

Central Bedfordshire Council

12 June 2025

Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Sustainable Modes of Travel to Schools and Active Travel Strategies

Report of:

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The following sections of this report are exempt: -

None

This report relates to a decision that is: *Non-Key*

This report relates to a decision that is urgent/exempt from call-in: No

Purpose of this report

To seek comments on:

- Sustainable Modes of Travel to Schools Strategy (updated)
- Active Travel Strategy (new)

RECOMMENDATION(S)

The Committee is asked to:

Consider, comment, and pass recommendations to the Executive on:

- Sustainable Modes of Travel to Schools Strategy
- Active Travel Strategy

Executive summary

1. As part of works to prepare issue 4 of the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan, various of the component and supporting strategies and guidance documents have been updated and require approval. Covered within this report are:
 - i. An updated '[Sustainable Modes of Travel to Schools Strategy](#)' for Central Bedfordshire
 - ii. A new 'Active Travel – Walking, Wheeling and Cycling Strategy' for Central Bedfordshire
2. The updated draft Sustainable Modes of Travel to Schools Strategy reflects changes to how school-related travel is now managed within Central Bedfordshire and in particular the opportunities afforded by the transition to a two-tier school system. The updated strategy also reflects government targets related to home-to-school travel.
3. The new draft Active Travel Strategy reflects an integrated approach to the promotion of walking, wheeling and cycling and complements the suite of [Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans](#) adopted by the Council in April 2024. Once approved, the strategy will replace the existing, separate strategies for '[Walking](#)' and '[Cycling](#)'.
4. The above referenced strategies place in context the activities and initiatives undertaken by officers to facilitate sustainable travel choices and to promote walking, wheeling and cycling for local trips. Alongside the investment that is being made to upgrade active travel infrastructure through Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans, the strategies are vital components of the drive to raise the proportion of trips by 'active modes' beyond 50% by 2030.

Background

5. The Local Transport Plan for Central Bedfordshire sets out the overarching strategy for managing transport in Central Bedfordshire. It identifies local transport priorities and provides a framework for directing future investment. It is a statutory requirement (Local Transport Act, 2008) for all highway authorities to have a Local Transport Plan in place and since 2000, it has been the vehicle through which Central Government funds local transport schemes.
6. Issue 4 of the Central Bedfordshire Local Transport Plan is currently being developed. Once completed, it will set out agreed strategic priorities relating to the provision and integration of transport services across the authority. This is against a background of rising demand for travel, reflecting significant levels of Local Plan-related housing and employment growth. The LTP will also complement the Sustainability Plan in setting out the steps needed to reduce transport-related emissions.
7. The LTP is informed and supported by a suite of documents (plans, strategies, and guidance documents) that help direct action through more detailed policies and guidance on their practical implementation. The Sustainable Modes of Travel to Schools Strategy and the Active Travel Strategy are both supporting documents of LTP4.

8. The new and updated documents reflect a continuation of the work that has been done over the past fifteen years to provide residents of Central Bedfordshire with a range of attractive travel choices other than the private car. This drive towards a more sustainable future is reflected in the Council's [2050 Vision](#), [Strategic Plan](#), [Local Plan](#) and [Sustainability Plan](#), all of which have been published since Issue 3 of authority's [Local Transport Plan](#) was adopted in 2011.

