

EXECUTIVE

14th September 2023

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| Report Title | North Northamptonshire Greenway Strategy |
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| Lead Member | Cllr Helen Howell – Executive Member for Sport, Leisure, Culture and Tourism |

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| Key Decision | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Are there public sector equality duty implications? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 | |

List of Appendices

Appendix A: North Northamptonshire Greenway Strategic Masterplan and its appendices (A(i)-A(vi))

Appendix B: Rushden to Wellingborough Feasibility Study

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. This report introduces the North Northamptonshire Greenway Strategic Masterplan and the Feasibility Study for the proposed Rushden to Wellingborough phase of the Greenway.
- 1.2. Both documents have been co-produced with the Council's strategic partners. The Greenway strategy provides a clear vision and definition for the Greenway and an evidence-based masterplan to shape investment and development over the next 10 to 20 years;

- 1.3. The report requests approval from Executive to publicly consult on both the strategy and the Feasibility Study for the Rushden to Wellingborough phase of the Greenway, ahead of formal adoption.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. This report introduces the Strategic Masterplan for the North Northamptonshire Greenway, comprising over 350km of routes connecting settlements within North Northamptonshire and in neighbouring authorities with a combined population of 600,000.
- 2.2. It sets out the vision for the North Northamptonshire Greenway:

‘to be a strategic rural network of safe, largely traffic-free routes suitable for walking, wheeling and cycling, connecting settlements, employment, leisure and tourism destinations across North Northamptonshire and beyond.’
- 2.3. A development contributions formula has also been drafted as part of the Strategic Masterplan to help inform future negotiations with developers to secure funding through, for example, Section 106 Agreements.
- 2.4. The strategy will be widely consulted on and refined as needed following feedback from stakeholders and residents. It will then be adopted to ensure it has weight in planning terms and can feed into other policies and strategies, including the emerging Strategic Plan for North Northamptonshire and for future negotiations with developers regarding planning obligations.
- 2.5. The report also introduces the Feasibility Study for the Rushden to Wellingborough phase of the Greenway which assesses the feasibility of creating a new, commuter and leisure route which will make use of the many existing quiet lanes, Public Rights of Way and access tracks within the Nene Valley and existing disused railway greenways within Wellingborough and Rushden.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. It is recommended that the Executive:
 - a) Approve the Greenway Strategic Masterplan for public consultation;
 - b) Approve the Feasibility Study for the proposed Rushden to Wellingborough Greenway for public consultation; and
 - c) Delegates authority to the Executive Member for Sport, Leisure, Culture and Tourism, in consultation with the Director of Public Health to make any

amendments to the documents as a result of the public consultation, ahead of them being brought back to the Executive for adoption.

3.2 Reasons for Recommendations

- To support the Council and its partners to prioritise future routes for the Greenway and to inform future feasibility studies which will assist the Council to secure developer contributions and other external funding to deliver the programme.
- To allow for public consultation on the draft strategy and Rushden to Wellingborough Greenway Feasibility Study.

3.3. Alternative Options Considered: The alternative option would be to not have a Greenway Strategic Masterplan. However, this would not be a recommended approach as the strategy clearly outlines what the priority routes are for North Northamptonshire, based on comprehensive data and evidence, will inform future feasibility studies, which are required to secure external funding and developer contributions to enable the expansion of the Greenway across North Northamptonshire. It will also ensure a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of the Greenway.

4. Report Background

- 4.1. The former East Northamptonshire Council managed the legacy East Northamptonshire Greenway programme, a green infrastructure development proposition, following the Nene Valley, which aimed to create connectivity, walking and cycling opportunities between Peterborough and Wellingborough railway stations.
- 4.2. This programme, in its earlier phases, delivered Greenway routes in and around Rushden, Irthlingborough and Higham Ferrers and some inter-connecting routes were put in place between Rushden Lakes and Stanwick Lakes.
- 4.3. The North Northamptonshire Greenway Programme Board was established in early 2022, to replace the previous governance in place when East Northamptonshire Council led the programme. Chaired by the Executive Member for Sport, Leisure, Culture and Tourism it is a partnership including key stakeholders such as Nene Rivers Trust, Natural England, Wildlife Trust, Environment Agency, Sustrans and Highways England. Four Council Ward Members, one from each locality, have also been appointed to the Board to help shape the Greenway in their areas.
- 4.4. The new Board agreed that a strategy would be required for the North Northamptonshire Greenway. A strategy would build upon existing Planning documents and policies such as the Core Strategy and Local Plans which include overarching policies for green infrastructure and active travel. It would also build on the existing and emerging Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure plans (LCWIPs), and various feasibility studies already

undertaken, for example the Ise Valley masterplan and the Rushden Lakes to Wellingborough phase of the Greenway.

