

Devon Countywide Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP)

Report of the Director of Climate Change, Environment and Transport

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Committee before taking effect.

1) Recommendation

That the Committee be asked to consider the report, the outcomes of the public consultation and advise Cabinet of any comments on the Devon Countywide Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), provided in Appendix I.

2) Introduction

This report sets out a recommendation to support and commend the Devon Countywide Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) to Cabinet. The LCWIP document is contained in Appendix 1.

Devon has a successful rural multi-use trail network which has significantly expanded over the last 10 years. Building on success of the Exe Estuary Trail, the County has delivered the Wray Valley Trail, Stover Trail and improvements to the Tarka Trail. The benefits afforded by multi-use trails are multiple. New and improved routes support the local economy, increasing spend in towns and villages connected by the trails. They can reduce vehicular motor traffic and ease congestion, increasing access to training and education opportunities. They also support safer travel and improved health and wellbeing for people of all abilities, , providing access to Devon's outstanding natural environment.

To date investment priorities in Devon's rural multi-use trail network has been guided by the existing Cycling and Multi-Use Trail Network Strategy, adopted in 2015. This will be superseded by the Devon Countywide LCWIP. An LCWIP is a strategic framework which uses an evidence-based approach to identify prioritised cycling and walking improvements at a local level over a 10-20 year period. These documents are important in evidencing the case for future investment and can help leverage external funding.

The proposed Countywide LCWIP will complement the suite of other adopted, urban-focused LCWIPs, instead identifying attractive rural routes that support utility and leisure pursuits and connecting Devon's rural communities..

3) Proposal

An overview of the Countywide LCWIP is detailed below including what changes are proposed following public consultation.

Strategy Aims

The Countywide LCWIP has a number of aims and objectives:

- To provide an aspirational long-term strategic network plan for walking and cycling links between Devon's towns and communities.
- To use evidence of existing and potential future demand to plan and design interventions which will support social, economic and environmental outcomes. For instance, it will improve health and wellbeing and improve accessibility for all for utility or leisure pursuits, whether walking, cycling or wheeling. It can support the economy and environment by offering attractive alternatives to the car for short to medium distance trips. This can help support development and trails can also increase visitor spend in towns and villages. Routes like the Tarka Trail, Exe Estuary, Stover Way and Wray Valley Trail have seen new businesses develop as a result of increased tourism, delivering local economic benefits to communities..
- To design a prioritised programme of infrastructure interventions and improvements for future investment, considering existing plans, strategies, and priorities across the county.
- To support and improve safety so that people of all ages and abilities can feel confident and empowered to participate in active travel,
- To make the case to Government for future funding for strategic walking and cycling infrastructure outside of urban contexts, ensuring investment is targeted where it can have the greatest impact.

Route Selection Methodology

A bespoke active travel modelling tool was used to identify routes with the greatest potential for the most active travel trips. The model selected routes with origin-destination pairs where potential users of the trails have an origin of major residential areas, and holiday parks, and end destinations including education, employment, transport hubs and leisure amenities. This ensured that all trip purposes were considered, recognising the broad appeal of multi-use trails for a wide range of users. Additional weighting was given to routes that joined with the existing National Cycle Network and multi-use trail network, alongside priorities identified with district councils during early stakeholder engagement. A limit of 8km for cycling and 2km for walking was also applied to enhance the accuracy of demand forecasting.

This process highlighted hundreds of potential routes for consideration, therefore further analysis was undertaken to better understand which routes were likely to have the greatest impact. Refinement factors included: omitting routes with existing provision, omitting routes

that start or end outside Devon’s boundary, merging connecting short routes into longer routes, and ensuring “missing link” connections that serve longer existing routes were also considered. Any routes within any adopted or emerging LCWIP areas were also omitted. Finally, it was ensured that all Devon districts, outside of Exeter, were represented by at least one route in the final list of priorities to ensure that even the most rural parts of the county are included as a funding priority.

Selected Routes

As a result of the analysis, 10 routes were selected in the proposed Countywide LCWIP. These are listed below in a west-to-east order, relative to their geography rather than in terms of their priority.

Route	Name	District
1	Tarka Trail (Knowle to Willingcott)	North Devon
2	Ruby Way / Tarka Trail (Holsworthy to Meeth)	Torridge / West Devon
3	Roborough to Dousland	South Hams / West Devon
4	Yealmpton to Newton Ferrers	South Hams
5	Ashburton to Buckfastleigh	Teignbridge
6	Boniface Trail	Mid Devon
7	Teign Estuary Trail	Teignbridge
8	Otter Trail	East Devon
9	Sidbury to Sidford	East Devon
10	Beer to Axminster and Uplyme	East Devon

These routes have been selected as having the greatest potential in terms of maximising active travel for the rural trail network and will be prioritised for development and delivery.

