

**STOCKPORT COUNCIL**  
**EXECUTIVE REPORT – SUMMARY SHEET**

**Subject: MCF Heatons Cycle Link – Heaton Mersey Common Amendments**

**Report to: (a)** Heatons & Reddish Area Committee      **Date:** Monday, 2 August 2021  
Cabinet Member (Economy and Regeneration)      Date:

**Report of: (b)** Corporate Director for Place Management & Regeneration

**Key Decision: (c)**      **~~NO~~ / YES** (Please circle)

Forward Plan ☐ General Exception ☐ Special Urgency ☐ (Tick box)

**Summary:**

This report gives results of a consultation on the Mayoral Challenge Fund (MCF) proposals for an amended foot and cycle route to the approved scheme on and in the vicinity of Heaton Mersey Common in Heaton Mersey and seeks a recommendation that the Cabinet Member (Economy and Regeneration) approves the scheme or alternative Highway routes described in the report.

**Recommendation(s):**

The Area Committee is asked to comment on this report and recommend that the Cabinet Member (Economy & Regeneration) approves the implementation of the scheme with the mitigation measures described.

**Relevant Scrutiny Committee** (if decision called in): **(d)**  
Communities & Housing Scrutiny Committee

**Background Papers** (if report for publication): **(e)**

There are none.

Contact person for accessing  
background papers and discussing the report

**Officer:** Nick Whelan  
Tel: 0161-474-4907

**‘Urgent Business’: (f)**      **~~YES~~ / NO** (please circle)

**Certification** (if applicable)

This report should be considered as ‘urgent business’ and the decision exempted from ‘call-in’ for the following reason(s):

The written consent of Councillor \_\_\_\_\_ and the Chief Executive/Monitoring Officer/Borough Treasurer for the decision to be treated as ‘urgent business’ was obtained on \_\_\_\_\_ /will be obtained before the decision is implemented.

AGENDA ITEM

## **MCF Heatons Cycle Link – Heaton Mersey Common Amendments**

### **Report of the Corporate Director for Place Management & Regeneration**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 This report gives results of a consultation on the Mayoral Challenge Fund (MCF) proposals for an amended foot and cycle route to the approved scheme on and in the vicinity of Heaton Mersey Common in Heaton Mersey and seeks a recommendation that the Cabinet Member (Economy and Regeneration) approves the scheme or alternative Highway route described in the report.

#### **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1. Work has started on a Greater Manchester wide programme to make journeys on foot or by bike easier and more attractive. Greater Manchester's Cycling and Walking Commissioner has unveiled an innovative new plan to create a city region wide cycling and walking network that includes Stockport. The Bee Network will consist of more than 1800 miles of routes and will be the largest joined up system of walking and cycling routes in the UK.
- 2.2. In support of this ambition, the Mayor of Greater Manchester has allocated £160 million to the Mayor's Cycling and Walking Challenge Fund. This has been made possible thanks to the national government's Transforming Cities Fund, which is investing in public and sustainable transport to improve productivity and spread prosperity. In Stockport a number of schemes have been developed one of which is improvements for walking and cycling in the Heatons to create a route National Cycle Network 55 (the Trans Pennine Trail) to National Cycle Network 6 (The Fallowfield Loop Line).
- 2.3. The project was subject to a public consultation exercise in autumn 2019 the results of which were reported to the Heatons and Reddish Area Committee and the Cabinet Member (Economy and Regeneration) in January 2020. The scheme was approved and construction of it started in 2020. Works undertaken or underway to date include improvements to paths at Meadow Gardens, works to Nelstrop Road, an upgraded crossing on the A6 and works at Buckingham Road / Chandos Road. Works are also starting on Didsbury Road to provide a new crossing point close to Harwood Road.
- 2.4. The approved scheme was routed via Cherry Holt Avenue, skirted the playing fields and passed along the boundary of Priestnall School to Mersey Road. It then followed Mersey Road for approx. 20m before joining a path onto Heaton Mersey Common to the north of Woodheys and then going south along the rear of property on Mersey Road. It emerged from the Common at Hawthorn Road before following a route to the east of St John's Church of England Primary School to New Beech Road. The route then followed New Beech Road to Harwood Road.