4.5. Lessons learned from the East Northamptonshire Greenway programme have helped to shape the requirements of the strategy which will provide:

- a clear vision and definition for the Greenway;
- an evidence-led masterplan to shape investment and development over the next 10-20 years;
- a formula to calculate developer contributions;
- further guidance on rights of way and their role in developing greenways and ensuring the greenways are designed to current national standards;
- a clear link to the LCWIP process to bring these to rural areas;
- a masterplan which will link to policies such as the Local Transport Plan and help shape and influence decision making.

4.6. In July 2022, the Greenway Programme Board agreed that the new strategy will be the overarching document setting out the long-term strategy and the aims and objectives for the Greenway. In addition, it will have a series of individual dynamic plans or 'design recommendation booklets', detailing the network in manageable routes.

4.7. The design recommendation booklets will provide clear summaries of each route; length, surface, land ownership, costs, key stakeholders and route constraints.

4.8. The strategy details how the Greenway will be delivered across North Northamptonshire by:

- Defining the Greenway; what it is, how it can be used, who might use it and how it underpins other Council strategies and priorities relating to health and wellbeing, leisure, tourism and active travel.
- Influencing and shaping policy as a potential Supplementary Planning Document.
- Setting out how Biodiversity Net Gain can positively impact green infrastructure and wider natural capital
- Detailing how contributions can be secured through Section 106 and other developer contributions, through a developed formula ensuring future developments in North Northamptonshire can link to the Greenway where appropriate.
- Influencing internal and external stakeholders to consider the Greenway programme in their strategic decision making.
- Outlining how the Greenway will be delivered through existing Rights of Way and the creation of new routes.
- Providing clarity on the maintenance, liability and ownership requirements when new sections of the Greenway are proposed and opened.

- Reflecting the government guidance provided by Local Transport Note 1/20 (regarding standards for cycling infrastructure) and Gear Change (which seeks to support a modal shift towards walking and cycling).
- Developing a template for the four local area “design recommendation booklets” which will be dynamic plans highlighting the completed, proposed, desired routes with GIS layers that will be able to be updated as required by Council officers.
- Placing the Council and its partners in the best position to bid for future funding from sources such as Active Travel England, the Levelling Up Fund and National Highways.
- Referencing the Sense of Place toolkit as developed by the Nenescape project which was Lottery funded for the 3 years up to end of 2022.
- Highlighting the advantages of the Greenway branding and route names to add a sense of place.

- 4.9. In November 2022 the first round of procurement took place to commission a consultant to deliver the Greenway Strategy and associated documents, which unfortunately was unsuccessful. In January 2023 the procurement exercise was repeated and Phil Jones Associates Limited (PJA) was successfully appointed and work commenced at the beginning of March 2023.
- 4.10. PJA are known for developing the Government’s Local Transport Network 1/20 standards and for producing LCWIPs. They followed the LCWIP methodology in producing the Greenway Strategy, in effect making the North Northamptonshire Greenway a strategic LCWIP which connects North Northamptonshire’s key settlements and trip generators. This robust, evidence-based approach to developing the Strategic Masterplan ensures that future investment in infrastructure will be informed by a coherent vision of how routes can contribute to increasing walking and cycling – for all types of journeys including leisure trips – across North Northamptonshire.
- 4.11. PJA undertook a national and local policy review to inform the context for the strategy, which demonstrates significant policy support for a strategic active travel network.
- 4.12. They also collected a range of data appertaining to such issues as demographic and census data; collisions; terrain, cycle catchments; severance of existing networks; app data on individual’s runs, walks and rides, all of which was used to analyse demand and inform network alignments.
- 4.13. A vision and set of objectives for the North Northamptonshire Greenway has been co-produced.
- 4.14. A series of three workshops were held during the process of developing the strategy to engage key stakeholders and to gain insight on priority routes and locations.