The proposed Countywide LCWIP does not include detailed plans for every route or identify every aspiration for active travel improvements. Equally, a route’s inclusion in the LCWIP does not guarantee its delivery. Schemes must be backed by funding, whether Local Transport Plan funding, external grants or developer contributions. It will also be subject to further design work to determine feasibility of the scheme, land acquisition, public/stakeholder engagement and support, and securing the legal and committee approvals.

Route Prioritisation

Routes have been prioritised to help allocate resource to the development and delivery of schemes. This prioritisation is set out below and has been informed according to the distance between settlements, complexity of route delivery, current scheme development stage, project cost, scope for developer contributions and consultation feedback. Routes are not prioritised within the short, medium and long term categories, i.e. the Tarka Trail is no higher priority than Sidbury to Sidford in the short term category.

Priority	Route
Short Term	Route 1: Tarka Trail (Knowle to Willingcott)
	Route 7: Teign Estuary Trail
	Route 9: Sidbury to Sidford
Medium Term	Route 3: Roborough to Dousland
	Route 8: Otter Trail
Long Term	Route 2: Ruby Way / Tarka Trail (Holsworthy to Meeth)
	Route 4: Yealmpton to Newton Ferrers
	Route 5: Ashburton to Buckfastleigh
	Route 6: Boniface Trail
	Route 10: Beer to Axminster and Uplyme

There is a need for a flexible approach, adapting to changing circumstances and opportunities to progress schemes sooner. For example, if funding becomes available through development or where there is only sufficient funding to deliver sections of a route, this would be considered in prioritisation.

Proposed changes to LCWIP following Public Consultation

As section 5 highlights, all proposed routes were well supported. There were several key themes arising from the consultation. Details of the actions taken and proposed changes to the final Countywide LCWIP are explained below:

- **Detailed Design Suggestions** – Respondents were invited to provide comments on each route. Many of these related to detailed design considerations, which are beyond the scope of the current stage of scheme development for many of the proposed routes. Recognising this feedback is important, commonly raised design suggestions have been acknowledged as items of public interest in the revised Countywide LCWIP document and have been passed onto the relevant project teams.
- **Miscellaneous Minor Works** – Recognising that community priorities for small-scale intervention extend beyond the areas covered by the 10 prioritised routes, a ‘miscellaneous minor works’ section has been added to the revised Countywide LCWIP. This section identifies the need for a programme of minor works to improve accessibility on the existing multi-use trail network, including the removal of staggered barriers, new dropped kerbs and improvements to route coherency – this is important in supporting access for all.
- **Extensions to Proposed Routes** – Following representations from stakeholders, it is proposed to extend two of the original routes. *Route 2: Ruby Way (Holsworthy to Meeth)* was originally proposed to end at Hatherleigh and has been extended to include Hatherleigh to Meeth. This will resolve a key “missing link” on the Tarka Trail, linking the market towns in West Devon, Torridge and North Devon. *Route 3: Roborough to Dousland* includes a new extension from Yelverton to Dousland along the disused railway line. This extended route utilises existing provision from

Clearbrook to Yelverton and recognises the well-developed status of proposed onward connections to Dousland.

- **Additional Routes** – Respondents were given the opportunity to comment which additional routes should be prioritised but had not been included. Only two additional routes were raised by more than 10 respondents; Braunton to Saunton (38) and Exeter to Tiverton (21). As there was limited support for these compared to the support for other routes, no changes are therefore proposed to the prioritised route list.
- **Additional Wording** – Further clarification and consideration has been included in the revised Countywide LCWIP document to address recurring themes. These include, wording on the way in which horses interact with multi-use trails, recognition that safety is one of the key benefits of multi-use trails and further recognition as to the rural nature of Devon as a county.

Consultation responses to prioritisation of routes

Respondents were invited to choose the order in which routes should be prioritised. The table below shows the percentage of respondents who ranked a given route as their top priority, alongside the priority assigned to each route in the consultation draft Countywide LCWIP.