2.5. The route as approved included elements that it was considered could be improved. In particular the following issues were raised:

- A route could be provided from Kingsleigh Road to Cherry Holt Ave;
- Improved linkage could be provided to Trentham Avenue;
- The route adjacent to Priestnall School is between a wall and a fence, involves removal of trees to widen, is cut off from the Common and doesn't link to residential areas to the west;
- Some existing paths on the common are often wet / muddy;
- At Mersey Road cyclists join and leave the carriageway over approx. 20m;
- The path north of Woodheys is not on Council controlled land;
- The route was constrained in width between St Johns CofE Primary School and the property boundary on Hawthorn Road.

2.6. As a result of this alternative proposals were looked at to seek to address the above issues and also to seek to widen the scope for use of the path by connecting east-west as well as north-south. The resultant proposals are described below.

### **3. PROPOSALS**

3.1. The Heaton Mersey Common proposals have been further developed to better connect to adjacent residential streets and upgrade an additional east-west route.

3.2. The proposals presented for consultation in March 2021 total about 2km of path improvements and include:

- Connections to Kingsleigh Road, Trentham Avenue, Cambo Walk, Priestnall Road, Bluestone Drive, Uppermill Drive and Burnage Lane;
- Re-routing away from the boundary with Priestnall School onto existing path alignments on the common;
- Re-alignment of paths onto Council controlled land;
- Construction of the north-south and east-west paths to a width three metres to accommodate shared pedestrian and cycle use;
- Resurfacing the paths with a hard, porous material;
- Lighting the paths with heritage-style columns (hours of operation to be determined by ecological surveys);
- Some vegetation clearance and relocation;
  - One tree to be removed and eight sapling trees to be relocated to the side of the proposed shared use path near Ingram Drive / Uppermill Drive;
  - The potential removal of one tree near Hawthorn Road;

- Several new trees are proposed, including multiple near those being removed, and landscaping enhancement opportunities are to be explored as the proposals develop;
- The existing boundary fence around St John's Primary School to be altered and vehicle access gate reoriented to allow for shared use path and for some of the existing trees to be retained;
- Bollards to prevent unauthorised access to be fitted with shared use signage where applicable;
- The addition of seating along the paths.

3.3. The package was presented as distinct schemes comprising:

- Section A which involves the upgrading of the north-south route connecting Kingsleigh Road, Cherry Holt Avenue and Trentham Avenue in the north to New Beech Road in the south to a shared use cycleway / footpath. Spurs are provided to Priestnall Road, Mersey Road, Cambo Walk and Bluestone Drive; and
- Section B which upgrades the east-west route stretching from Burnage Lane to the confluence of paths to the west of Woodheys. Spurs are provided to Uppermill Drive, Ingram Drive and Bluestone Drive.

## **4. LEGAL POSITION/IMPLICATIONS**

4.1. The Traffic Management Orders would be made under Section 1 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984. The Council is required by the Local Authorities Traffic Order (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996 to give notice of its intention to make a Traffic Order (by publishing a draft traffic order). These regulations also require the Council to consider any representations received as a result of publishing the draft Order.

## **5. CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS**

5.1. As described above an alternative route to that consulted over in March 2021 was previously consulted over in Autumn 2019. In addition consideration has been given to an on-road route along Mersey Road and New Beech Road. Such as route can of course be followed by cyclists now and could, if the current proposals are not accepted, form part of the Heatons Cycle Route. It would have the following disadvantages over the currently proposed route:

- Cyclists would be riding with traffic on a road which becomes busy around school times, and which is locally classified as a Local Distributor although overall traffic flows on it are not considered likely to exceed the 4000 / day MCF definition of a 'quiet street';
- Mersey Road has vertical traffic calming which would need re-construction with sinusoidal ramps to form part of the cycle route;
- New Beech Road has a stone sett surface which is not a comfortable riding surface although improvements could be made to level uneven areas;

- For east-west connections improvements to routes via the Bluestone Drive / Uppermill Drive estates have been suggested and considered. Unfortunately the path connections between the estates are too narrow in some sections to allow upgrade for cycle use.

