves, to deliver improvements on the NCN5 route north of Walsall, by Summer 2021. The next steps are to undertake an internal feasibility assessment of the suitability of the cycle route proposals with various stakeholders, in addition to implementing the modified P-barrier trial at Station Road, in Pelsall.

## **8. Review**

Scrutiny of the Council's efforts to promote the 'Movement for Growth' and 'Transport in Walsall' agendas will help promote the overall efficiency of service delivery. Transport policy is continually developing and evolving with regard to local issues. Project and programme delivery is adapting and responding to current and future challenges, such as COVID-19 restrictions.

Walsall Council are required to attend quarterly review meetings with TfWM to track the progress on both of their Better Streets projects. Project risks and financial profiles are updating regularly using TfWM's Smartsheets system. Walsall Council circulates monthly project reports to the NCN5 Better Streets applicants, to ensure that they are kept updated with the latest progress and delivery timescales.

## Background papers

- Petition: A Marked, Safe Route along National Cycling Route 5 – report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee dated 17<sup>th</sup> October 2019
- Transport in Walsall: 2017-2022 (Walsall Council, published 2017)
- Movement for Growth: The West Midlands Strategic Transport Plan (West Midlands Combined Authority, published 2016)
- Black Country Core Strategy (Walsall, Dudley, Sandwell and Wolverhampton Councils, adopted 2011)

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