Active Travel Task and Finish Scrutiny Group Report

1.   Summary

1.1   The cross-party task and finish group was established by the Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport (SEPT) committee in March 2025, with a remit to scrutinise the implementation of the council's cycling and walking strategy, and to make recommendations.

1.2   The group took written evidence from Reading Borough Council officers, local community groups, and high-performing local authorities for active travel. Further oral evidence was taken via a meeting with representatives of the Reading Cycle Campaign, and a meeting with Transport officers.

1.3   In line with the terms of reference, the task and finish group has not proposed any changes to the council's recently-agreed Local Transport Strategy, but has instead concentrated on identifying ways to improve the implementation of the existing strategy. The group has sought to reach unanimity, and its recommendations have been agreed *'nem con'* unless otherwise specified.

1.4   Reading's Local Transport Strategy has been independently assessed, in a recent Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) report, as setting ambitious goals for modal shift to active and public transport. The report, considered by Audit and Governance Committee on 9 April 2025 [**viewable here**], noted that staffing constraints mean that it will only be possible to achieve these targets if all resources are prioritised in a way that aligns with the council's strategic objectives. Members recognised that these constraints are a national issue affecting all councils, it is noted that current Transport for the South East (TFSE) studies and consultations [**viewable here**] have verified that active travel in Reading is further ahead in their journeys towards modal shift than other councils in the South East and elsewhere and that there is opportunity for local improvement to better meet our strategic goals.

1.5   The group was mindful of the financial position that the council faces, and therefore has not made any recommendations for unfunded additional expenditure. The focus has instead been on looking at how processes can be improved, and how existing funding sources could best be used and prioritised, as several areas of concern were identified in this area.

1.6   Members found that while a strong strategic commitment to active travel exists, its effective implementation is currently facing operational challenges. This report sets out 12 recommendations across three themes, focusing on rebalancing scheme design priorities, best utilising available funding, and aligning internal processes to accelerate the delivery of a cohesive and safe active travel network, in order to meet the council's existing targets for modal shift:

> **Recommendations**
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> 1: Avoidance of 'missing links'
> 2: Increased use of 'wands' for a better value-vs-effort ratio

3: Considered use of shared spaces where appropriate

4: Continuous footways and 'informal' side-road zebra crossings

5: Cyclist-level traffic lights

6: Pavement parking and accessibility for disabled pedestrians

7: Making best use of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Section 106 (S106) contributions

8: Consideration of other sources of income, including demand management measures

9: Reprioritisation of Waiting Restrictions Review Programme (WRRP)

10: A clear pathway from scheme request to implementation

11: Embedding active travel across the council

12: Senior leadership oversight and project management to ensure delivery at pace

1.7   The task and finish group members would like to extend our thanks to the local community groups, Reading Borough Council officers, and officers from other authorities who provided evidence to this scrutiny process; and to Andrew Wood and Committee Services officers for providing valuable administrative support to assist members in carrying out this review.

Recommendations

2.   Scheme Design and Prioritisation

2.1   The group assessed whether the council is striking the right balance in its approach to scheme design and prioritisation, taking evidence from other councils and carefully considering feedback and suggestions from local stakeholders. Members were particularly mindful of evidence from leading local authorities, which showed that the areas which have seen the greatest level of modal shift to active travel are those which have implemented extensive, segregated and connected cycle networks, enabling people to feel safe when using active travel.

2.2   Members found a range of examples of best practice from other local authorities. Glasgow City Council has seen significant modal shift due to its segregated network; Greater Manchester councils have worked with the mayoral authority to deliver an integrated network across local authority areas; Edinburgh has developed new Street Design Guidance to incorporate dropped kerbs, tighter junction radii and pavement widening during infrastructure renewal schemes; Nottingham has introduced a Workplace Parking Levy to fund sustainable transport infrastructure; Lambeth has developed a kerbside use strategy to reallocate space from cars to pedestrians, cyclists and sustainable urban drainage; and Southwark's Streets for People scheme is moving away from favouring cars in order to free up space for cycling and walking.

