

Active Travel Hierarchy Consultation and Development

To: Highways and Transport Committee

Meeting Date: 3 December 2024

From: Executive Director of Place and Sustainability

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: No

Executive Summary: This report provides an update to the Committee regarding the development and consultation on the draft Active Travel Hierarchy and the next steps being taken to finalise the Hierarchy. The Active Travel Hierarchy comprises: the Walking and Wheeling Hierarchy, the Cycling Hierarchy and the Public Rights of Way (PROW) hierarchy.

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to:

Note progress to date regarding creation of the Active Travel Hierarchy.

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1. Creating a greener, fairer and more caring Cambridgeshire

1.1 The creation of an Active Travel Hierarchy aligns with the following Strategic Framework Ambitions.

1.2 Ambition 1 (net zero carbon emissions for Cambridgeshire by 2045 and our communities and natural environment are supported to adapt and thrive as the climate changes).

Development and adoption of an Active Travel Hierarchy will help support modal shift by making highways safer and more attractive for walking, cycling and wheeling. This will help reduce car use, with resultant reductions in carbon from transport

1.3 Ambition 2 (travel across the county is safer and more environmentally sustainable).

Development and adoption of an Active Travel Hierarchy will help support modal shift by making highways safer and more attractive for walking, cycling and wheeling. This will help to reduce car use, with resultant reductions in congestion from transport, and to promote physical and mental wellbeing.

1.4 Ambition 4 (people enjoy healthy, safe, and independent lives through timely support that is most suited to their needs).

Making regular journeys on foot, by bicycle or other active means boosts health. Maintaining roads and highways infrastructure in ways that supports active travel helps support health improvement by making walking, cycling and wheeling a more attractive travel choice. Resultant reduction in motor vehicle journeys help reduce traffic congestion, reduce air pollution leading to increased air quality and reduced noise levels, which further supports increased physical and mental health and wellbeing.

2. Background

2.1 On 23 January 2024, the Highways and Transport Committee received a report on [proposals for an 'Active Travel Network Maintenance Hierarchy'](#), referred to in this report as an Active Travel Hierarchy.

2.2 The report outlined the principles of hierarchies for highway maintenance. It also introduced recommendations from the 'Well Managed Highways Infrastructure' code of practice, specifically that local highway authorities consider footways, cycle routes and public rights of way as part of their maintenance hierarchies. By doing this, an Active Travel Hierarchy can be formulated, which will better support non-motorised users of the highway network.

2.3 Since that report was presented in January 2024, the Council has worked with externally commissioned partners to develop a draft Active Travel Hierarchy. The Active Travel Hierarchy has three components:

- Walking and Wheeling* Hierarchy (which includes roads and footways)
- Cycling Hierarchy (which includes roads and cycleways)
- Public Rights of Way (which comprise of Public Footpaths, Public Bridleways, Restricted Byways and Byways Open to All Traffic).

(*The term 'Wheeling' includes the use of wheelchairs, powered wheelchairs, mobility scooters, rollators and other mobility aids).

- 2.4 The draft Walking and Wheeling Hierarchy and Cycling Hierarchy have been developed using a data-driven approach, considering such criteria as proximity to important destinations, population density, potential population growth, and risk factors such as speed limits. An aggregation of this data has been assigned to every road, footway and cycleway within the County on a location-specific basis. This has enabled each highway to be ranked and assigned a position within its respective hierarchy, and for maps to be produced to demonstrate the effect of the hierarchies for our communities.
- 2.5 The outcome of this work can be seen on the [Active Travel Hierarchy Map](#) on the Council's website.
- 2.6 The datasets and methodology used to compile the draft Walking and Wheeling Hierarchy and Cycling Hierarchy are attached at Appendix 1.
- 2.7 Whilst conducting this exercise, it was found that the data-modelled approach did not transfer effectively to Public Rights of Way, which means that the development of a draft Public Rights of Way Hierarchy has not yet taken place. This was because early theoretical work based on available data did not accord with highway officers' knowledge and experience of the PROW network. It was decided that feedback from the planned public consultation would be used to help inform the development of criteria for a potential Public Rights of Way Hierarchy.
- 2.8 Following the development of draft Hierarchies, a public consultation exercise took place, which sought input in two main ways:
 1. Respondents were presented with the draft hierarchies and asked to comment on whether, in their opinion, highways had been ranked appropriately. For Public Rights of Way, respondents were asked to comment whether or not they felt particular routes should be highly ranked in a hierarchy.
 2. Respondents were also asked for their feedback on the general principles of an Active Travel Hierarchy, such as what maintenance activities they would wish to see prioritised, and what criteria they felt should be used to classify highways within the hierarchies.
- 2.9 The consultation was open for responses during a ten week period from 22 July 2024 until 30 September 2024. All local Members and parish councils were emailed directly with an invitation to contribute feedback, as were local and national active travel and rights of way user groups. The consultation was regularly promoted on the Council's social media channels throughout the response period.
- 2.10 The number of responses received is set out below. A summary of the responses to the form requesting feedback on general principles of the Active Travel Hierarchy is attached at Appendix 2.
 - Active Travel Hierarchy – feedback on general principles: 259 forms and written responses received