Updated Sustainable Modes of Travel to Schools strategy

9. The requirement to prepare a Sustainable Modes of Travel Strategy is set out in the Education and Inspections Act of 2006. This legislation places the Council under a general duty to assess annually the school travel needs of its authority area and to promote the use of sustainable modes of travel for the journey to school, between schools and to other educational institutions.
10. The authority's current 'Sustainable Modes of Travel to Schools' strategy was adopted in 2011. It had the aim of delivering greater sustainability in all forms of travel to, from and between schools and other forms of education provision available within the authority. The document drew together related strands of work in education, travel planning, transport provision and road safety.
11. The updated strategy has a strong degree of continuity, recognising that walking, cycling, or scooting to school is good for everyone. It seeks to reduce the number of cars making short journeys, helping improve air quality and reducing congestion during the school run period. As well as getting more children walking, scooting, and cycling, the strategy seeks to ensure journeys to school are healthy, safe and an enjoyable part of the day for everyone who takes part.
12. The context for the strategy is that nationally, the number of children walking, cycling, or scooting to school has been in decline for several decades. This is the result of various societal trends including increasing levels of private car ownership, higher number of women participating in the labour market and increasing numbers of parents exercising their right to choose their children's school.
13. In 1975-76, 74% of primary school pupils walked, cycled, or scooted to school. In 2022, the figure for walking for children aged 5-16 was 51%, as reported through the National Travel Survey. That more pupils are driven is evident to everyone because of the traffic congestion they experience, particularly during the school run period.
14. With more parents opting to drive to drop off and collect, there is increasing pressure on kerb space. Many people now must park further away from the school or arrive earlier. Residents living close to schools suffer daily from indiscriminate and inconsiderate parking, resulting in safety, air quality and engine-idling complaints. Parking pressures at the start and end of the school day can be a daily misery for those living nearby. The competition for parking near to the school gate makes it less attractive and safe for those who walk, cycle and scoot.
15. The Government's second [Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy](#), published in 2022, contains a target for 55% of primary school children (aged 5-11) in England to be walking to school by 2025. In 2022 the figure recorded through the National Travel Survey was 53%.

16. In Central Bedfordshire, according to the 'hands up' data collected in September 2024, 39.2% of pupil journeys to all mainstream Central Bedfordshire schools were on foot. This percentage increases to 51.6% when cycling and scooting are included. The figure for walking to lower and primary schools is 38.5%. For this tier of schooling, car travel accounts for 45.6% of pupil journeys and active travel for 53.3%.
17. There is a significant disparity across schools with some experiencing much higher levels of car-use, and some much lower. This variance can in part be explained by the number of children attending a non-catchment school. In the 2019-20 academic year for example, around a third of pupils did not attend their closest or catchment school. Although not everyone who attends a school that is not their closest school will be driven, the likelihood is greater. This is particularly the case for lower and primary aged pupils that must be accompanied to school by an adult. At one small rural school over 97% of pupils are driven. At the other end of the spectrum, at one urban primary school the equivalent figure is 15%.
18. The Sustainable Modes of Travel to Schools strategy considers the barriers to walking, scooting and cycling. It sets out the Council's aim and objectives to encourage sustainable travel, the ways in which these can be achieved and how their delivery can be facilitated.

Transition to two tier schooling

19. Central Bedfordshire Council is facilitating the move from a three- to a two-tier school system. The change affords an opportunity to systemically review travel patterns and school-gate arrangements.
20. As the transition proceeds, the planning process provides the mechanism through school travel planning to promote a shift away from car use towards sustainable modes of travel.

New Active Travel strategy

21. The authority's current 'Walking' and 'Cycling' strategies were adopted in 2011 and form part of the suite of documents comprising Issue 3 of the Central Bedfordshire Local Transport Plan.
22. The strategies noted that levels of walking and cycling had been decreasing across the UK for many years, particularly amongst the young, and predominantly as a result of lifestyle changes, car ownership and perceptions of safety. In this context, the vision of both strategies was to *"encourage people to walk/cycle, to walk/cycle safely, and to walk/cycle more often"*.
23. Central Bedfordshire is conducive to walking and cycling due to the relatively flat topography and with most towns hosting a range of services at locations accessible within a short walk or cycle ride. Despite this, walking was the predominant mode of travel for only 8% of journeys to work. For cycling, the equivalent figure was 2%.

National policies

24. Since the LTP3 strategies were adopted, central government published its [Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy](#), with the overarching objective to make cycling and walking the natural choices for shorter journeys, or as part of a longer journey.
25. The second Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy ([CWIS2](#)) was published by the government in 2022 and updated the objectives in [CWIS1](#), alongside [Gear change \(2020\)](#), 'A Bold Vision for Walking and Cycling'. The updated strategy sets out objectives to increase walking and double cycling, with the aim of 50% of all journeys in towns and cities being walked or cycled by 2030.

