

Environment, Development and Transport Committee

Report title:	Update on Recycling Norfolk's Disused Railways
Date of meeting:	9 November 2018
Responsible Chief Officer:	Tom McCabe – Executive Director, Community and Environmental Services
Strategic impact Bringing disused railways, and other under-used parts of the transport network, back into full-use as cycling and walking routes will have significant benefits. Health, the rural economy, the environment and traffic congestion could all be improved through this action. The Norfolk Cycling & Walking Strategy establishes the target of quadrupling the level of cycling and walking to work in Norfolk market towns by 2025 and sets out to make Norfolk a top cycling and walking destination for leisure and tourism by 2025. These ambitious targets will facilitate economic growth and will protect Norfolk's natural beauty. Cycling and walking routes have multiple benefits including health, mental-wellbeing, economy, increased biodiversity, alleviation of congestion and air quality improvements.	

Executive summary

What have we done

The Recycling Norfolk's Disused Railways project is on target in delivering its output of **three detailed feasibility studies** and an **overall network feasibility review** of the whole disused railway network across Norfolk. The detailed feasibility studies are:

- Weavers' Way (Aylsham to Stalham)
- King's Lynn to Fakenham
- King's Lynn to Hunstanton

An essential element of the studies is to identify external funding opportunities to bring these routes into fruition. Six months into the project, we have secured our first funding of £1,000,000 from the Rural Development Programme for England for improvements to the Weavers' Way.

The three detailed desk based feasibility studies are well underway with initial route checks completed, ground investigations are also underway and the highways design teams are currently producing detailed designs for the highways elements of these routes.

In consultation with our project partner, Sustrans, and utilising national best practice we have recommend that these routes use the name **Greenways**. This terminology will not only indicate that the routes facilitate the travel needs of people, but that they also underpin the ecological networks around the county helping the movement of plant and animal species. Greenway is an internationally recognised term and we believe its use will help secure external funding for the implementation of the proposed routes.

A core aspect of the project is engagement with key stakeholders and landowners along the routes. Engagement with landowners has begun, and we have been identifying alternative routes to use when it is not possible to gain landowner agreement.

As part of the project we have also been engaging with heritage railway groups to discuss the aims of the project. We have already been proactive in contacting these to assure them the feasibility would not impact on the current heritage railways in Norfolk with the

focus on the project to secure the land from encroaching developments. We have already had a productive meeting with a representative from the heritage railways in Norfolk will continue to engage with them as the project continues.

As part of the initial report submitted to the P&R committee, it was set out how the project would work with the UEA to ensure that we have a robust way of valuing the benefits the routes will bring. Work is underway with the UEA to develop an evaluation toolkit that can be used on these routes as well as other Green Infrastructure links. This will be tested on existing Green Infrastructure on the Marriott's Way and Bure Valley Railway and also the potential route of the Broadland Way. This will benefit the project by estimating the value of creating the "Green Loop" around Norwich and will provide a valuation methodology that will be used for the final feasibility studies

Next Steps

We have gathered enough information on the three pilot routes that we are in a position to conduct a public consultation to provide potential routes and get feedback on the routes and also how best these could be used by the communities.

We want to continue to progress the feasibility studies for completion by the end of March 2019 and will use feedback from the public consultation and stakeholder engagement to develop these.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that the EDT Committee:

- 1. Note the development of the feasibility work and support the bid for a capital contribution to the project;**
- 2. Agree public consultation on the pilot route proposals;**
- 3. Agree the use of the term Greenway to refer to these types of facility in the future.**

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Recycling Norfolk's Disused Railways project was taken to the Policy and Resources Committee in January 2018 and approval was given for funding of the initial feasibility work. Officers started working on the project in the current financial year with the feasibility study split into two sections. One is focusing on detail on the three disused railways
 - Weavers' Way
 - King's Lynn to Fakenham
 - King's Lynn to Hunstanton
- 1.2. The second will focus on a wider network feasibility study provided a desk based assessment of the wider routes and standardised designs that can be replicated across the entire network.
- 1.3. A part of the project work is estimating the value of two existing cycleway footpaths: The Marriott's Way and the Bure Valley Path. This will then provide a methodology to apply to the wider network.