## 6. CONSULTATION

- 6.1. The original public consultation was held during October 2019 with the vast majority (80%) of respondents supportive of the scheme overall. In respect of the proposals between Cherry Holt Avenue and Harwood Road (Proposal G of that consultation) the results were as follows:
  - 65% of respondents agreed with **Proposal G - upgrade of off-road paths** and 16% disagreed with the proposal predominantly on the basis of the proposed lighting leading to a likely increase in anti-social behaviour. The system of lighting proposed will allow the lights to be switched off between the hours of 2200 and 0500 to avoid anti-social behaviour late at night.
- 6.2. During the course of the March 2021 consultation criticism was levelled at the Autumn 2019 consultation for not distributing consultation leaflets to Hawthorn Road, Poplar Road, Lyme Road and New Beech Road. This is accepted as an error even though other publicity material was available and responses were received from the area. We would not, therefore, expect to rely on the earlier decision in respect of works in the vicinity of these streets in the event that this scheme is not approved.
- 6.3. During the course of the March 2021 consultation posters were erected on the Common by objectors. Whilst all publicity to consultation events is generally welcome in this case some posters contained misinformation, for example stating that in the event of objections that alternative path improvements to the Common would be brought forward. Unauthorised posters were removed. Some examples of the posters are included in an appendix to the consultation report.
- 6.4. The full methodology and results of the March 2021 consultation are included in the Consultation Report appended to this Report.
- 6.5. A total of 1,010 online response forms were completed and 46 emails were received. Of the 1,010 completed response forms, 775 (76.7%) respondents provided a comment in response to *'please use the space below to provide any comments you may have on the proposals'*.
- 6.6. Online respondents were asked to provide their home post code, of the 1,010, 954 provided a full or part post code. Over 90% of these were considered to be local to the proposals (SK4 – 82%, M19 – 7%, M20 – 2%).
- 6.7. The most common themes from the comments made (>100, 10%) is provided below:
  - Concern for Ecology (trees, vegetation, wildlife): 320 (32% of 1,010);
  - Safety concerns (shared paths, conflict between users): 288 (29%);
  - Opposition to lighting (ecology, unnecessary, pollution): 232 (23%);

- Opposition to shared use paths: 226 (22%);
- Concerns of Anti-Social Behaviour: 225 (22%);
- Support for improved accessibility: 187 (19%);
- Excessive path widths: 120 (12%);
- Preference for alternative routes (e.g. Mersey Road): 117 (12%); and
- Concerns relating to maintenance / litter: 109 (11%).

6.8. The response to Section A and Section B is presented in the following sections. This is followed by a summary of the general comments received, which are considered to be applicable to both Sections (A and B), and stakeholder comments.

### **Section A: Kingsleigh Road to New Beech Road**

6.9. Of 991 respondents to 'Section A' (Kingsleigh Road to New Beech Road), 39% agreed, 58% disagreed, 3% neither or didn't know.

6.10. There were 54 comments which specifically related to Section A. Recurring comments received regarding the Section A proposals included:

- Potential safety issues pertaining to speeding cyclists and possible conflict between different types of users;
- A general feeling of agreement towards improving accessibility but this is offset by concerns relating to potential unauthorised access by motorcycles, antisocial behaviour, and a reduction in the natural feel of the Common;
- Opposition to the development of a shared-use path with many respondents believing that cyclists should not be using the Common;
- The potential negative impact on ecology and emphasis on the local nature reserve status; and
- Suggestions for the consideration of alternative routes for cyclists with a particular focus on Mersey Road.

6.11. The responses have been analysed to understand respondents' opinion in relation to where they live. There is a general trend in that those living further away from the proposals for Section A, who may use the Common, expressed greater levels of agreement than those living closer to the route.

6.12. 88 respondents provided postcodes on Mersey Road or the side roads to the west (Hawthorn Road, Poplar Street, Lyme Street & New Beech Road) with the majority disagreeing with the proposals for Section A. The comments mainly related to a desire to preserve the natural character of Heaton Mersey Common. However, the following points were also raised:

- It is questioned why cyclists should be allowed to pass through the Common when alternative adequate routes are already available;

- There is opposition to seating areas and lighting as they may attract antisocial behaviour to the Common and there are particular concerns about motorcyclists gaining access;
- It is hoped the paths will be improved for pedestrians in a more sympathetic / sensitive manner without the need for widening, vegetation removal or hard surfacing;
- The proposals may attract a greater quantity of vehicular traffic to the wider area which may impact safety and the ability of residents to park near their properties;
- Many respondents state that they have not received any prior communication relating to the proposals;
- There is emphasis on the Common being a local nature reserve and conservation area with specific concerns raised regarding wildlife and mature trees and requests for ecological surveys;
- Some residents believe that the path between Hawthorn Road and Poplar Street may become dangerous for school children with the addition of cyclists.

