



**WELWYN
HATFIELD**

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Cllr Phil Bibby
Executive Member – Highways and Transport
Hertfordshire County Council
County Hall
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Dear Cllr Bibby

Hertfordshire Active Travel Strategy Consultation

I am writing to provide the comments of Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council to the above document, which is currently being consulted upon.

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council declared a climate emergency in 2019 and set five ambitious objectives, one of which was to reduce carbon emissions across the borough by promoting a number of measures including sustainable transport. Enabling and encouraging people to more easily and safely walk, cycle and wheel is an important part of this, and undertaking a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), on which the Council worked with Hertfordshire County Council and which was adopted this year, was specifically identified in the Council's Climate Change Action Plan.

The draft strategy was considered at the Council's Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel this month, and this response takes on board comments made by members during the meeting.

We welcome the investment that the County Council has made in improving active travel provision in Welwyn Garden City over the past two years. The improved access for cyclists and pedestrians will make the town centre more attractive and accessible to more residents, and hopefully help support the vitality of the town, something we all want to see. Whilst they are focussed developments, we hope that in time they will grow into a comprehensive network covering the borough as a whole.

We are pleased that Hertfordshire County Council has decided to produce an Active Travel Strategy to cover the whole county. We also welcome the focus on the wider benefits of increasing the uptake of active travel. Whilst a reduction in carbon emissions is incredibly

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important, it is far from the only benefit and we were pleased to see additional benefits in areas such as congestion, individual health, air quality and social benefits are also quoted in the strategy.

However, whilst we welcome the strategy, we feel that there are areas where it could be improved or made more ambitious to encourage and support the growth in active travel we all want to see.

Firstly, we welcome the consideration of the barriers which prevent, or disincentivise, people from travelling in an active way and agree that these are extremely important. We do however feel that proposals to address some of these could be more prominent in the strategy. For example, though the strategy correctly identifies maintenance of vegetation which can grow across paths and make passing difficult, there are no proposals in the strategy to respond to and address reports of such obstructions in an improved period of time, and we think that specific commitments in that respect could help increase uptake of active travel. Equally, a firmer commitment to swiftly address obstructions or things which may present a risk to those travelling - such as pot holes, broken glass, sunken drains or drainage issues – in a timely way would help encourage more people to use active means of travel and improve road safety.

In terms of infrastructure, whilst we appreciate that Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIP's) are the appropriate place to identify locationally specific improvements, this overall strategy should include measures to ensure that areas are properly connected to important destinations – for example outer parts of a town to the town centre – through safe and pleasant routes which are well lit where necessary, and that in time these routes form a coherent and seamless network rather than a series of unconnected facilities as can sometimes happen.

Infrastructure improvements also need to include secure parking and “cycling hubs” such as exists in Stevenage, and the strategy should explicitly support the increased provision of such measures. The increased uptake of e-bikes means that increased provision of secure parking is particularly important.

The references to the importance of behavioural change are welcome, but we think that the effectiveness of the strategy could be improved by adding more detail on these and exploring – even if briefly – what any such programmes might involve.

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council also supports the broad base of the strategy, namely that initiatives to encourage active travel include measures like education and encouragement, as well as the installation of new infrastructure. We would suggest that additional measures on working with local business to assist employees to travel to work using active modes might help the effectiveness of the strategy. This could include encouraging companies to sign up to a cycle to work scheme so that employees can purchase cycles through a salary sacrifice schemes, and encouraging a financial limit that would allow for the purchase of e-bikes. Equally, the strategy could have a measure to encourage companies to install facilities to assist anyone travelling to work in this way, such as secure cycle storage and showers.

The Borough Council also welcomes the emphasis on joint working; between the County Council and Districts / Boroughs, and the proposed improvements on “joined up” working between active travel and public transport where opportunities arise. However, we feel that this “joined up” approach could be extended to include a specific measure to investigate opportunities to make active travel improvements when other works are already taking place. For example, it would presumably be easier and more cost effective to install a new pedestrian crossing in a location whilst a road was being resurfaced as part of ongoing maintenance than if the crossing were delivered as a stand alone project. Whilst this might not deliver a comprehensive approach to making active travel on particular routes, small incremental improvements are also important over time, and pedestrian crossings can make a big difference to residents of the immediate area.

Another area we support is the link the strategy makes with public transport, and the aspiration to ensure public transport hubs are accessible through active means. However, this area could be strengthened by a more explicit acknowledgement that better provision and increased use of public transport – in particular bus services - will reduce the levels of road transport and encourage some active travel users who may be deterred by heavy traffic.

We also welcome the inclusion of rural areas in the strategy, and the willingness to trial concepts which reduce through traffic. We feel that this could be of benefit to villages and rural communities within the Borough, but feel that the approach to trialling concepts could be used county wide, and that there should be a reference in the strategy to short trials of concepts or possible infrastructure works across the county as a whole, with a view to testing and if necessary refining them before implementation.

Overall, Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council supports Hertfordshire County Council’s focus on increasing the uptake of active travel across Hertfordshire and supports the production of this strategy and I hope that the County Council will use this letter as evidence of our support. As active travel is such an important area and means of reducing carbon emissions and securing various other benefits, we feel that the strategy could be more ambitious and we hope that the suggestions above are helpful.

I hope that we can look forward to working with Hertfordshire County Council on the swift delivery of many improvements and initiatives in the future.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Jane Quinton
Executive Member, Environment and Climate Change