2. Overall Network Feasibility Review

2.1. RDPE

A key outcome of the Network Feasibility study is to identify external funding sources for the routes and to develop successful bids. As part of this project we have already had a successful bid for the RDPE Growth Programme for £1,000,000

2.2. **Green Loop**

We are also conducting a detailed valuation of the Marriott's Way, the Bure Valley Railway and the potential Broadlands Way. The loop is linked to areas of growth. When fully operational it will help to mitigate the impact of housing growth on nearby designated landscapes, particularly the Broads Authority Area and protected sites such as Natura 2000, SPA, SAC and SSSI. As such the Green Loop performs a fundamental spatial planning function in facilitating housing growth. These three routes will create a Green Loop around Norwich and provide a long distance walking and cycling route connecting communities North of Norwich. It will also be an important visitor destination, boosting rural tourism in this part of Norfolk. As part of the UEA valuation toolkit, potential changes to sections of the Green Loop will be tested as a pilot.

2.3. **Greenways as a Concept**

When designing the walking and cycling routes we are using Greenway management concepts developed with our Sustrans partners. Greenways provide wildlife networks that run alongside the cycling and walking routes but with minimum maintenance. There are clear environmental benefits through the linking of habitats that otherwise may be isolated. Greenways also allow for a range of economic, educational and social activities on the route to provide a key sense of place and are a known visitor draw.

Using best practice from the Lawton report "Making Space for Nature: A review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network", we will meet the aspiration for More, Bigger, Better and Joined up wildlife habitats.

2.4. **More, new wildlife sites**

Currently, many railway verges are shaded by overhanging trees or dominated by bramble, nettles or gorse. Managing these margins more deliberately according to adjoining habitat types or soil types, will increase the biodiversity and can also reduce management costs eg. replacing self-sown sycamore or ash trees with grassland or by creating bare sandy soil for solitary bees and wasps.

2.5. **Bigger, existing site**

There is huge potential to increase the area in hectares (ha) of UK priority habitats for conservation. Extending lengths of grassland, hedgerows, ponds, orchards, bare ground will create bigger areas of these habitats, particularly if the adjoining land has the same habitat type.

2.6. **Better ecological management and strategy**

The current management of habitats along the disused railways is minimal and not generally focussed. Our management strategy will be to consult with conservation stakeholders and landowners to select the most beneficial habitat or species for each area. Management will be tailored to those species / habitats, and the results from monitoring the success of the work will be fed back into the wider conservation effort in Norfolk.

2.7. **Joined up wildlife sites**

Disused railway lines by their nature form long corridors, usually bordered by grass, plants, trees, farmland, woodland, and grazing meadows /marsh.

By choosing the most appropriate habitat to maintain along each section of disused railway line, we will be connecting sites designated for nature conservation and allowing flora and fauna that is common to each site to spread between the two. This is very important ecologically, as some plants and animals require connection to populations from further afield for breeding, or may require a male/ female plant for germination.

2.8. **Desk based feasibility study**

To begin the project we have created a desk based feasibility study, using best practice from existing feasibility studies from both the highways and environment teams. Once this was developed it was piloted and refined on the three pilot studies. This will inform the feasibility studies for the remaining 22 routes identified across Norfolk.

The desk based feasibility studies create detail on potential routes for each section, market towns and villages connected, places of employment, education, retail and leisure.

2.9. **Prioritisation of the routes**

All potential routes have had an initial overview and have been prioritised for detailed desk based study. This has been achieved by looking at which have the largest amount of railway track bed present and also the routes that can connect to existing trails. We have also been prioritising routes that currently do not possess much cycling and walking provision. One of the focus areas is the Great Yarmouth area and we are investigating what we can be done to improve the current provision and also how this can link into other new green infrastructure on the network.

2.10. **Wider uses of the Greenways**

At the turn of the 20th Century, Norfolk had over 400 miles of Railway but by the 1970's around 300 miles of this had been closed.