6.13. 29 respondents provided postcodes in the vicinity of the playing field to the west of Priestnall Allotments, the relative majority agreed with Section A. The comments related to:

- Concerns over the potential safety implications associated with the removal of the barriers at the junction with Kingsleigh Road and at the end of Trentham Avenue;
- Issues with motorcycles / quadbikes possibly gaining access to the field from Cherry Holt Avenue and Kingsleigh Road;
- Support for improving the paths for pedestrians but not for cyclists;
- There is a need to improve drainage along the path between the Common and Bluestone Drive (parallel to Allerdean Walk);
- A general feeling that the proposals may reduce the tranquillity of the Common and negatively impact the ecology;
- Requests for the paths to be constructed from a permeable material as they get waterlogged and muddy in the winter;
- Lack of support for lighting in the Common due to its potential to disrupt wildlife and attract antisocial behaviour.

6.14. Seven respondents provided postcodes in the vicinity of Hepple Close and Cambo Walk. Five agreed with the proposals for both Section A with comments focusing on the siting and timing of the lighting. Those who disagreed cited:

- Objections to the installation of lighting;

- Queries regarding the prevention of motorcycle access;
- Suggestions related to mitigation in the form of vegetation regrowth and tree planting between the upgraded path and back gardens;
- Concerns over the width of the proposed paths and associated tree felling.

### **Section B: Priestnall Road to Burnage Lane**

- 6.15. Of 1,004 respondents to 'Section B' (Priestnall Road to Burnage Lane), 38% agreed, 58% disagreed, 4% neither or didn't know.
- 6.16. There were 26 comments which specifically related to Section B. Recurring comments received regarding the Section B proposals included:
- Concerns relating to safety, particularly as the steep gradient of the land may allow cyclists to pick up speed;
  - Disagreement with regards to the creation of a shared-use path with numerous respondents of the opinion that cyclists should not be using the Common;
  - The potential for the proposals to negatively impact wildlife;
  - Consideration of alternative routes for cyclists with emphasis on Bluestone Drive and Uppermill Drive;
  - A general appreciation for improving access to the Common but a desire for the wild appearance to be retained; and
  - Concern about seating attracting antisocial behaviour.
- 6.17. The responses have been analysed to understand respondents' opinion in relation to where they live. There is an overall pattern in that those residing a greater distance away from Section B, who may frequent the Common, were more likely to agree with the proposals than those who live nearer to the route.
- 6.18. Sixty respondents provided postcodes from properties immediately adjacent to the path leading to Burnage Lane. The majority disagreed with the proposals for Section B. The comments included:
- General negativity towards shared-use paths due to the potential for collisions between pedestrians, dogs and cyclists who may be able to pick up speed due to the gradient of the land;
  - The plans, and particularly the lighting, may detract from the natural wilderness feel of the Common, may attract antisocial behaviour, damage ecosystems and lead to noise / disturbance;
  - Requests for 'The Monkey Path' to be recognised with signage, for additional litter bins, for the sandbags to be removed from the pond and for tree lopping along Uppermill Drive;



- Recognition that the paths require resurfacing, as they can become muddy and waterlogged, but they should not be widened for the use of cyclists;
- Access points need to be designed in a way to permit wheelchair users and prams but exclude motorcycles;
- Consider an alternative option to widening the path to the south of Bluestone Drive or offer more substantial fencing / tree screening / adequate space to increase privacy for residents;
- Cyclists could use Bluestone Drive and Uppermill Drive rather than Section B and Mersey Road rather than Section A;
- A suggestion that repaving 'The Monkey Path' would be a better solution than the proposals;
- An expression of disappointment relating to the lack of pothole repairs throughout Stockport; and
- Query as to whether the new paths will be maintained long term as the existing paths have been neglected.

### **General Comments**

6.19. The vast majority of comments related to the scheme as a whole rather than being specific to either Section A or Section B. Recurring themes included:

- A preference for alternative routes to be considered via existing quiet roads with streetlighting (Bluestone Drive, Uppermill Drive, Hawthorn Road & Mersey Road);
- A feeling that the proposals, particularly lighting and path widening, could negatively impact the ecology within the Common and its local nature reserve / conservation area status;
- Concerns that the proposals may lead to an increase in noise levels, light pollution, littering, traffic / congestion, on-street parking, antisocial behaviour and motorcycles / quadbikes gaining illegal access;
- Disapproval towards the development of shared-use paths due to possible safety issues relating to fast-moving cyclists and the potential for collisions with other users, particularly school children;
- A general appreciation for improving access to the Common, especially for those with mobility impairments or prams, but not for cyclists or motorised vehicles;
- A desire for the existing paths to be regularly maintained / repaired to prevent them from becoming impassable after periods of inclement weather due to flooding and the build-up of mud;

- Strong opposition towards the felling of trees or clearance of vegetation with a preference for the Common to be preserved as a peaceful, natural green space;
- A belief that the proposals are a waste of money and funding would be better allocated elsewhere e.g. pothole repairs or developing cycle lanes along commuter corridors; and
- Widening the paths to 3m with hard surfacing is considered excessive, although there are suggestions that improving the existing routes could be a compromise providing the work is sympathetic to the surroundings.