- Walking/Wheeling – feedback on specific routes in the hierarchy: 124 forms received
- Cycling – feedback on specific routes in the hierarchy: 308 forms received
- Public Rights of Way – feedback on specific routes: 456 forms received

3. Main Issues

- 3.1 Owing to the length of time allowed for public consultation and the volume of feedback, consideration of how the responses received can be integrated into the draft hierarchies is still ongoing.

Feedback regarding the ranking of routes in the draft Hierarchies

- 3.2 Following a review of the consultation responses, the Walking and Wheeling Hierarchy and the Cycling Hierarchy will be updated, where appropriate, to reflect the routes felt to be most important by respondents. Feedback received in relation to Public Rights of Way will also be considered by the relevant teams to inform the development of criteria for a potential Public Rights of Way Hierarchy.
- 3.3 The final Walking and Wheeling Hierarchy and Cycling Hierarchy are anticipated to be updated and available for consideration for adoption by the Highways and Transport Committee in March 2025.

Feedback regarding the principles of an Active Travel Hierarchy

- 3.4 The feedback given by the public regarding the general principles of the proposed hierarchies will help give the Council an understanding of the maintenance activities and standards the public would like to see prioritised in relation to active travel.
- 3.5 This will be used to inform both:
- (i) The Council's decisions regarding assignment of criteria for reactive maintenance to the different rankings within the Active Travel Hierarchy (such as intervention levels for resolving category 1 defects, timeframes for repair, frequency of inspections, etc.); and
 - (ii) How the Council approaches decisions on the prioritisation of related planned capital maintenance schemes.
- 3.6 Consideration of how to assign reactive maintenance standards to highways at differing levels within the hierarchies will be undertaken upon finalisation of the hierarchies. It is anticipated that these maintenance standards will be included in the Highway Operational Standards (HOS) document. These changes will be the subject of a further report to this Committee, which is anticipated to be delivered in late 2025. It is not envisaged that the standard of maintenance for routes which are placed lower in the Hierarchy will be reduced.

- 3.7 Once adopted, the Hierarchy will be used to support prioritisation of capital maintenance schemes by assigning ranked scores to routes which are placed higher in the Hierarchy. This will complement the existing method used to prioritise schemes, rather than introducing a separate process. Subject to the adoption of the Hierarchy, this would be able to take place from April 2025 onwards. The inclusion of routes from the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) in the data-led assignment of Hierarchy rankings means that a more joined-up approach to delivering maintenance and improvement schemes for active travel routes will be possible.
- 3.8 Protocols for the addition of new or amended highways to the Hierarchies will also need to be developed, so that it can be determined how to assign newly adopted routes to an appropriate position within the Hierarchies.

Public Rights of Way

- 3.9 It has become clear that the data-led approach to ranking PROWs for the purposes of creating a hierarchy is not appropriate. The importance of any given PROW may depend on factors that cannot be quantified in the same way as a route that is intended to be used for utilitarian cycling or walking purposes. This is in large part because of the rural location of most PROWs; there is a likelihood that most are by their nature remote from services and prominent destinations (and so naturally attract a lower importance in the data-led ranking system), coupled with the fact that the majority of PROWs are used primarily for leisure journeys rather than for active travel purposes.
- 3.10 A separate methodology for developing a PROW Hierarchy is therefore being devised, to enable the inclusion of all PROWs within the wider Active Travel Hierarchy. Engagement with key colleagues and stakeholders will be undertaken to support this development, and it is intended to present a PROW Hierarchy to the Committee in July or October 2025, depending on the engagement outcomes.