Much of the land previously used by the railways has been built on. However 5 sections are in use by heritage railways:

- North Norfolk Railway- running from Holt to Sheringham
- Mid- Norfolk Railway- between Wymondham and Worthing
- Bure Valley Railway- between Aylsham and Wroxham
- Wells and Walsingham Light Railway- between Wells-next-the-Sea and Walsingham
- Whitwell and Reepham Railway- Based at Whitwell Station on the Marriott's Way

2.11. The project looks to secure the disused railways from encroaching development, especially around North Walsham and King's Lynn, with heritage railways potentially being able to co-exist on the greenways as is currently done on the Bure Valley Railway and the Whitwell and Reepham Railway.

2.12. **GIS Mapping**

The entire network has been mapped on our GIS system so we are able to create detailed maps for each section of our feasibility studies. These have been created in detail so they can be reused for ground investigations.

2.13. **Engagement of Key Stakeholders**

As part of the project we have been engaging with key stakeholders to provide insight into the development of the project and also gain advocacy on the project:

- Key Internal Stakeholders: Economic Development Team, Public Health
- Key Council Partners, Active Norfolk, Natural England
- Heritage Railway representatives

We will progress our engagement with key stakeholders to build advocacy for the project prior to and during the public consultation.

2.14. **Alignment to Government Strategy**

A key part of the Network Feasibility study has identified current and potential alignment to existing and new government strategy. We have developed our

overall design principles from the Government's "**A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improvement the Environment**", with a particular focus on Chapter 3 "Connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing." With this review we are using the following design principles:

- Maintain and enhance the current ecosystem
- Linking population areas to Green spaces to improve access to green spaces
- Using the Green spaces to help improve Health and Wellbeing
- Ensuring children can use the Green Infrastructure.

2.15. We have also reviewed the DFT Guidance for Shared use routes for pedestrians and cyclists and Public Health's "Improving access to green spaces" report to ensure that the routes are:

- Safe for all to walk and ride
- Include accessible sections on each of the routes so people with mobility issues can make use of the green infrastructure

2.16. We also will ensure alignment to the Agricultural Plan 2018 to provide opportunity for landowners to benefit from the new infrastructure.

This bill will provide new financial assistance powers that will allow the Secretary of State to provide financial assistance in connection with:

- Managing land or water in a way that protects or improves the environment
- Supporting public access to and enjoyment of the countryside, farmland or woodland and better understanding of the environment
- Managing land or water in a way that maintains, restores or enhances cultural heritage or natural heritage

2.17. **National Planning Policy Framework**

As part of the overall network feasibility study we are ensuring that we align to the National Planning Policy Framework with a particular focus on how the new Greenway infrastructure can both increase the cycling and walking network and conserve and enhance the natural environment. With the overall network feasibility looking at routes that are both in the Broads and the North Norfolk Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty we will seek the closest alignment to the National Planning Policy Framework.

3. Public Consultation

We have started gathering the information required for the public consultation for the three routes including graphical overviews of the routes, photography along the route, the economic business case for the route as well as information on the heritage and ecology along the route.

3.1. For the public consultation we propose to have meetings in each of the locations where the routes go through including King's Lynn, Fakenham, Hunstanton, Aylsham and North Walsham.

3.2. To ensure the maximum amount of community feedback we will look at providing information:

- Online via Citizenspace web portal
- Face to Face via public exhibitions
- Stakeholder Engagement with landowners, Charities (e.g. RSPB, National Trust) and Key Partners

3.3. If approved we would look to undertake the public consultation from mid November with public exhibitions throughout December and January and the initial consultation ending mid February to allow the findings to be included in the