### **Stakeholder Comments**

6.20. Stakeholder comments are included in in full in the Consultation Report. In summary:

- Natural England responded to the consultation stating that the proposals likely do not pose any risk or opportunity in relation to their statutory purpose and as such no comments were provided;
- A meeting was held on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2021 with the headteacher of St John's C.E. Primary School which was followed by a site visit the following week. The school has raised concerns regarding inappropriate parking adjacent to their accesses, security and safeguarding, the safety of children using the paths and the loss of school amenity. Discussions are ongoing.
- Walk Ride Heatons submitted a detailed response to the consultation informed by site visits and online meetings, this is included at Appendix E1. The group expressed their strong support for the scheme as a whole, but this was caveated with concerns over particular aspects such as lighting. The table at Appendix E2 provides a dissection of the content of the response alongside the proposals which were consulted on. Notably, four people responded to the consultation with the comment "*I support the response put forward by Walk Ride Heatons*". Three of the respondents expressed strong agreement for both sections of the scheme while the fourth respondent agreed with both parts.
- The TPT Partnership submitted a document which has been included at Appendix F1. They provided their strong support for the overall scheme with further comments relating to particular aspects. The table at Appendix F2 provides a dissection of the content of the response alongside the proposals which were consulted on.
- Heaton Mersey Village Conservation Group also provided a document which summarised their response to the consultation, this is included at Appendix G1. The document references 'grave concerns' with strong disagreements to both sections A and B. The table at Appendix G2 provides a dissection of the content of the response alongside the proposals which were consulted on.

- A representative from Lower Dale Farm Equestrian Centre and Stockport Bridleways Association completed the online response form and expressed agreement with both Sections A and B. A comment was provided which related to a desire for equestrians, of which there are numerous in Stockport, to be considered in the plans so that they can enjoy safer routes rather than riding on “busy dangerous roads”. The comment also refers to plans to upgrade to bridleway status and the representative believes that enabling multiple groups of users to access the Common is a “better use of funds”.
- The Planning Manager from CPRE Lancashire, which was formally known as the Campaign to Protect Rural England but changed its name to The Countryside Charity in early 2020, submitted a response to the consultation via the online form. The respondent chose to agree with the proposals for both Sections A and B and left a comment which advocated more walking and cycling and increasing sustainable connections between urban and rural areas. Reliance on car use for short journeys was highlighted as an issue which must change in response to the climate crisis, air quality concerns and to promote health benefits. The comment also focused on a need to deliver infrastructure in a sensitive manner and cited The Natural Capital Committee which reported in July 2020 that officers / politicians need to be alert to the threats posed by ill-considered schemes. It is acknowledged that the paths require maintenance and future management, but CPRE is against tree felling and introducing light into dark areas. The closing sentence provides support for introducing safe cycle lanes that do not harm the natural environment.
- A respondent completed the online form and stated that he was representing the Heaton Mersey volunteered group. Strong disagreement was expressed for both Sections of the scheme, and the comment focused on a need to develop two paths: one for cyclists and one for pedestrians. The respondent refers to the rude nature of cyclists, their lack of respect for pedestrians and the excessive speeds that they’re able to achieve. There is a request for warning and speed limit signage and the representative reports witnessing accidents.

## **7. ECOLOGICAL AND ARBOCULTURAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1. An Ecological Report has been commissioned to support the evaluation of this scheme. The report has been prepared by John Rowland, Countryside Officer for the Council. The Summary Report is below, the full report is appended.
- 7.2. The proposed dual use cycle and footpath network in Heaton Mersey links local housing to traffic free cycle routes in order to promote safe cycling and a cleaner environment. These interconnecting paths run through a variety of habitats including open amenity grassland, a local park and broad-leaved woodland some of these are within the Heaton Mersey Common Local Nature Reserve.
- 7.3. The proposed routes are all following existing paths and in general have little impact on the surrounding environment.