Recommendation 1: Avoidance of 'missing links'

2.3   Members of the group acknowledged that there was a strong perception from public stakeholders that Reading's cycling network contained numerous 'missing links', which hindered uptake among potential cyclists. The group noted that even short gaps in

connectivity can have the effect of forcing cyclists onto busy main roads where they feel less confident, which precludes people from using the bicycle for the entire journey. As mentioned above, it was noted that the local authorities which had seen the greatest increase in cycle usage were those who had successfully delivered a connected and segregated network via a 'cycle superhighway' approach.

2.4 Members considered three case studies of Active Travel Fund (ATF) funded schemes to try and ascertain why missing links could arise:

Shinfield Road
The Shinfield Road cycle scheme has delivered a long length of stepped track, but active travel upgrades to the Christchurch Green junction are intended to take place in a subsequent phase, thereby resulting in a missing link between the new Shinfield Road scheme and Redlands Road. Members noted that previous ATF bidding requirements had limited the types of schemes that the council could put forward in specific funding rounds but noted that the funding allocation mechanism had recently been made more flexible, providing an opportunity for a reconsideration of the approach taken in putting schemes forward.

Members found that the prioritisation matrix for previous ATF-funded strategic cycle schemes had led to missing links, by preferring schemes which had the highest net level of support in the public consultation, rather than preferring schemes which would most help to deliver a connected cycle network.

Castle Hill
The group welcomed the approach taken with the proposed Castle Hill scheme, whereby the initial phase of delivery will concentrate on the more dangerous Inner Distribution Road (IDR) roundabout end (which connects with existing cycle routes in the town centre) as opposed to delivering a long length of cycle track along the Bath Road which would end with a missing link when cyclists arrived at the IDR roundabout.

Southampton Street
Members noted that a lengthy mandatory cycle lane (between the Hindu Temple and the former Red Cow pub, via an existing bus lane) had been introduced quickly and effectively as part of Covid-era ATF measures, but that there is then a gap in the form of a busy road between the Red Cow junction and the bus lane at the Oracle roundabout. No subsequent progress had been made with connecting these two schemes, due to officer concerns about the potential impact on car traffic at the roundabout, thereby resulting in a missing link.

The group felt that elected members had given a clear 'steer' on increased pedestrian and cyclist priority as part of the Local Transport Strategy, and that the council should ensure that any consideration of statutory duties to facilitate the expeditious movement of traffic on the road network gives sufficient weight to the movement of cyclists and pedestrian traffic, to promote modal shift.

Members of the task and finish group further recommend that a primary criterion for all future strategic scheme selection should be the prioritisation of linking up

existing infrastructure to form a contiguous cycle superhighway network. This might often involve starting in the town centre and building outwards, but specific cases would need to be considered in more detail as part of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) update.

Recommendation 2: Increased use of 'wands' for a better value-vs-effort ratio

2.5   It was recognised that a variety of Local Transport Note 1/20 (LTN 1/20) compliant methods of cycle lane segregation exist, including stepped tracks and bollards/wands. The group noted that existing strategic schemes in Reading had largely used stepped tracks, which are high quality and good practice, but are significantly more costly, and do not allow as long a length of cycle track to be implemented for the same amount of money as methods such as wands.

2.6   From officer evidence, it was noted that the primary reason for not using wands in schemes was a concern that it would be harder to clear leaves from these routes, however, members noted from the evidence of leading local authorities that this had seemingly not proved to be an impediment to wand-based schemes elsewhere, and felt that the gutter issue was a factor to be weighed up against other priorities, rather than a reason to rule out wands altogether. It was also noted that wands can be used to deliver large lengths of segregation quickly, with the potential to upgrade the schemes at a later stage if warranted.