Route	Consultation Draft Priority	% Top Priority
Route 7: Teign Estuary Trail	Medium-term	26%
Route 1: Tarka Trail (Knowle to Willingcott)	Medium-term	25%
Route 8: Otter Trail	Long-term	18%
Route 9: Sidbury to Sidford	Short-term	7%
Route 4: Yealmpton to Newton Ferrers	Long-term	5%
Route 10: Beer to Axminster and Uplyme	Long-term	5%
Route 3: Clearbrook to Roborough (<i>now extended to Dousland</i>)	Medium-term	5%
Route 6: Boniface Trail	Long-term	3%
Route 2: Ruby Way (Holsworthy to Hatherleigh) (<i>now extended Meeth</i>)	Long-term	3%
Route 5: Ashburton to Buckfastleigh	Long-term	1%

This demonstrates a significant proportion of respondents consider Routes 1, 7 and 8 to be their top priority. As such, in the revised Countywide LCWIP route prioritisation has been amended as follows:

- **Route 1: Tarka Trail (Knowle to Willingcott).** Priority increased from *medium-term* to *short-term*.
- **Route 7: Teign Estuary Trail.** Priority increased from *medium-term* to *short-term*.
- **Route 8: Otter Trail.** Priority increased from *long-term* to *medium-term*.

4) Alternatives

Do Nothing – Without approved LCWIPs, the County will not be well placed to secure future active travel investment from Government, be able to positively influence new development proposals or secure contributions towards active travel. In recent years, national active travel funding opportunities has focused on urban areas. Without an adopted LCWIP there a high risk that rural communities will struggle to attract funding. This evidence-based approach identifying funding priorities has been developed using a wealth of data and has been further refined by input from stakeholders and the public. It represents a credible proposal to secure the benefits afforded by active travel for Devon’s rural and market town communities.

Alternative Strategy – The proposed Countywide LCWIP has been developed following an evidence-based approach and has received strong support at public and stakeholder consultation. An alternative strategy would need funding and resource allocated for its development and need to be reconsulted upon.

5) Consultations

A two-month consultation was held between 1 October and 30 November 2024. This was advertised through press releases and social media, with materials available on the Devon County Council’s ‘*Have Your Say*’ webpage and at all Devon libraries. Feedback was primarily collected through an online questionnaire, which was also available as a hard-copy upon request, but responses were also welcomed by email, phone and post.

Two interactive webinars were held during the consultation period, both featured a short presentation followed by an opportunity to ask the project team questions. The first was aimed at stakeholders who were invited via email; 45 attended. The second was open to the public and had 8 attendees. A recorded version of the presentation was later posted online for those who could not attend the webinar.

1306 questionnaire responses were submitted. 49 key stakeholders submitted a response to the consultation, either through the questionnaire or by email. Stakeholders included District, Town and Parish Councils, inclusivity groups, route campaign groups and local councillors.

The table below shows that all proposed routes received overwhelming (over 80%) support. A separate consultation was held for *Route 6: Boniface Trail* to specifically understand support for different route options.

Route	No. Responses	Do you support the proposed route?		
		Yes	No	Unsure
Route 1: Tarka Trail (Knowle to Willingcott)	379	95%	1%	4%

Route 2: Ruby Way (Holsworthy to Hatherleigh) (<i>now extended to Meeth</i>)	135	84%	4%	12%
Route 3: Clearbrook to Roborough (<i>now extended to Dousland</i>)	149	81%	5%	14%
Route 4: Yealmpton to Newton Ferrers	179	85%	4%	11%
Route 5: Ashburton to Buckfastleigh	172	87%	4%	9%
Route 7: Teign Estuary Trail	480	94%	1%	5%
Route 8: Otter Trail	452	92%	3%	5%
Route 9: Sidbury to Sidford	295	90%	3%	7%
Route 10: Beer to Axminster and Uplyme	268	90%	2%	8%

6) Strategic Plan

The Countywide LCWIP is well aligned with several of the Devon Strategic Plan 2021-2025 priorities. It aims to increase active travel by providing better, high quality opportunities for walking and cycling. This will help encourage mode shift, particularly for short distance, everyday journeys and contributing to reduced carbon emissions. Delivering routes that will attract increased visitors and spend in local communities will also support economic recovery post-pandemic. Improved walking, wheeling and cycling facilities will also increase travel choices for accessing employment and education opportunities for those without access to vehicles. Benefits extend to increased physical activity; active travel has significant benefits for both physical and mental health, not just for children and young people, but for all Devon residents.