- 7.4. There are some hedges that are currently overhanging footpaths and these must need to be cut back hard or even removed and if this work is to be undertaken then this should be completed after bird nesting season (March to August inclusive) or if the work needs to be carried out during this period a nesting bird survey should be carried out no more than three days in advance of the work.
- 7.5. The grassland areas are all currently maintained and close-cut amenity grassland which is of limited value for wildlife, and this is something that should be addressed as part of the project. Along the base of these hedge rows there are some wilder areas with coarse grasses, tall ruderals, bramble and other woody stemmed plants. These areas do have more potential to be of some benefit to wildlife providing shelter, foraging areas and commuting routes for small mammals, amphibian species and invertebrates etc. Please refer to the recommendations section at the end of this report.
- 7.6. The route travels in a semicircle around Bluestone Gardens on established sealed surface path which is lined with mature trees. There are island beds and linear woodland around the garden but generally speaking the trees are of a low potential to support a bat roost. There is one sycamore which has a high potential to support a bat roost and this should be far enough away from the proposed cycle path to not be affected by the works. There are potential Nest sites in both the trees and the various hedges and shrubs that can be found in the garden and care must be taken if carrying out any works in areas where there could be nesting birds and if possible the work should be left until after bird nesting season (March to August inclusive) or if the work needs to be carried out during this period, a nesting bird survey should be carried out no more than three days in advance of the work.
- 7.7. No field signs of badger were identified (footprints, latrines and snuffle holes) along the line of the route within the localised area at the time of the survey.
- 7.8. The path then joins with the main path from Priestnall Road to Burnage Lane which in places is unmade and muddy with areas of different materials making up the rest of the path. There are a couple of areas where the existing path is extremely narrow and to accommodate a new 3m wide path there are sections of old hedgerows that would need to be removed. In order to eliminate this possibility, there is an option which is my prepared route to run the new path on the opposite side of the hedge parallel with the garden fences of neighbouring properties. There would be a need to remove some shrubs and cut back overhanging vegetation which is growing out from these gardens. Photographs of these areas and the proposals can be seen in the photos section.
- 7.9. Towards Burnage Road there are large areas of amenity grassland which have limited wildlife value and changes to the maintenance regime and should be implemented to create wilder areas and supplemental planting should be carried out. Please refer to the recommendations section at the end of this report.
- 7.10. The trees along this section of the route have very few PRF and have negligible potential to support a bat roost, but the trees do offer foraging and commuting opportunities for bats species.
- 7.11. No field signs of badger were identified (footprints, latrines and snuffle holes) along the line of the route within the localised area at the time of the survey.

- 7.12. Where the path forks to run at the rear of Woodheys Apartments, through the LNR the path is of an old rolled stone construction which is all but lost in places and is covered in mud where it runs through the wooded area. The path through the woodland is over three meters wide so there should be no need to affect the woodland fringes on either side of the path. If soil is to be excavated from the proposed route it should not be deposited on these woodland fringes to avoid affecting any of the local flora growing in these areas.
- 7.13. Two small 'sprigs' of Japanese Knotweed were located during the survey on the 09/04/21 indicating that there is some regen after these areas have been cleared by repeated herbicide treatments. An invasive species method statement and treatment plan should be drawn up and adhered to and as part of the overall project stands of JKW and himalayan balsam should be treated.
- 7.14. The trees along this section of the route have very few PRF and have negligible potential to support a bat roost, but the trees do offer foraging and commuting opportunities for bats species.
- 7.15. No field signs of badger were identified (footprints, latrines and snuffle holes) along the line of the route within the localised area at the time of the survey.
- 7.16. Where the path runs alongside the boundary of St John's C of E primary School, the first section is muddy over the top of a narrow, rolled stone path. The school grounds are all being maintained as amenity grassland with close cut grass of little wildlife value. There are some young tress growing in the fence line, but these too have limited wildlife value, but where any tree is to be removed, they should be replaced at a ratio of two to one.
- 7.17. The proposed route carries on along the school boundary on wide newly resurfaced rolled stone paths with no wildlife value. There are some small sections of hedging along the school boundary they are limited in their value to wildlife.
- 7.18. The trees along this section of the route have very few PRF and have negligible potential to support a bat roost, but the trees do offer foraging and commuting opportunities for bats species.
- 7.19. No field signs of badger were identified (footprints, latrines and snuffle holes) along the line of the route within the localised area at the time of the survey.
- 7.20. Overall, it is considered that the cycle path will have little impact on the wildlife of the area, mainly due to following the lines of existing footpaths and having little impact on the surrounding areas. Please refer to the recommendations section at the end of this report.
- 7.21. Lighting is being considered as part of the project and this is necessary then it should be in line with recommendations of the BCT as outlined in their guidance notes 'Bats and Artificial Lighting in the UK'.

