

WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL CABINET

14 NOVEMBER 2023

**Cabinet Member For Environment, Transport, Highways And Waste:
Councillor Phil Larratt**

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| Report Title | Active Travel Fund 4 - Connecting the Active Quarter – Access for All, Northampton |
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List of Approvers

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List of Appendices

Appendix A – Location plan

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To note and accept the Active Travel Fund Tranche 4 (ATF4) funding awarded by the Department for Transport to build the Connecting the Active Quarter – Access for All scheme in Northampton.
- 1.2. To seek delegated authority to the Executive Director of Place, Economy and the Environment and in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Transport, Highways and Waste to take all operational decisions necessary to implement the active travel scheme.

2. Executive Summary

- 1.3. The Active Travel Fund is part of the Government £2 billion commitment set out in [Gear Change](#) to deliver a step change in the provision of active travel and better streets for everyone, helping to promote health travel, reduce emissions and grow the economy. There have been four tranches of funding.
- 1.4. The first tranche of funding was announced in May 2020 during the early months of the Covid-19 pandemic and was known as the Emergency Active Travel Fund and was used to implement temporary measures across Northamptonshire, which have now been removed.
- 1.5. In November 2020 Northamptonshire County Council was awarded £1.066m capital funding and £266,570 revenue funding for Active Travel Fund Tranche 2 (ATF2). Following strong opposition from residents and businesses to an original proposal to convert Billing Road into a one-way road, the Council have worked with the Department for Transport to revise the proposal and develop an alternative.
- 1.6. The Abington Area Active Travel scheme now seeks to improve Abington Park Crescent, Bridgewater Drive, Park Avenue South and the Billing Road/ Rushmere Road junction in Northampton.
- 1.7. Consultation on the Abington Area Active Travel scheme was carried out in late spring 2023, a consultation report is currently being prepared and will be published on the Council's website. In line with legacy procedures in place at that time, the ATF2 scheme was not part of a formal decision-making process.
- 1.8. The funding allocations for Active Travel Fund Tranche 3 (ATF3) were confirmed in May 2022. The Council did not submit a bid so did not receive an allocation.
- 1.9. In February 2023 the Department for Transport (DfT) announced Tranche 4 (ATF4) to support improving walking and cycling infrastructure across the country.
- 1.10. ATF4 is a single year grant funding for the 2022/23 financial year for construction of walking and cycling schemes in 2023/24, with a requirement that the funding must be committed by March 2024.
- 1.11. Following a bidding process, in March 2023 the Council was awarded £642,871 for the capital construction of a 1300m traffic-free route, accessible for walking, wheeling and cycling at Delapre Abbey and associated supportive infrastructure (secure cycle parking facilities, wayfinding/directional signage, benches and information boards). In addition, £30,443 revenue funding was awarded to be spent on monitoring and evaluation, stakeholder engagement, consultation, and marketing.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- a) Notes and accepts the ATF4 funding to deliver the Connecting the Active Quarter – Access for All scheme, Northampton
- b) Delegates authority to the Executive Director of Place, Economy and the Environment in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Transport, Highways and Waste to take all operational decisions necessary to implement the active travel scheme at Delapre Abbey as outlined in 1.6 above.

4. Reason for Recommendations

- 4.1 To ensure the ATF4 grant award is spent within the award timescales and for the permitted purposes.

5. Report Background

- 5.1 At the Cabinet meeting held in January 2023, the Council formally endorsed a pioneering place-shaping Active Quarter in Northampton, a collaborative partnership of key public, third sector and private stakeholders who have come together around a shared ambition to pioneer active travel in the south-west area of Northampton.
- 5.2 The vision outlined a list of short, medium and long-term plans to deliver a zone supporting physical activity, health and wellbeing. One of the short-term schemes identified in the Active Quarter Vision was completion of the link between Delapre Abbey and Brackmills Industrial Estate.
- 5.3 On 6th February 2023 the Department for Transport (DfT) announced a funding competition that sought to support improving walking and cycling infrastructure across the country, called the Active Travel Fund Tranche 4 (ATF4). Bids had to be submitted by 24th February 2023.
- 5.4 The objectives of the fund are to:
 - Create a local authority capital investment programme that optimises delivery of 2025 and 2030 objectives, as set out in the statutory Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy (CWIS 2):
 - 50% of short urban trips in England to be walked, wheeled or cycled by 2030
 - Increase active travel from 41% in 2018 to 46% of short urban trips by 2025
 - Increase walking to 365 stages per person per year by 2025
 - Increase cycling from 0.8 billion stages in 2013 to 1.6 billion stages in 2025
 - 55% of primary school-aged children to walk to school by 2025
 - Align investment with Gear Change and wider Government objectives, including local growth and productivity, tackling public health issues, decarbonisation, levelling up and cost of living challenges.
 - Increase participation in active travel amongst underrepresented groups.
- 5.5 Due to the timescales involved, it was agreed in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Environment, Transport, Highways and Waste to submit the Connecting the Active Quarter – Access for All scheme as our priority construction scheme. The scheme will provide a new 1300m traffic-free route, accessible for walking, wheeling and cycling within Delapre Abbey, alongside cycle parking, signage and wayfinding.