Active Travel England

26. To support the delivery of the Strategy, the government established Active Travel England (ATE). As an executive agency of the Department for Transport, ATE was charged with working with local government to effect a transformation in the role that walking and cycling play in the country's transport system, and making England a great walking and cycling nation.
27. Since its establishment, Active Travel England has held the government's active travel budget, including for behaviour change and cycle training. It assesses all applications for active travel capital and revenue funding, including from wider funds, and makes awards to only those schemes that meet the standards and principles set out in [Local Transport Note 1/20](#). It also inspects schemes on completion to ensure compliance with the design standards and its inspectors review the active travel-elements of all major planning applications. In addition, it rates highway authorities annually on their performance on active travel. The levels it awards (between 0 and 4) determine the level of 'capability' funding each authority is allocated in national budgets.

Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans

28. A key determinant of the 2023 rating awarded to Central Bedfordshire by Active Travel England, a '1', reflected the lack of an adopted Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP). Formulating such a plan requires a strategic approach to identifying cycling and walking improvements at the local level, setting out in reasonable detail the range and nature of improvements needed to meet to the government's target for over half of all local journeys in larger towns and cities will be walked, wheeled, or cycled.
29. The authority now has five adopted LCWIPs and a sixth in development. The first five were approved by the Council's Executive in April 2024 and cover separately the main interconnected conurbations of Dunstable-Houghton Regis, Leighton-Linslade, Biggleswade-Sandy-Potton, Ampthill-Flitwick and Arlesey-Stotfold-Fairfield-Henlow. The sixth LCWIP covers the remaining urban conurbations and rural routes that interconnect towns and villages and the strategic connections to destinations in adjacent authorities.
30. The new Central Bedfordshire Active Travel Strategy has been drafted to complement the suite of LCWIPs. It sets out the range of activities and initiatives the Council is undertaking to facilitate and promote cycling and walking as modes of transport in addition to, and in support of, infrastructure-related investment.

31. For walking and wheeling, the strategy targets on the journeys people regularly make that are up to a mile in length. In England, the National Travel Survey shows 21% of trips fit into this category. For cycling, the focus is on the local trips people make that are up to five miles and occasionally longer in length. Collectively this covers the majority of trips made by residents to destinations in their town, or in the case of villages, to the closest nearby town.
32. The strategy also sets out how best to address the issues that pedestrians and cyclists consider important when making a travel choice and deciding whether a trip can be walked, wheeled or cycled. In this regard, it draws links to wider transport, environmental, economic, health and sustainability benefits from active travel and specifies a number of high-level indicators to track and report the impact of initiatives and incentives.

Consultation and approval timescales for the strategy documents

Date	Milestone
12 th June 2025	Documents to be discussed at Overview and Scrutiny Committee
July 2025	Start of public consultation on Active Travel and Sustainable Modes of Travel to Schools strategies
September 2025	End of public consultation on Active Travel and Sustainable Modes of Travel to Schools strategies
October - December 2025	Review of consultation responses, writing of consultation summary report and any subsequent amendments to the documents
03 February 2026	Final version of the documents to be approved at Executive for adoption

Reason for decision

33. It is a statutory duty for authorities to keep their Local Transport Plan up to date. The Local Transport Act (2008) sets out a statutory requirement for Local Transport Authorities to have a Local Transport Plan. The Act allows authorities the freedom to replace their plan as and when they see fit rather than requiring a five-year planning cycle as in previous legislation (Transport Act 2000). The Sustainable Modes of Travel to Schools Strategy and Active Travel Strategy are subordinate documents of the Local Transport Plan and their adoption helps ensure related policies affecting investment decisions are up to date.

Council priorities

34. Within its [Strategic Plan](#) for the period 2024-27 the Council sets out a number of core aims. The Sustainable Modes of Travel to Schools Strategy and Active Travel Strategy support the following core aims:

- *Be ambitious in our plans towards improving and maintaining the roads and travel network.*
- *Ensure that environmental, sustainability and climate resilience impact will be at the heart of all Council decision-making.*
- *Create opportunities for all children and young people to reach their full potential.*
- *Enable people to live active, healthy, and independent lives.*
- *Provide the environment for economic prosperity in which existing businesses can grow and new ones will move to the area.*

35. Both strategies also support the Council's Sustainability Plan, the current version of which contains the objective to:

"To reduce car-based trips and transport emissions relating to local journeys, with health and wellbeing, road safety and capacity and air quality benefits."