## **8. ANALYSIS**

- 8.1. The proposals offer an opportunity to greatly improve paths on the Common both for pedestrians and cyclists. As described in the Consideration of Alternative Solutions

section above if it is desired some of the route could be on road and so the Heaton's Cycle Link can be completed with very limited works on the Common. The routes on the Common would, however, offer a much better facility which would be likely to appeal to families and less dedicated cyclists much more than an on-carriageway route. The Ecological and Arboricultural reports do not raise any issues which cannot be overcome but careful design and suitable mitigation measures.

### **Nature Reserve**

- 8.2. Whilst the site has significant wildlife value it is not an SBI or otherwise statutorily recognised and English Nature did not raise any objection. Measures to protect wildlife often seen in other nature reserves, for example restricting public access away from marked paths and requirements to keep dogs on short leads, are not in evidence.
- 8.3. Improvements to the paths themselves are not likely to have an adverse impact on wildlife on the common providing that certain precautions are taken. This would include repeating wildlife surveys shortly before construction starts to make sure that no protected species had moved onto or close to the route and avoiding activity during the bird nesting season that could disturb nesting birds. Lighting will need to accord with recommendations of the Bat Conservation Trust.

### **Cycling on the common**

- 8.4. Some objections seek improvement to paths for pedestrian access but do not want to allow cycling on the Common. The funding available is for the provision and improvement of walking *and* cycling routes. For the avoidance of doubt without cycling being allowed on the paths there will be no improvements to paths on the common funded by the MCF.
- 8.5. Concerns were raised about possible conflict between cyclists and walkers. From experience elsewhere this is not considered likely to be an issue. There are a number of paths in the Borough shared by pedestrians and cyclists. These include the Trans-Pennine Trail, the Ladybrook Valley Path, Middlewood Way, the Alan Newton Way and the recently opened A555 walking and cycling route. In most cases when such paths are proposed these concerns are raised but they very rarely materialise as a conflict and we have no records of injury being caused to pedestrians from collision with a cyclist on these paths. To guard against risk however signage will be erected making it clear that pedestrians do have priority and that cyclists must share the path with care. Such signage is already in use on other shared paths in the Borough.

### **Lighting on the common**

- 8.6. The heritage style lighting was considered inappropriate for this setting as it could disturb wildlife more than certain other types of lighting. This is accepted and can be revised to a downward facing LED lighting installation with minimal over-spill mounted on a minimum height (4.5-5m) column. The luminaires used will follow recommendations of the Bat Conservation Trust. They will be 'warm white' and as such emit very little in the blue spectrum so reducing disturbance to bats which are most affected by this. The lighting can be switched off during the hours of 10pm to 5am to minimise any residual disturbance to night feeding animals. The use of bollard lighting has been seriously considered but the Council's Street Lighting

Engineer does not support the use of bollards for a cycling specific scheme as they do not provide sufficient lighting for the speed that a cyclist travels at. They could also be prone to vandalism and hence be a potential maintenance liability.

### **Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)**

- 8.7. Concern was expressed that lighting will attract anti-social behaviour at night. As above the lighting can be switched off between 10pm and 5am to minimise risk of late night disturbance from anti-social behaviour. Concern was also expressed that provision of benches on the common could lead to ASB and littering. The provision of benches is helpful for older users of the path and does accord with Government policy in this respect however it is not critical to the scheme and they could be deleted without detriment the operation of it. Benches could be removed in the future if thought to become an issue.

### **Access controls**

- 8.8. There were concerns over changes to access control on the Common and in particular access by quad bikes and motorbikes. Entry points to the common currently have varying forms of access control some of which is not compatible with access by mobility scooters. These controls should be changed in any case as they could discriminate against disabled users which is no longer acceptable. Nationally it is recommended to use a 1.5m spaced bollard however that would allow quad bike access. This can be addressed by placing bollards 1.2m apart rather than 1.5m apart. The Council has undertaken trials and all mobility scooters and adapted cycles (including one designed to carry a wheelchair) could pass through a 1.2m gap, however most quad bikes could not. It should be noted that access which allows a mobility scooter to access the common will also allow small motorbikes to gain access. The Council fully appreciates the nuisance that these motorbikes can cause and works with the Police to enforce against anti-social users of them.