5. Issues and Choices

- 5.1. Through the workshops stakeholders considered the rural nature of North Northamptonshire, and the need to create Greenway routes that support leisure and tourism as a key priority.
- 5.2. The routes need to be safe and attractive, with a preference for being traffic free wherever possible.
- 5.3. There was an appetite to improve existing and create new Public Rights of Way, and it was accepted that improved ways of working are needed to keep existing routes maintained to a good standard.
- 5.4. Stakeholders examined the potential routes that were identified across North Northamptonshire following the data collection and analysis, and consideration was given to any routes that had not been identified. This led to two more being added to the proposed network, giving a total of 35 potential routes.
- 5.5. A vision and a set of objectives were co-produced for the Greenway:

‘The North Northamptonshire Greenway will be a strategic rural network of safe, largely traffic-free routes suitable for walking, wheeling and cycling, connecting settlements, employment, leisure and tourism destinations across North Northamptonshire and beyond.’

The key objectives of the North Northamptonshire Greenway are to:

- Enable people to choose to walk, wheel or cycle for a range of trip purposes including school, commuting, every day and leisure trips.
 - Deliver an accessible, inclusive active travel network in line with current design standards in terms of coherence, directness, safety, comfort and attractiveness.
 - Help to deliver North Northamptonshire’s Green Infrastructure network including the Ise and Nene Valley Corridors,.
 - Improve the tourism offer across North Northamptonshire, with connected market towns, nature reserves and tourism sites and circular routes.
 - Improve the vitality of North Northamptonshire’s towns, aiding local businesses by improving access for commuters and shoppers.
 - Provide safe routes to schools.
 - Provide additional sustainable transport options for residents who don’t own a car.
- 5.6. Finally, partners considered the prioritisation toolkit that the consultants had developed specifically for the programme, in order to inform the prioritisation of

one route over another and when considering which would be likely to attract external funding. The prioritisation criteria included eight themes:

- **Access to employment sites**
- **Access to education/training sites**
- **Access to leisure/tourism destinations**
- **Access to new developments**
- **Access to green space**
- Value-added to the Greenway network
- Improving road safety
- Potential cost to develop and likelihood of attracting external funding sources.

5.7. All routes were then prioritised against the criteria, and because many scored the same, a decision was taken to weight those criteria **emphasized in bold** in the above list.

5.8. Four routes have been identified to include in the design recommendations booklet which accompanies this Strategic Masterplan (Appendix A(vi) to the Strategy). These have been informed by the prioritisation scores, which routes have existing feasibility studies, and stakeholder feedback. On this basis the following four routes have been selected:

- Rothwell to Kettering
- Wellingborough to Wollaston via Irchester
- Burton Latimer to Irthlingborough
- Kettering to Thrapston

5.9. A draft development contributions formula has also been developed as part of the Strategic Masterplan to help inform future negotiations with developers. The formula has been informed by the cost of the proposed network, the forecast development-related active travel trips and the cost per active travel trip, resulting in the following developer contributions formula:

Developer contributions = Active travel trips x cost per active travel trips

5.10. The focus of the Feasibility Study, undertaken through a separate commission with Sustrans, is to assess the creation of a new, commuter and leisure route from Wellingborough to Rushden. The route will make use of the many existing quiet lanes, Public Rights of Way and access tracks within the Nene Valley and existing disused railway greenways within Wellingborough and Rushden.

5.11. The proposed Cycleway will provide a quiet lane and traffic-free route, connecting the urban centres of Wellingborough and Rushden. The proposed route has been considered with a sealed tarmac surface, at least 3m in width with access at multiple key locations. The route could be used very practically, eventually linking to the LCWIP route into Rushden town centre and to Wellingborough train station at the opposite end.

- 5.12. Further benefits will come as this multi-user trail re-uses as much as possible the old Wellingborough to Little Irchester and Wellingborough to Rushden/Higham Ferrers railway alignments between the two.
- 5.13. Like many similar trails, the development of this relies on the goodwill of landowners, the ability to overcome Engineering challenges and Ecological biodiversity, and of course on securing the required funding.

6. Next Steps

- 6.1. To consult publicly for a minimum of 30 days on both the draft strategy and the Rushden to Wellingborough design recommendations using the Council's online Citizen Space platform.
- 6.2. To use the feedback from the consultation to finalise the strategy and to bring it back to Executive for approval and recommendation for adoption by the Council.
- 6.3. There will be ongoing engagement with stakeholders to produce further design recommendation booklets.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

7.1. Resources, Financial and Transformation

- 7.1.1. The strategy development has been funded through external funding from the Shared Prosperity fund. It does not include specific saving targets or future expenditure proposals at this stage. However, the strategy will inform future capital investment in the Greenway through developer contributions, external funding bids and any capital investment the Council may or may not choose to consider.