The table below summarises how the proposals would impact achievement of relevant Strategic Plan actions according to a seven-point scale, whereby -3 represents a large negative and +3 represents a large positive impact.

Strategic Plan priority	Strategic Plan action	Alignment
Responding to the climate emergency	Prioritise sustainable travel and transport.	+3 (Large positive)
	Encourage sustainable lifestyles.	+3 (Large positive)
Supporting sustainable economic recovery	Secure investment in transport infrastructure.	+3 (Large positive)
	Maintain and, where necessary, improve our highway network and improve sustainable transport options.	+2 (Moderate positive)
Improving health and wellbeing	Give people greater opportunities for walking and cycling to increase their physical activity.	+3 (Large positive)
Help communities to be sage, connected and resilient	Enable a range of transport options, including public transport.	+2 (Moderate positive)

7) Financial Considerations

Revenue funding, awarded by Active Travel England, has been used to develop the proposed Countywide LCWIP at a cost of £55,000 across the 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25 financial years.

Adoption of the proposed Countywide LCWIP does not automatically result in any additional financial commitment from Devon County Council. The Countywide LCWIP document recognises that the majority of funding for schemes is likely to require external grant funding from Government. Funding sources will also include Section 106 developer contributions, the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), and in some cases infrastructure may be delivered directly by developers. Adoption of the proposed Countywide LCWIP will strengthen the County's position to secure funding and deliver the routes detailed in the report.

Any future commitment of fundings towards either the development or delivery of active travel schemes would require committee approvals, i.e. through the transport capital programme or scheme specific reports to the relevant committee.

8) Legal Considerations

There are no specific legal considerations. When introducing new transport schemes, it is the County Council's responsibility to ensure that all relevant legislation is complied with. Where relevant, these are considered in reports on individual schemes, such as where land negotiations or traffic regulation orders may be necessary.

9) Environmental Impact Considerations (Including Climate Change)

The delivery of active travel interventions is an essential part of reducing transport emissions in Devon. According to the Devon Carbon Plan, transport contributes approximately 30% of Devon's greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) and is the sector with the largest GHG emissions across the county. Reducing transport GHG will be essential to meet both national and local climate commitments.

The Countywide LCWIP provides a strategic plan for the delivery of new routes that will provide an attractive alternative to the private car for short to medium distance journeys. Several of these routes are accessible by rail with potential to promote end to end low carbon leisure pursuits.

10) Equality Considerations

Where relevant, in coming to a decision the Equality Act 2010 Public Sector Equality Duty requires decision makers to give due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct;
- advance equality by encouraging participation, removing disadvantage, taking account of disabilities and meeting people's needs; and

- foster good relations between people by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

In relation to the protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership (for employment), pregnancy and maternity, race/ethnicity, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation), when coming to a decision, a decision maker may also consider other relevant factors such as caring responsibilities, rural isolation or socio-economic disadvantage.

In progressing this LCWIP, an Impact Assessment has been prepared which is available on the Council's website at <https://www.devon.gov.uk/impact/published>.

The Impact Assessment highlights that, overall, the LCWIP will benefit all residents by improving walking, wheeling and cycling links for a range of purposes including access to work, education and leisure pursuits. The proposed infrastructure will cater for pedestrians and cyclists of all ages, abilities and confidence levels. It may enable certain individuals to travel independently by improving safety of routes and removing some of the barriers preventing active travel.

11) Risk Management Considerations

The proposed Countywide LCWIP represents an ambitious set of active travel interventions. Subject to the availability of funding and the further development of individual schemes, it may not be possible to deliver all interventions set out in the document. The delivery of proposals will need to be flexible and adapt to changing circumstances, such as public support for the detailed proposals and the availability of funding.

Road Safety Audits will be undertaken prior to delivery of individual schemes. This is a formal, independent process for assessing risks to different road users, conducted during the development and post implementation of schemes.

12) Summary

The Countywide LCWIP sets out ambitious evidence-based plans for expanding and strengthening Devon's rural multi-use trail network. The document strongly aligns with Strategic Plan priorities and the Devon Carbon Plan. It will help ensure the County is best placed to attract and secure external funding, focused in locations that offer greatest opportunity to increase active travel, particularly in rural areas.

The document has undergone public consultation and has been amended in response to the feedback it received. This report seeks that the Committee advises Cabinet of any comments on the Countywide LCWIP.

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Electoral Divisions: All

Cabinet Member for Highway Management: Councillor Stuart Hughes

Local Government Act 1972: List of background papers

Nil

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