final detailed feasibility studies to be completed the end of March 2018

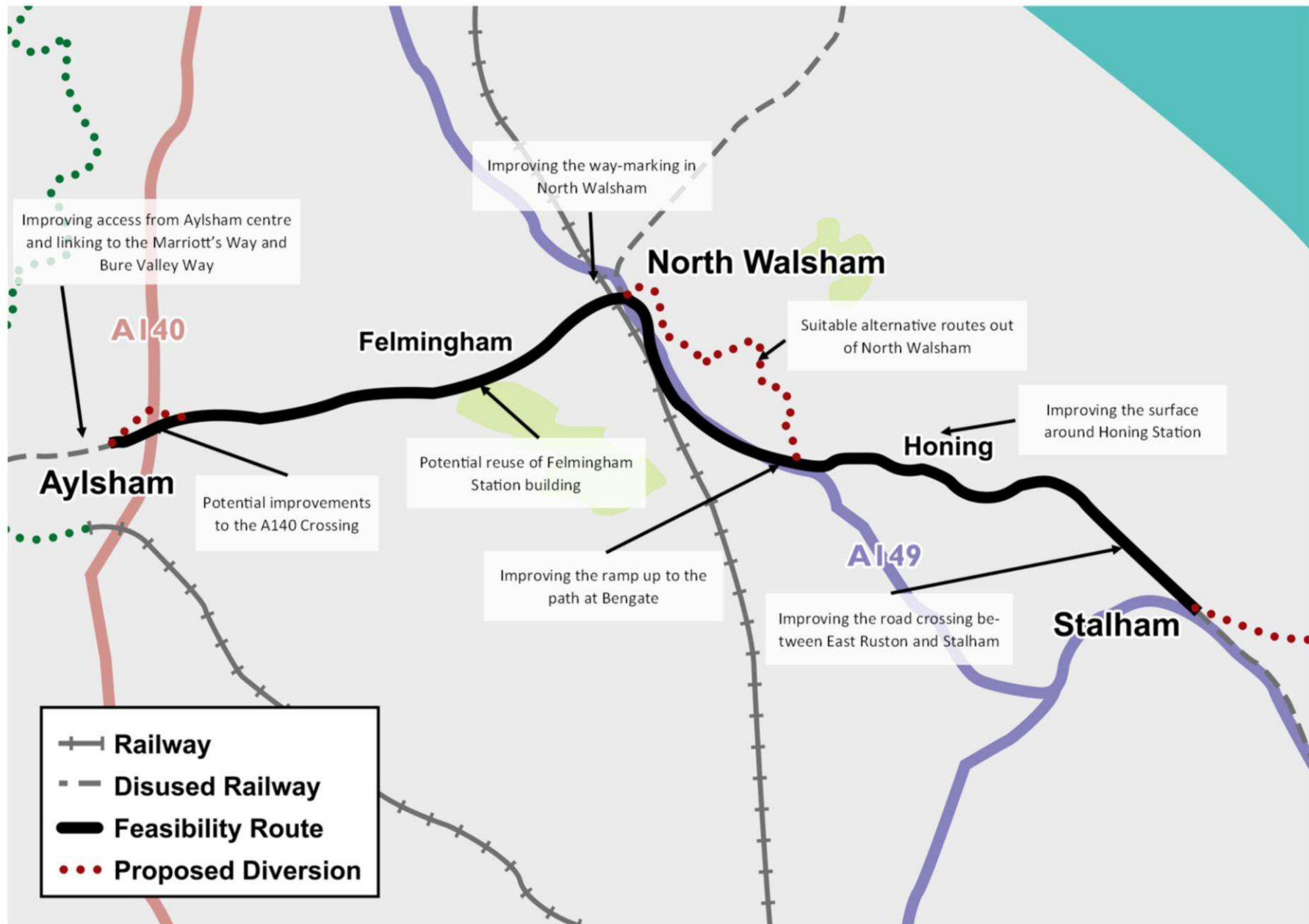
4. Update on the Detailed Feasibility Studies