7.2. Legal and Governance

- 7.2.1. The Report asks that the Greenway Strategic Masterplan and underlying feasibility Study is approved for Public Consultation. A future legal matter will be the securing of access rights across land that is not owned by NNC. Third party land in the ownership of Stakeholders may be available for the route but any third-party land will need to be secured by legal agreement and easements or permanent rights granted through dedication by the Owners.
- 7.2.2. As it is proposed to send these documents out to consultation the process must be fair third parties to given time to consider and respond and the fruits of consultation fairly considered. A clear description of what is proposed and reasonable access to the documents in terms of Transparency will also be required.

7.2.3. The report also seeks authority for matters raised in the course of consultation to be considered and discussed with any consultees and allows for some flexibility as to how matters raised are addressed.

7.3. Relevant Policies and Plans

7.3.1. The North Northamptonshire Council's Corporate plan adopted in 2021 has key commitments which are key to this project. These include:

- Active, fulfilled lives :- supporting people to live healthier more active lives. Active travel schemes and use of our green spaces supports commitment.
- Safe and thriving places:- thriving economy that shapes great places to live, learn work and visit which can be achieved within this scheme.
- Green, sustainable environment:- the vision is to develop a green infrastructure for walking, cycling and use of our waterways.

[Corporate plan | North Northamptonshire Council
\(northnorthants.gov.uk\)](https://www.northnorthants.gov.uk)

7.4. Risk

7.4.1. The template for design recommendations provides the Council with the basis for future feasibility studies for proposed routes of the Greenway. Without such studies the risk is future funding applications will be unsuccessful.

7.5. Consultation

7.5.1. The strategy has been co-produced with a range of stakeholders.

7.5.2. Approval is sought through this report to consult publicly.

7.6. Consideration by Executive Advisory Panel

7.6.1. This report has not been considered by the Executive Advisory Panel, but it planned to be considered by the Active Communities Panel during the period of consultation.

7.7. Consideration by Scrutiny

7.7.1. This report has not been considered by Scrutiny, but will be subject to call in.

7.8. Equality Implications

- 7.8.1. The proposals set out in the strategy respond to the need to ensure that equitable access to jobs, services, leisure and other opportunities are provided for all North Northamptonshire residents, workers and visitors. The Strategy aims to improve walking, wheeling and cycling in North Northamptonshire to enable travel choice and reduce short journeys by car, with resulting improvements in emissions, health and wellbeing.
- 7.8.2. The development of the strategy followed current best practice and guidance including Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan guidance and Local Transport Plan 1/20 Cycling Infrastructure including accessibility considerations such as distance, gradient, safety and providing smooth surfaces to ensure the proposed network is accessible for all users including pedestrians, cyclists, e-scooters, pushchairs, wheelchairs and mobility scooters.
- 7.8.3. Individual schemes will be developed in more detail in line with strategy and relevant guidance and be subject to consultation, including with groups representing protected characteristics such as disability groups.

7.9. Climate and Environment Impact

- 7.9.1. The Greenway and North Northamptonshire's green (and blue) infrastructure network are inextricably linked. One of the key objectives of the Greenway is to enhance the green corridors, for example through enhancing verges along new and improved traffic-free routes with trees, grassland and wildflower planting or even swales.
- 7.9.2. The Strategic Masterplan also recommends that proposals use Natural England's Green Infrastructure Planning and Design Guide in the development of designs for traffic-free sections of routes particularly where these follow identified Green Infrastructure Corridors, are close to water or Special Protection Areas. Natural England should also be treated as a key stakeholder throughout the design process.
- 7.9.3. The strategy also addresses flood mitigation. Much of the proposed network follows the Nene and Ise Valley Corridors which are Environment Agency Main Rivers and it is important that a balanced approach is taken to the design of these sections of the network. The Masterplan recommends that Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) such as swales and rain gardens are incorporated into the design of the route, particularly in areas at risk of flood. SuDS and tree planting have the dual benefit of reducing flooding and contributing to biodiversity.
- 7.9.4. It also contributes to the Council's Carbon Management Plan for example through reduced use of motor vehicles and the promotion of active travel.

7.10. **Community Impact**

7.10.1. The Masterplan highlights the need to maximise the value of the Greenway through additions which enhance economic and community benefit, such as sites for cafes and other appropriate businesses, or for community initiatives which enable and encourage people to use the network, especially those from more deprived communities who may struggle to access or afford bicycles.

7.11. **Crime and Disorder Impact**

7.11.1 None identified

8. **Background Papers**

8.1 None