2.7   The group recommends that the council should reconsider its approach to segregation, explicitly taking into account the use of lower-cost options (such as bollard/wand protection) where they can deliver a lengthier, more integrated cycle network more quickly, sharing experiences with other local authorities when it may be beneficial.

2.8   A further recommendation is to review the town's existing painted cycle lanes as part of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) update, with a view to identifying locations for wands to be installed to improve segregation, as a 'quick win'.

| *Figure 1: a stepped cycle track (DfT - Department for Transport)* | *Figure 2: a cycle lane with wand segregation (TfL - Transport for London)* |

Recommendation 3: Considered use of shared spaces where appropriate

2.9   The group noted that shared spaces are not preferred by Local Transport Note 1/20 (LTN 1/20) guidance, and therefore any schemes involving these would be unlikely to qualify for Active Travel Fund (ATF) funding. However, it was also recognised that, while there are some issues with pedestrian and cyclist interface on shared paths, they can also feel safer to novice cyclists (including women and children), and therefore may be beneficial in encouraging modal shift, especially in areas with existing wide paths and low footfall.

2.10   Members noted that there are numerous 'gaps' in the town's existing shared space network, as well as some missing pavement markers, missing tactile paving, instances of signage on the pavement surface not being reflected on the cycle network map, and instances of routes indicated on the map not having the appropriate indication on the pavement surface.

2.11   Noting that these 'gaps' may be fairly quick and cost-effective to deal with, the group recommends that appropriate consideration be given to extensions to shared space routes as part of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) review, as locally-funded small schemes, to complement the emerging segregated cycle network.

Figure 3: a shared-use path for cyclists and pedestrians (DfT)

Recommendation 4: Continuous footways and 'informal' side-road zebra crossings

2.12   Members noted that recent changes to the Highway Code had given increased priority to pedestrians and cyclists and side road junctions, and noted that a growing number of local authorities have been redesigning such junctions to increase the physical sense of priority, such as continuous footways/Copenhagen crossings. These entry treatments physically maintain the pavement level and surface material, indicating to drivers that they are crossing a continuous pedestrian route, rather than the other way around. This design enhances accessibility for disabled users and pushchairs by eliminating the need to navigate kerbs, making the walking route more direct and uninterrupted. A further, and more cost-effective measure, can be found in pilots of 'informal' side road zebra crossings, in Westminster and other local authorities.

2.13   The group found that there had been some examples of good practice with continuous footways in Reading, but this was not consistent and did not form part of a larger commitment to such entry treatments.

2.14   It was also noted that some London authorities had implemented continuous paths for cyclists and pedestrians where segregated cycles tracks had been installed. Members noted that there would be cost considerations to such an approach, but that this type of infrastructure may avoid some of the issues with sharp kerbs that have affected the Shinfield Road scheme where the raised path ends and restarts at each side road, as well as improving the sense of priority.

2.15   While the group noted that continuous footways would not be suitable for every junction, it was felt that such options were generally being ruled out on the grounds of inconvenience to motorists, or cost, and felt that they were not currently being sufficiently prioritised in the 'toolbox' of measures available to the council. The group therefore recommends that the council consider examples of best practice in other local authorities and take into account how such crossings can promote modal shift in future major and minor schemes.

Figure 4: Shinfield Road stepped cycle track with white painted entry treatment (Google Maps)

Figure 5: a stepped cycle track with 'flush kerb' entry treatment (Google Maps)

Figure 6: an entry treatment of both a stepped cycle track and continuous footway (Google Maps)

Figure 7: a continuous footway for pedestrians (Google Maps)

Figure 8: an informal side-road zebra crossing (Google Maps)

Recommendation 5: Cyclist-level traffic lights

2.16   Cyclist-level traffic lights can be installed alongside normal traffic lights at advance stop lines, or as part of segregated infrastructure. These can sometimes be phased differently to allow early release, they improve visibility and safety, and more generally provide a visual reminder to all road users that cyclists are using the junctions.