4.1. Three Detailed Desk Based feasibility

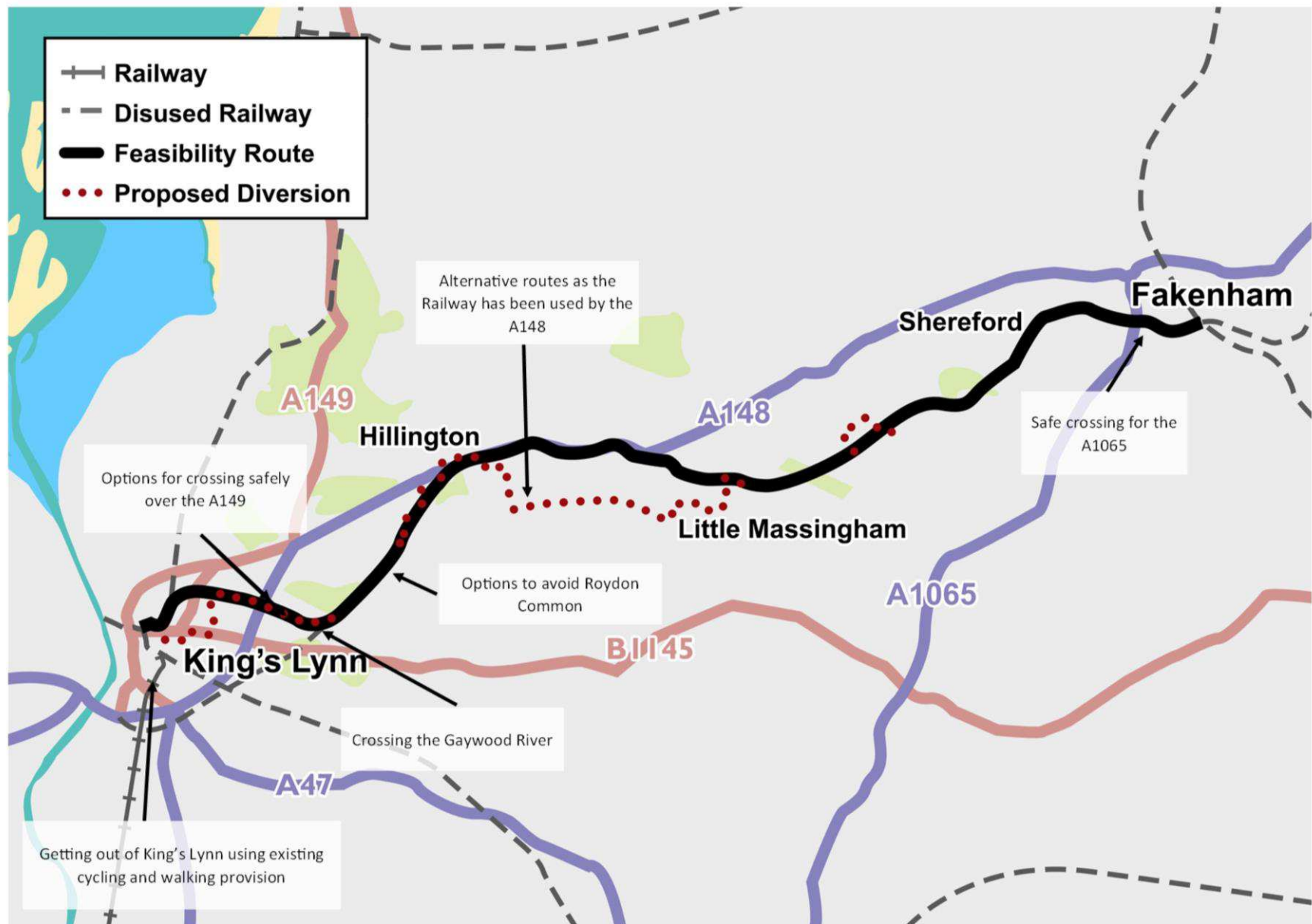
For all three of the pilot routes, detailed desk based feasibility has been completed. This includes collating information from various datasets, creating detailed GIS maps of the routes and highlighting the demographic, heritage and ecological attributes along the route.

Below are maps providing an overview of the routes and key areas of investigation we are looking at when producing the detailed feasibility studies.

