

Part A

Report to: Cabinet

Date of meeting: 11 November 2019

Report author: Group Head of Corporate Strategy and Communications

Title: Improving connections for cycling in Cassiobury Park from Rickmansworth Road to the Hub (Footpath 30)

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 As part of Watford's ambitions to develop sustainable transport, one of the Elected Mayor's commitments, embedded into the Council's Corporate Plan, is to improve walking and cycling routes in the town to offer an appealing, practical alternative to private car travel.
- 1.2 The need to enhance the cycle routes within Cassiobury Park has been identified as part of this programme of improvements, in particular the route from Rickmansworth Road to the Hub and rustic bridge – Footpath 30 (F30) (see Appendix 1 for map). The refurbishment of F30 and granting permissive rights to cyclists along its length will support the launch of a new cycle hire scheme being delivered in spring 2020, and regulate cycling between these key features within the park
- 1.3 A project has been initiated to deliver the improvements to FP30, encompassing:
 - A review of options for FP30, including assessing feasibility and budgets
 - A review of best practice and advice from experts within the cycling field
 - Engagement with key stakeholders, including local residents
 - Engagement with the council's chosen bike share provider
 - A review of signage
 - Proposals for better information on considerate use of the paths in Cassiobury Park
- 1.4 The project has set a delivery date of the end of March 2020 to coincide with the launch of the bike share scheme.

2.0 Risks

2.1

Nature of Risk	Consequence	Suggested Control Measures	Response (<i>Treat, tolerate, terminate, transfer</i>)	Risk Rating (the combination of severity and likelihood)
Risk of not agreeing on a suitable / deliverable solution for linking Rickmansworth Rd to the Hub	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Delay to project - Risk to bike share scheme business plan - Disaffected stakeholders who are looking for a solution to the current situation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thorough assessment and testing of options taking into account expert advice and stakeholder feedback - Present solutions to Cabinet 	Treat	(3 x 2) 6
Delay to the project so the cycle link from Rickmansworth Rd to the Hub is not delivered by March 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Risk to bike share scheme business plan - Reputational damage to the council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Robust project planning and governance - Highlight risks / issues as they arise 	Treat	(3 x 2) 6
Project costs exceed budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Budget strain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Robust budget monitoring 	Treat	(3 x 2) 6

3.0 **Recommendation**

3.1 Cabinet is asked to:

3.2 Consider the engagement feedback, noting the concerns raised as well as the broad support for the proposals

3.3 Approve the option recommended in this report for FP30 - Option 4: Resurface and widen Footpath 30 with an asphalt surfacing solution

3.4 Agree that permissive rights be granted for cyclists to use FP30

3.5 Approve the recommendation to make the path a non-segregated, shared surface, with the promotion of considerate use by all users (supported by better signage and information within the park– see 3.7 below

3.6 Approve procurement of contractors to undertake detailed design and build of the scheme.

3.7 Note that an important element of the improvements will include better signage on the path and an information campaign on the safe shared use of FP30 and other shared paths within the park. The information campaign will be informed by best practice, including advice from Sustrans, the cycling and walking charity.

3.8 Once implemented, the project team will keep the path under review to monitor how effectively the improved shared surface is balancing the various user needs within Cassiobury Park.

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4.0 Detailed proposal

4.1 Background

Watford has established a reputation as a town that welcomes and promotes cycling as a means of travel that not only reduces the reliance on the car but is also a great way for people to keep fit and healthy.

The Elected Mayor of Watford, Peter Taylor, made the delivery of a wider range of sustainable transport solutions a key manifesto commitment on being elected in 2018, with cycling at the heart of these solutions. This included the introduction of bike share for Watford, the refurbishment of Watford Cycle Hub and the improvement of the town's cycling network.

Early feedback from the borough's cycling community as well as the requirements of the bike share scheme to access popular destinations in the borough and optimise routes for cycling, identified Cassiobury Park as in need of a clearer, consistent approach to cycling.

4.2 Cycling in Cassiobury Park: FP30

Cycling in Cassiobury Park is currently confusing and unclear, particularly in relation to cycling from Rickmansworth Road to the Hub / rustic bridge. This is the route that cyclists would take if cycling to and from the town centre.