2.17   The group found that there were very few such traffic lights in Reading, and although the Council had supported their use in principle, there had been no progress towards installing any, due to cost considerations. Members recognised that cost would generally prohibit the retrofitting of cyclist-level lights on existing infrastructure due to its fragility, as this would require a full replacement of the existing traffic lights, but noted that many other local authorities have similar issues with ageing infrastructure yet had introduced a significant number of cyclist-level lights. It was further noted that no cyclist-level signals had been installed as part of the Traffic Signal Obsolescence Grant funded programme on cost grounds; members did not feel that this reflected the correct balance of strategic priorities.

2.18   The group recommends that the installation of cyclist-level traffic lights should be adopted as the default where new traffic light infrastructure is installed (e.g. on new housing estates), and in junctions undergoing a complete replacement (e.g. via the

Traffic Signal Obsolescence Grant or as part of those Active Travel Fund (ATF) works which require a full signal replacement).

Figure 9: cycle traffic lights at eye level (DfT)

Recommendation 6: Pavement parking and accessibility for disabled pedestrians

2.19   A recurring theme in the evidence from stakeholders was that pavements are routinely obstructed by parked cars, which causes a significant impediment for pedestrians and disabled people. It was noted that there are some streets where pavement parking restrictions would result in a reduction in car parking capacity, due to the roads in question being too narrow for cars to park on both sides unless using the pavement. Members felt that that a loss of parking capacity was not, in itself, a good reason to rule out pavement parking restrictions, as the Local Transport Strategy specifically commits to the reallocation of space from cars to pedestrians, whose needs are not currently being adequately prioritised.

2.20   In 2014, the council implemented a pavement and verge parking ban via Traffic Regulation Order (TRO), in Tilehurst and Southcote. Members recognised that for administrative reasons it would not be feasible to implement a boroughwide ban via this method, and that the council is waiting for the government to make an announcement on changes to national legislation. In the meantime, individual problem streets could be considered for parking restrictions via the existing waiting restrictions review programme, noting the significant capacity constraints.

2.21   It is therefore recommended that the council should await forthcoming government updates on a national pavement parking ban, and consider becoming an early adopter or pilot local authority for any opportunities that arise to address pavement obstructions.

2.22   A further recommendation, specifically concerning the needs of disabled pedestrians, is that the council give due consideration to benches/perching places as part of proposals to improve the town's public realm, recognising that pregnant women, disabled and elderly people, those living with chronic pain, and carers with small children etc struggle to access amenities without adequate places to rest.

3. Funding

3.1   The group considered whether the council is making the best use of all current and potential funding sources to finance active travel schemes.

3.2   Members noted that constraints on local authority finances mean that active travel schemes must generally be funded from income sources outside of the council's general revenue streams. In Reading, strategic active travel schemes have largely been funded via the government's Active Travel Fund (ATF), as well as some use of Section 106 monies. A key theme noted in the response from Reading Cycle Campaign was the slow progress with the backlog of 'small scheme' implementation, due to a lack of funding, and the task and finish group has focused on making recommendations to improve the CIL process in order to address this.

3.3   Members recognised that transport schemes are only one of several 'themes' for Community Infrastructure Level (CIL) expenditure, with others including parks, public realm improvements and community facilities. It was recognised that transport expenditure should be balanced with these other areas of spending, but members felt that the right balance was not currently being struck, particularly when it came to 80% CIL, where the lack of any funding for cycling infrastructure was not felt to reflect the council's strategic priorities.

Recommendation 7: Making best use of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Section 106 (S106) contributions

3.4   The group took evidence on the current use of developer contributions (such as CIL and S106 funds) for major and minor active travel schemes.