Legal Implications

36. The adoption of an updated Sustainable Modes of Travel to Schools Strategy meets the general duty placed on the Council to assess the school travel needs of its authority area, and to promote the use of sustainable modes of travel for the journey to school, between schools and to other educational institutions as set out in the Education and Inspections Act of 2006.

Financial and Risk Implications

37. All current active travel promotion undertaken by the Council is currently externally funded and outside of the 'core' budget. This funding includes:

- Capability Funding from Active Travel England. This discretionary fund is based on the quality of the authority's plans for active travel, alongside the Council's track record in delivering high quality schemes. The funding supports various initiatives including the entirety of the Active Travel team's work with schools to promote and facilitate walking, scooting and cycling.
- Bikeability Funding from the Department for Transport. This funds the delivery of Bikeability training to equip age-appropriate pupils with the skills and confidence to cycle safely on local roads and is organised through schools.
- Secured Section 106 'Travel Plan' contributions. This funds the work of officers coordinating the delivery of measures to make major developments to the east of Leighton Buzzard and North of Houghton Regis more sustainable from a travel and transport perspective. It also funds the deployment of bike hire and EV car club schemes on the various development sites.
- Cycling E-asier programme funded by Active Travel England. This funding meets the costs of a scheme designed to encourage take up of e-bikes within Luton, Dunstable and Houghton Regis.

38. There are therefore risks that should external funding elements fall away, all activity in support of active travel promotion would cease, as has been the case in several neighbouring authorities.
39. Financial risks will in part be mitigated by updating the Local Transport Plan as expenditure on schemes and behaviour change programmes will be guided by the latest national, sub-national and local strategies and policies, meaning that Council and external funding streams are utilised in the most appropriate way. Having up-to-date strategies also provides a clear policy basis when bidding for external funding bids and preparing business cases for investment.
40. The Council Medium Term Financial Plan (24/25 to 27/28) and agreed budget for 2025/26 includes provision for revenue and capital budget to focus on sustainability initiatives. This funding will be used to move forward the implementation of both strategies particularly in the area of monitoring and evaluation and where a capital contribution is required.

Equalities and Fairness Implications

41. Central Bedfordshire Council has a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics: age disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
42. An Equalities Impact Assessment is in preparation and is expected to indicate the impact of both strategies will be positive and, in many areas, strongly so. This document will be finalised following public consultation and included in the report to the Executive.

Biodiversity and Sustainability Implications

43. Within Central Bedfordshire, transport-related emissions are the largest component of greenhouse gases, at a little over 40%. This percentage is rising as other sources of emissions are addressed.
44. The Council's Sustainability Plan sets out the actions needed to reduce transport emissions and includes two specific aims:
 - a) That by 2030 over half of all local journeys within the authority's largest towns will be walked, wheeled or cycled
 - b) That at least 55% of school journeys made by primary-aged pupils (5-11) will be non-car based

The two strategies set out the initiatives the Council has in place or will set in train to deliver these aims.

45. The outcomes achieved by increasing levels of active travel will support the delivery against a number of the key areas identified in the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which underpin the Sustainability Plan and provide the working definition of sustainability for the Council.

Conclusion and next steps

46. Members are invited to comment and make recommendations to the Executive on all of the documents and accompanying schedules and appendices.
47. All documents will be updated in response to the comments received and in the case of the two strategies, from a wider public consultation. The updated documents will then be presented to the Executive Committee for approval.
48. It is expected Executive approval will be secured at the meeting scheduled for February 2026, though this will be dependent upon the number and nature of consultation responses received.

Appendices

Appendix A: Sustainable Modes of Travel to Schools Strategy (SMOTS)

Appendix B: Active Travel Strategy

Appendix C: SMOTS - Supporting Data Annex

Background Papers

None.

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