

TO: SWALE JOINT TRANSPORTATION BOARD
DATE: 14th December 2009
SUBJECT: Sittingbourne Cycle Network Improvement
BY: Transportation and Development Manager – Swale
Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: A report on the public consultation carried out to implement a cycle route to the south of Sittingbourne town centre (partly funded by the Integrated Transport budget, and match-funded by Sustrans)

Decision Required: Approval of recommendation to implement the scheme

Introduction

1. The purpose of this scheme is to construct a shared-use cycleway in Sittingbourne to provide a link to existing cycle routes and safer routes to schools. This section of proposed shared-use path will provide the next stages of improvement to the local cycle network and will extend eastwards along the Avenue of Remembrance, Trotts Hall Gardens, Chilton Avenue, along South Avenue, down Merlin Close following the route of an existing footpath between Kestrel Close and Pond Drive to finish at Highsted Road. (Please see the location plan at the end of this report.)
2. The development of this route has been chosen as it links the existing cycle route in the west at Roman Square with three schools which have identified a wish for safer routes to school. It then continues north to south along South Avenue, providing the opportunity to create links in the future all the way to Sittingbourne Railway Station and along Merlin Close down an existing public right of way down to Highsted Road. As there are proposals to close Highsted Road to vehicular traffic, this will provide another excellent opportunity in the future to work on the provision of another strategic route from Highsted Road to Sittingbourne Memorial Hospital, to meet this route on Bell Road.
3. A bid for match-funding for this route in the sum of £50,000 from the cycling and walking charity Sustrans has been safeguarded towards constructing this route.

Consultation

4. The consultation process for this project has now ended and 192 consultation letters were sent out on 24 September 2009. The consultees included all local residents and businesses bordering the proposed route, Borden Grammar School, South Avenue Infants' and Junior Schools, Swale Borough Council, County and District Councillors and all statutory consultees. A consultation page was also set up on the Kent County Council website detailing the project and plans, and visitors to this page were invited to comment on the plans. Comments were invited before 26 October 2009.

5. Out of the 192 letters sent out and the advertisement of the proposal on Kent County Council's Public Consultation page, only 5 objections were received – one from the local Ramblers' Association and four from local residents.
6. The main issues raised were:
 - That shared use paths may make people feel they are entitled to cycle on all footways
 - Residents worried that we were putting in cycle lanes in front of people's houses
 - Concern that converting the footpath between Kestrel Close and Merlin Close to a shared use path may cause accidents between cyclists and pedestrians
 - Fear that cars backing out into the road at Merlin Close may hit a cyclist
7. These issues have been taken into account during the planning of the route, and a Stage 1 Safety Audit has been undertaken and passed for this project. The Safety Audit recommended moving the crossing point in Bell Road, which has been discussed with Swale Borough Council and agreed. No cycle lanes will be constructed along any point in this route. To minimise the danger of clashes between cyclists and pedestrians, suitable barriers will be installed and paths widened on the section of route between Merlin Close and Highsted Avenue to slow cyclists down and improve visibility. These barriers will also help slow down cyclists as they exit the paths at Highsted Road and Merlin Close. Appropriate signing will be erected to ensure it is clear where cyclists are permitted to cycle, and where they are not.

Decision Required

8. Members are asked to recommend approval of the scheme as shown.

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