3.5   Members expressed significant concern that the 15% CIL process did not appear to be operating effectively in this area. The current situation is that minor active travel measures (such as improved cycling facilities, pedestrian refuges, speed calming features, modal filters etc) are agreed by committee, subject to funding, with the main source of potential funding being 15% CIL. The CIL terms of reference allow either councillors or officers to submit funding bids, to be agreed by the Policy Committee; however, officer feedback indicated that officers had not submitted any CIL funding requests for these schemes, meaning that a backlog of agreed schemes has built up. Members noted that, in practice, 15% CIL bids only originate from ward councillors – this leads to a failure point in the process, as an active travel network will have gaps if ward members in different areas have different priorities. It was also noted that, where members have put forward new cycling and walking measures for CIL funding, these are often schemes that do not feature in the existing list of agreed schemes.

3.6   Members noted that £500,000 of 80% CIL funding had been used (by Network Management) to successfully and quickly deliver a programme of dropped kerbs and grab rails to benefit pedestrians. However, this was a new programme that did not originate from the agreed list of schemes, which are still forming a backlog. Evidence from Finance officers was that no bids had been received from the Strategic Transport team for 80% CIL funding, which members considered to be a missed opportunity. It was noted that there had been significant use of 80% CIL funding for road resurfacing,

which will provide some benefit to cyclists and pedestrians, but members did not consider that this balance of funding adequately reflected the changing priorities of the council for active travel.

3.7   The group also noted that there had been use of S106 contributions in funding schemes by both Network Management and Strategic Transport, however, it was observed that a significant number of pending schemes in the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) and other request lists are located in the town centre, and that progress has not been made with these despite significant housing development in this area, and associated developer contributions.

3.8   Members noted that a source of frustration from cycling groups was the lengthy list of small measures in the town centre area, which had been outstanding for many years, predominantly signage and wayfinding measures, without an identified funding source.

3.9   The task and finish group recommends that the council should review processes around how S106 and CIL funds are managed and allocated for active travel, and to ensure that officers are proactively putting forward schemes for funding.

Recommendation 8: Consideration of other sources of income, including demand management measures

3.10   As mentioned above, a significant constraint on active travel scheme delivery is the limited available funding. Members noted that in the medium term a metro-mayoral authority will be introduced; this is a potential source of additional funding, and many of the councils with the highest active travel capability rating are part of combined authorities. A risk is that Reading Borough Council will not be able to fully benefit from this funding due to capacity issues, and members therefore request that officers plan ahead for any opportunities that are likely to arise from devolution.

3.11   Members also recognised that the several leading authorities have introduced schemes such as the Workplace Parking Levy, Clean Air Zone or Congestion Charge. These are demand management measures, the primary function of which is to change travel behaviours, but which have the second order effect of raising income which is ringfenced to transport expenditure, including active travel. The task and finish group noted that a Workplace Parking Levy (WPPL) had previously been considered by Reading Borough Council, which had the potential to raise a significant amount of income depending on the area covered, but this had not been progressed due to uncertainty about post-Covid travel behaviours.

3.12   The group recognised that any such scheme would be a significant undertaking, and felt that the current priority should be to ensure that all existing funding sources are being fully utilised, and that processes are working properly. However, it is recommended that the council should formally monitor and evaluate examples of income generation from demand management measures implemented in other local authorities, and consider further exploring the potential for a WPPL in Reading when the time is right.

4. Implementation

4.1   The group considered whether officer time, processes, and high-level vision are adequately aligned with strategic active travel aims.

Recommendation 9: Reprioritisation of Waiting Restrictions Review Programme (WRRP)

4.2   It was recognised in the recent Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) review that Reading Borough Council has an ambitious target for active travel, and that a key risk is lack of officer capacity in delivering the necessary programme of work. The evidence which the task and finish group took from officers highlighted the fact that a significant proportion of officer time is currently taken up by the Waiting Restrictions Review Programme (involving changes to double yellow lines, parking bays etc), and associated Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) administration, investigation and consultation work. This has limited the amount of time available for active travel measures, and resulted in a backlog. While noting that double yellow lines can be popular with residents, they are not a strategic priority in the Local Transport Strategy, unlike active travel, and members did not feel that the council is currently getting the balance right.