A number of paths in the park do allow cycling, either permissively or under the Cycle Act 1984, but Footpath 30 (FP30) – the main east / west arterial route through Cassiobury – does not. This path is poorly signposted and, because it directly connects some of the park's main attractions, it is regularly used by cyclists – although it is officially not permitted. This can, at times, lead to misunderstandings and confrontations between park users – currently around 2 million people use the park each year, including a significant number of cyclists.

Now however, with the need for sustainable transport alternatives becoming ever more pressing, it is proposed that permissive rights be granted to cyclists to use FP30. The park, as it currently stands, represents an effective 'no go' area of considerable size for cyclists and interrupts the town's cycle network, acting as a blocker to a cohesive and joined-up sustainable transport approach. It is also an important factor in the successful delivery of the new cycle hire scheme due to go live in spring 2020.

4.3 Options Appraisal

The council initiated a project to address the need to open up FP30 to cycling. Sustrans, the charity which promotes improvements to cycling and walking networks, was commissioned to support the development and design of options and subsequent concept design for the new path, bringing their experience and expertise and understanding of best practice.

Four initial proposals were explored:

1. Do nothing
2. Construct a separate, new path running parallel to FP30
3. Widen and segregate the existing path
4. Widen the existing path and make it shared use

These were also tested with the borough's Cycle Forum in July 2019. Option 4 was considered the best option in terms of both cost and conflict reduction, whilst also having minimum impact on the park's ecology and overall character. A concept design was developed on this basis.

4.4 **Concept design solutions**

A concept design was drawn up by Sustrans, offering three different solutions to the build of the refurbished path:

1. A resin bound aggregate path
2. Asphalt
3. Self-binding gravel

Resin bound aggregate – this proved the most expensive solution and would not be in keeping with the current aesthetic of the park. Like asphalt, it is a smooth surface, which is good for disabled users, but encourages high speeds in cyclists. Sustrans' suggestion of using alternative colour strips to slow cyclists would prove unpopular aesthetically and we do not believe it would offer sufficient results in speed reduction to warrant the impact on the visual amenity of the park. Given these considerations, we do not recommend this option.

Self-binding gravel – this is the most natural looking approach, but out of keeping with the park's aesthetic and costly to maintain. It is also a considerable barrier to disabled users and pushchairs. We do not recommend this option.

Asphalt – this is in keeping with the park's current aesthetic and also the most budget friendly option. Given that it is a 'like for like' material, there is the cost-saving option to resurface the existing path, without the need for excavation, and widen as results of topological surveys allow. This option is the easiest to deliver and offers the least risk in terms of deliverability, especially given the project's tight timeframes. It is also the most hard-wearing option with only a minimal maintenance plan and associated costs required. We are considering how best to use signage and street furniture in a way that does not encumber disabled users or maintenance vehicles in order to reinforce considerate and safe use of FP30.

4.4 **Concept Design Option Recommendation**

Given the information received in 4.3, asphalt is recommended for the following reasons:

- Most budget friendly option, with potential for further cost saving by resurfacing, rather than excavating, existing path and widening to either side.
- Offers least deliverability risk given tight timescales.
- Mitigates risk to go live of cycling scheme as of the 3 options this will be the quickest and easiest to deliver.
- Low maintenance costs.
- In keeping with current park aesthetic.
- Offers no obstacles to disabled users or maintenance vehicles.
- If at a later date for whatever reason the decision were to be taken to move to resin bound aggregate, this can be overlaid.
- Park user group feedback showed greatest support for this option, provided it were accompanied by comprehensive signage and appropriate information and education campaigns plus enforcement where behaviours are witnessed that do not comply with considerate and safe use

4.5 Permissive Rights

To officially allow cycling on FP30 there needs to be a legal process initiated. The project team recommends permission be granted via permissive rights as this gives the council the option to revoke cycle access at any time, for any reason, should there be a requirement to do so (i.e. In the case of shared use resulting in significant, evidenced cases of user conflict between cyclists and pedestrians).

Legal advice has been sought and it suggests that the process is relatively straight forward. FP30 will need to be clearly signposted as granting permissive rights to cyclists. In addition, the council can lodge a declaration with Hertfordshire County Council, acknowledging existing public rights of way over the land and indicating a lack of intention on the council's part to dedicate any other public rights over the land in question.