### **Parking**

- 8.9. Some objections have been raised on the grounds that the scheme will attract more people to access the Common via local streets and it could lead to visitors parking on those streets, including in inappropriate places. The local streets have relatively low traffic flow and are equipped with footways so the use of them by pedestrians and cyclists is not considered a concern in itself. In the event that people park in inappropriate locations then this could be addressed by imposition of waiting restrictions. If visitor parking became such that residents found it hard to park then a Resident Parking Scheme (RPS) could be considered. It is proposed that should the scheme be implemented then the parking situation be monitored and if complaints are received about obstruction of access or visitor parking preventing resident parking then waiting restrictions or an RPS could be proposed. To facilitate this funding can be held back from the scheme budget to fund consultation and implementation. Such waiting restrictions or RPS would need to be subject to separate consultation and approval processes.

### **Trees**

- 8.10. There were objections to loss of trees. The paths to be improved follow existing routes and where widening occurs this has been designed to avoid impact on trees. When construction is over tree roots 'no dig' methods of construction can be used

along with porous surfaces to allow water to permeate down to the roots. The loss of trees associated with this scheme is minimal with very few large trees needing removal on the Common. The proposals currently include one tree being removed and eight sapling trees to be relocated to the side of the proposed shared use path near Ingram Drive / Uppermill Drive, and the removal of one tree near Hawthorn Road. These are proposed to be replaced on, as a minimum, a two for one basis but the Council would seek to plant more than this using appropriate native species. Some saplings would also need to be re-located or replaced and near Bluestone Road there is a need to remove a small section of over-grown hedge or two sycamore trees. At the detail design stage the exact alignment of this section of path will be reviewed in co-ordination with the Arboricultural Officer and Ward Members to confirm this. Overall, however, the impact on trees is considered to be minimal from the scheme and will be fully mitigated by new planting.

### **Pedestrians at St John's CE Primary School**

- 8.11. Concern about conflict with children using the school and other pedestrians on the route to the west of St John's CE Primary School have been raised. Discussions are on-going with the school, however the primary conflict is considered not to be with cyclists but with inconsiderate drivers. This may be addressed by a potential School Street scheme in this area. This would need to be developed separately from this scheme but the presence of this scheme adjacent to the school would add weight to consideration of this school for scheme. It should also be noted that the times when the school gate is busy are limited to the beginning and end of the School day on weekdays in term time, for the vast majority of the time no such conflict could occur. To guard against remaining risk it is proposed to erect warning signs for cyclists making it clear that pedestrians will have priority in this area.

## **9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1. The scheme is being funded (subject to the approval of the business case by Transport for Greater Manchester) from the MCF Capital fund.

## **10. TIMESCALES**

- 10.1. If approved the scheme will be subject to further development and costing and is expected to be subject to a revised business case submission to the Mayor's Challenge Fund in Autumn 2021. Subject to funding being approved it is anticipated that the works would be carried out in 2022/23 financial year.

## **11. EQUALITIES/COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

### **11.1. Equal Opportunities**

- To provide a suitable and safer environment for pedestrians and other road users. The scheme contributes to the Council's vision statement "Promote equal life outcomes for all by tackling known inequalities across the borough of Stockport".

### **11.2. Sustainable Environment**

- To develop and sustain a healthy, safe and attractive local environment which contributes to Stockport. Stockport Council understands the responsibility it has



to lead by example and help the broader community make a positive contribution to the local environment.

## **12. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 12.1. This scheme consultation has raised a very high level of interest with around 1000 responses split roughly 400 in support of the scheme and 600 against.
- 12.2. The analysis shows that most objections can be over-come by amendments to the scheme or mitigation measures.
- 12.3. If it is accepted that the primary role of the Common is as public open space and it is sought to improve access to and use of that area whilst minimising the impact on wildlife then the scheme could be approved subject to mitigation measures. This will include access control at 1.2m spacing, directional LED lighting switched off between 10pm and 5am, signage to warn cyclists to give priority to pedestrians and planting schemes to mitigate loss of trees.
- 12.4. The Area Committee is asked to comment on this report and recommend that the Cabinet Member (Economy & Regeneration) approves the implementation of the scheme with the mitigation measures described.

### **Background Papers**

There are no background papers to this report.

Anyone wishing further information please contact Nick Whelan on telephone number Tel: 0161-474-4907 or by email on [nick.whelan@stockport.gov.uk](mailto:nick.whelan@stockport.gov.uk)

**Appendix A** – Drawing

**Appendix B** – Consultation Report

**Appendix C** – Ecological Report

**Appendix D** – Arboricultural Report