4.3   The majority of the task and finish group members agreed to recommend that Reading Borough Council should limit the size of the Waiting Restrictions Review Programme (WRRP) to allow for greater officer time to be allocated to active travel work. Furthermore, the council should introduce a transparent scoring matrix for the WRRP submissions, which weights requests according to the council's various priorities (including active travel), and aligns with the LCWIP.

Recommendation 10: Clear pathway from scheme request to implementation

4.4   Members of the group found that the current progress route for scheme requests lacks clarity and consistency, and that there are too many 'request lists', leading to mismanaged expectations and frustrations from members of the public.

4.5   In their written evidence, officers set out the route that schemes should take through the council's processes:

•Inclusion/alignment with the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP)
•Optioneering
•Concept design
•Funding secured
•Scheme and spend approval (Policy/Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee (SEPT))
•Initial public consultation (including engagement with local interest groups)
•Review feedback and amend plans as appropriate
•Detailed design
•Approval to undertake statutory consultation (Traffic Management Sub-Committee (TMSC))
• Statutory consultation
• Review feedback and amend plans as appropriate
• Report objections / scheme amendments (TMSC)
• Procurement of a contractor

- Construction
- Scheme opening
- Scheme monitoring

4.6   Members felt that in practice, requests were not consistently following this pathway, with too many 'on ramps' and 'off ramps' throughout. For example, some completely new schemes were being put forward for Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding by councillors which did not form part of the agreed LCWIP, schemes that had been approved by committee or are in the existing LCWIP had not been progressed for funding, and there were too many 'request lists' with no clear pathway for progression. Currently, the various request lists include the Requests for Traffic Management Measures, the Cycle Forum request list and the CIL request list, as well as the LCWIP. In some locations, multiple conflicting schemes have been developed, and it is not always clear which proposals have been superseded, so this will need to be considered as part of the LCWIP review to ensure clarity and effective prioritisation.

4.7   The task and finish group recommends that the existing 'request lists' be combined into one, with clear criteria for progression from idea, to approval, to implementation.

4.8   Officers are also requested to ensure that engagement with key stakeholders, including the Reading Cycle Campaign, takes place at the earliest formative stages of scheme development.

Recommendation 11: Embedding active travel across the council

4.9   Members noted that the council has undergone a significant change in strategic priorities around active travel in recent years, and recognised the strong commitment to cycling and walking from key officers, but noted that in order for the ambitious modal shift targets to be achieved, it will be necessary to ensure that these new priorities are fully embedded across a range of departments, including Network Management, Anti Social-Behaviour (ASB) and Public Realm, Planning etc.

4.10   The task and finish group recommends that the council should formally reiterate its commitment to active travel, and that the council should take steps to ensure that the active travel strategic vision is consistently embedded across all relevant council departments, thereby ensuring that day-to-day operational decisions consistently support the growth of safe and cohesive cycling and walking infrastructure.

Recommendation 12: Senior leadership oversight and project management to ensure delivery at pace

4.11   Members of the task and finish group noted that perceptions of the progress to-date on active travel differed between officers and public stakeholders. The group felt that there needs to be more clarity around the effective project management of major schemes, with concern about the number of strategic Active Travel Fund (ATF) schemes that have yet to be completed.

4.12   The recommendation is that the council should review mechanisms for senior leadership oversight, and ways to ensure that the strategic vision for active travel is

being consistently implemented and that delivery is proceeding at pace, with clear reporting lines from the Chief Executive to the Executive Director.

5. Next steps

Progress tracker

5.1   Officers are requested to provide a report to the next meeting of the Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport (SEPT) Committee, agreeing or rejecting each recommendation; and to update councillors by way of a light-touch progress tracker to every second meeting of SEPT Committee, until all accepted recommendations are completed.