- 5.6 The location of the traffic free routes is shown in Appendix A.
- 5.7 Following the bidding process, in March 2023 the Council was awarded £673,314.
- 5.8 Once built, the scheme will enable residents living in Far Cotton and the town centre to connect with employment opportunities in Brackmills Industrial Estate as well as connecting with other key amenities in the Active Quarter such as the University of Northampton and Northampton Mountain Bike Park.
- 5.9 The project will support economic growth by increasing the labour market that can access employment at the Brackmills Industrial Estate for example, delivering on the Council's strategic priorities to help existing businesses to develop, grow and to encourage new businesses to locate in Northampton.
- 5.10 The scheme also contributes towards the Council's Public Health 'Live Your Best Life' vision and supports the wider social prescribing/ cycle hub project based at Delapre Abbey to support mental and physical wellbeing.
- 5.11 The project will provide safe, attractive alternatives to help encourage people out of private cars, tackling congestion and improving air quality, particularly sections of the London Road which are within an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA).
- 5.12 Encouraging a switch to active travel will also contribute towards the Council's strategic target of becoming net zero by 2045.

6. Issues and Choices

- 6.1 A key requirement for ATF4 was that the funding be used to construct schemes that were at detailed design stage and 'shovel ready' with a requirement that funding must be committed by March 2024 (either construction by this date or contract in place with construction following as soon as possible).
- 6.2 The Council had previously been successful in securing funding for feasibility design for the Connecting the Active Quarter - Access for All scheme, and so design work was well advanced.
- 6.3 There were no alternative schemes that were considered to be at a sufficient level of design to meet the funding criteria.
- 6.4 The cost estimates for the Connecting the Active Quarter – Access for All scheme closely aligned with the indicative allocation from Active Travel England.
- 6.5 An Equality Screening Assessment has been completed. No negative impacts on protected groups were identified, so there is no requirement to complete a full Equality Impacts Assessment.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

7.1 Resources and Financial

- 7.1.1 The project is fully grant funded. To meet the grant requirements, the scheme needs to be constructed by March 2024 or committed (contract in place) by this date, with construction following soon after.
- 7.1.2 The works are to be awarded in two contracts. The first will incorporate the paths and cycle shelter. The second will be for the wayfinding and other signage.
- 7.1.3 Procurement for the tracks and cycle shelter has already commenced. If the works exceed the available budget, then the scheme will be value-engineered to meet the available budget.
- 7.1.4 The path construction will be sufficiently robust and durable for the proposed use that future maintenance will be minimal until later years (probably no significant maintenance needed for 10 years).
- 7.1.5 Any significant maintenance that is required in later years will be considered as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan. Should there be any change to the tenure of the grounds/woodland in the future, then responsibility for maintenance would be the responsibility of the new tenant.

7.2 Legal

- 7.2.1 Development of the Active Quarter within Northampton including application of the ATF4 for the construction of a 1300m traffic-free route, accessible for walking, wheeling and cycling at Delapre Abbey and associated supportive infrastructure, will contribute towards the Council's Public Health 'Live Your Best Life' vision and support the cycle hub project at Delapre Abbey to support mental and physical wellbeing.
- 7.2.2 Implementation of the identified scheme will be monitored.

7.3 Risk

- 7.3.1 Financial risks: if the scheme is not delivered within time and deadlines are not met, the Council risks grant clawback and loss of external funding and faces increased costs such as further inflationary pressure and abortive costs to date.
- 7.3.2 Reputational risks: If the scheme is not delivered within time and to budget it could affect the Council's position to secure funding from Active Travel England as future allocations are linked to demonstrating delivery. There would also be reputational damage with the public, as the scheme has already been announced including broad timescales for works.

7.4 Consultation and Communications

- 7.4.1 Consultation was carried out as part of the planning application process. Responses were received from several interested parties including Far Cotton and Delapre Community Council, Battlefields Trust as well as local residents and other interested parties.

- 7.4.2 Far Cotton and Delapre Community Council were generally supportive and welcomed the improved access for wheelchair users and those using mobility scooters. The Community Council did however note concerns raised by equestrians about using the surfaced paths.
- 7.4.3 The Battlefields Trust were also supportive of the aims of the proposal but raised concerns about maintaining the integrity of any extant archaeology relating to the battle of Northampton.
- 7.4.4 Some consultation responses highlighted concerns around the paths being shared by different user groups.
- 7.4.5 As a result of the consultation responses, further detail was provided on the unsurfaced paths that will remain open to equestrians if they do not want to use the new surfaced paths. The construction methodology used will not disturb the topsoil. The shared paths are designed to be of sufficient width to enable shared use. Signage will be used to encourage people to 'share with care'.
- 7.4.6 Further consultation will be undertaken in due course on the wayfinding signage.
- 7.4.7 Planning permission for the paths and cycle storage was granted on 22 September 2023.
- 7.4.8 The Council will continue to work with Active Quarter partners to deliver communications to promote the objectives and outcomes within the report.

7.5 **Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny**

- 7.5.1 Any requests from the Scrutiny Committee will be responded to, and formal engagement or presentations required will take place.

7.6 **Climate Impact**

- 7.6.1 The construction of the traffic free paths will have an environmental impact, but this will be mitigated as far as possible with minimal disturbance of the topsoil and no impact on tree roots. This will also be offset in the long term as the scheme will provide a safe and attractive alternative to the private car, that will encourage more people to walk, wheel and cycle which will help tackle congestion, improve air quality and reduce carbon emissions.

7.7 **Community Impact**

- 7.7.1 The aim of the project is to support the delivery of the Active Quarter in Northampton, to provide links to green spaces to contribute to people's health and wellbeing, but also provide connectivity for those living in Far Cotton to access Brackmills Industrial Estate for employment. Improving the paths so they can be used all year round by everyone will also help to grow a community within Delapre Abbey as it will support the provision of led cycle rides and walking groups.

8. **Background Papers**

8.1 Cabinet Report: 17 January 2023 – Northampton Active Quarter

Appendix A – Location plan of cycle shelter and cycle tracks