4.6 Stakeholder engagement

As the borough's most-used and best loved park, it is important to enable local people and parks users the opportunity to share their views on the proposals for FP30. Feedback received will help shape the final design for FP30 and the improved signposting of the route.

Face to face engagement

- **14 October – Park User Group meeting.**
The options appraisal and preferred concept design were presented. Broad support was received but clear message given on the need for appropriate signage and regulation of inconsiderate / inappropriate behaviour. The group felt it was important to see the proposal within the wider context of cycling within the park

- **22 October – Cycle Forum.** 21 attendees.
The options appraisal and preferred concept design were presented. Again there was general support for the proposal with agreement that the signposting and information element would be critical to ensure optimum sharing of the space and a reduction in current conflict
- **24 October – stakeholder drop-in session – Cassiobury Park Hub.** 17 attendees.
Responses from this group were more mixed, with three definite positions emerging: 1. in favour 2. not in favour 3. mixed views – primarily with concerns about the behaviour of some cyclists and the impact of this on safety and the ambiance of the park. Feedback was generally divided by the main reason people visit, and use, the park. Pedestrian views mainly fell into position 3. Some were supportive of cycling as long as it is responsible and speeds kept to a minimum, advocating considerate usage (possibly a pedestrian-priority approach) and wanting much clearer signage with the right messaging. Concerns were voiced about cycling speeds, especially in the area at the bottom of the hill near the Hub and paddling pools. Some opposed cyclists on the path altogether. Cyclists were largely in favour of the scheme, but on the whole did not support the idea of pedestrian priority, preferring an emphasis on people being actively encouraged to cycle considerately, prioritising the safety of other users. Their approach to signage was, therefore, more in favour of a 'share with care' message in keeping with the notion of a shared, non-segregated surface. Those expressing the strongest concern, and least in favour of the proposal, were dog walkers.
- **29 October – Disability Watford**
A representative of Disability Watford met the team to discuss the proposal; he also submitted feedback via email. There was acknowledgement that the current situation in the park is far from ideal for all users, including those with disabilities. Overall, he was in favour of a shared surface rather than a segregated path and felt dealing with this path should be an initial step in seeking to regulate cycling and shared use across Cassiobury as a whole.

Online and hard copy survey

138 responses were received. As for the drop-in session, views were mixed with strong objections registered to allow cycling on the path with equally supportive views for the proposal. Online there was more support for a segregated path than there had been in other engagement sessions. This could be because at the drop-in and Cycle Forum representatives from Sustrans were able to talk through why shared space is deemed to be safer and less open to conflict than segregated paths. Of the 138 responses received: 50% were in favour, 23%

were not in favour, 12% had mixed views and 18% were in favour of a segregated path rather than a shared path.

4.7 Next Steps

Procurement of contractor for detailed design and build phase

The project is now seeking to enter into negotiations with contractors for the design and build phase of the scheme. Given the tight timeframe the project is working to, and the relative simplicity of the design, we hope to appoint from the existing call-off framework. The contractor will be in place by mid-November to begin the detailed design ready for construction to start in January.

4.8 Monitoring and review

The project team will keep the shared path under review to ensure the objectives of the project are met.

5.0 Implications

5.1 Financial

The Shared Director of Finance comments that there is budget provision to deliver this project within the Capital Programme as part of the Cycle and Road Infrastructure Improvements programme.

5.2 Legal Issues (Monitoring Officer)

The Group Head of Democracy and Governance comments that by proceeding under permissive rights the council will need to ensure that the right to cycle along the footpath is prevented for at least 24 hours each year (i.e. the path is closed to cycling).

5.3 Equalities, Human Rights and Data protection

Officers have undertaken an equalities impact analysis (EIA) as this will be a change to the main path through Cassiobury Park. This is appended to this report (see Appendix 2). The EIA addresses the council's public sector equality duty under s149 of the Equality Act 2010 and is intended to assist the council to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to: eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act, advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it and foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not.

5.4 Sustainability

This proposal forms part of a wider sustainable transport programme and will support our sustainable objectives and vision. The resulting desired modal shift to cycling will also help support our climate crisis pledge.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Cassiobury Park map

Appendix 2: Equality Impact Analysis