4. Alternative Options Considered

4.1 Alternative options include:

- (a) Do not adopt the Active Travel Hierarchy. This is not recommended as the development of the Hierarchy will enable the Council to better support active travel and to achieve its ambitions outlined in section 1 of this report. The Committee also agreed to the development of the Active Travel Hierarchy at its meeting in January 2024.
- (b) Delay adoption of the Active Travel Hierarchy until a PROW Hierarchy has been devised. This is not recommended as the hierarchies for Walking and Wheeling, and Cycling, are now well-developed using data aggregation and supported by significant public consultation. They will be ready to adopt from March 2025 and would enable the Highways Maintenance service to better support active travel on much of the highway network, as well as being available for inclusion in capital maintenance prioritisation.
- (c) Exclude PROW from the Active Travel Hierarchy. This is not recommended. The 'Code of Practice for Well Managed Highways Infrastructure' guidelines advise that network hierarchies should include PROWs. Furthermore, it is known that a number of PROWs

are well-used for active travel purposes; it is therefore appropriate to include PROWs within an overall Hierarchy, which will enable the authority to maintain all of its highways on a ranked and prioritised basis.

5. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

- 5.1 This report outlines steps taken in the development of the Active Travel Hierarchy and the actions that will subsequently be taken to refine it and secure adoption by the Committee. The adoption of the Active Travel Hierarchy will be a key step in the alignment of highway maintenance priorities with the Council's aspirations for active travel and with nationally recommended best practice. The final Walking and Wheeling Hierarchy and Cycling Hierarchy will be presented to the Committee in March 2025, with a PROW Hierarchy to be presented later in 2025. Looking forward, following implementation the Hierarchy will be reviewed on a three-yearly cycle, alongside the Council's other highway maintenance hierarchies, as recommended by the Code of Practice for Well Managed Highways Infrastructure.

6. Significant Implications

6.1 Finance Implications

Any changes to the prioritisation of capital maintenance schemes and reactive maintenance standards will be integrated with existing prioritisation exercises and therefore within existing resources. If any new pressures are created through the implementation of the Hierarchy, options to fund these will be presented to the Committee for consideration. The assignment of reactive maintenance standards to the Active Travel Hierarchy will be the subject of a separate report to the Committee. It is anticipated that such a report will be presented to the Committee in the second half of 2025.

6.2 Legal Implications

The Council's duty to maintain public highways, as specified in the Highways Act 1980, remains unchanged by the introduction of the Active Travel Hierarchy.

The Council has carried out consultations as part of the formulation of the Active Travel Hierarchy and will take into account the results of the consultation.

The Council is not aware of any challenges to wider government policies and legislation on active travel which could affect the implementation and development of the Active Travel Hierarchy.

6.3 Risk Implications

The adoption of the Active Travel Hierarchy does not present any risk to the Council at this stage. The subsequent assignment and potential adoption of reactive maintenance standards across the Hierarchy will introduce a new risk area by implementing new standards that will be publicly available and which the Council will therefore be anticipated to uphold in managing its highway network. These implications will be considered in a subsequent report to the Committee once the standards have been drafted.

6.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

There are positive implications for equality and diversity. By introducing a system for prioritising maintenance on the most important active travel routes, the Council would be able to better respond to defects and issues on the assets most valued by the wider community. The introduction of the Walking and Wheeling Hierarchy is intended to support the authority in prioritising maintenance for routes that are used by residents who rely on mobility aids.

An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) is attached at Appendix 3. The EqIA has identified certain actions required to ensure that engagement is sought with demographic groups which are less equipped to respond to consultation, to help explore how the benefits of the Active Travel Hierarchy can be extended to these groups. It is proposed that these actions are taken up as part of a future review of the Hierarchy.

7. Source Documents

7.1 [January 2024 report to the Highways and Transport Committee](#)

7.2 ['Well Managed Highways Infrastructure', UK Roads Liaison Group, October 2016](#)

7.3 [Active Travel Hierarchy Map](#)

7.4 [The Council's 'Active Travel Strategy'](#)