4.2. Figure 2: Overview of the Weaver Way- Aylsham to Stalham

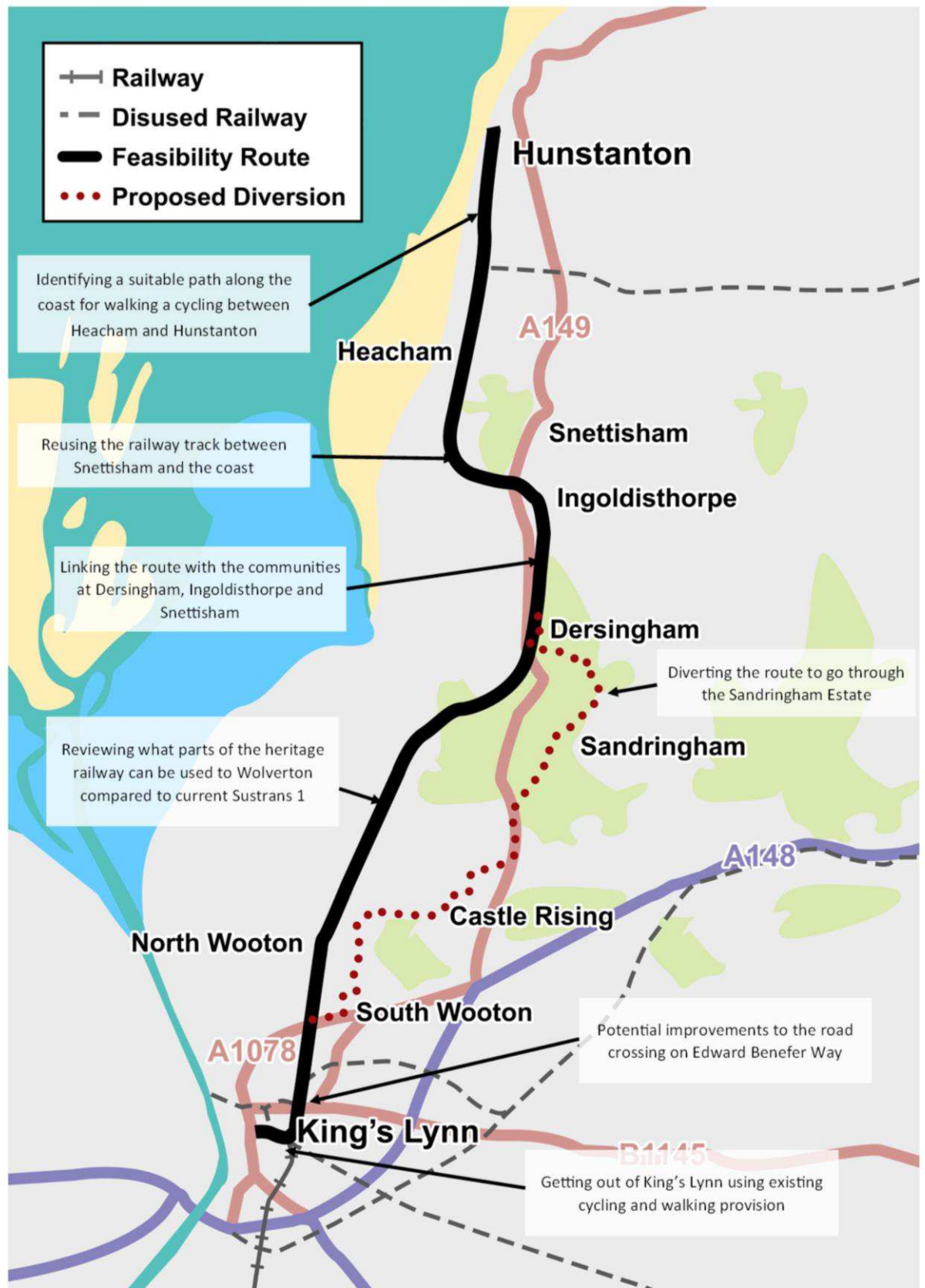


4.3. Figure 3: Overview of the King's Lynn to Fakenham



4.4.

Figure 4: Overview of King's Lynn to Hunstanton



4.5.

Ground Investigations

Following the desk based feasibility, ground investigations have been made on all three routes. These have been to investigate the current route, where accessible, and identify potential alternative routes and highlight key highways infrastructure required - for example, waymarking in urban areas and crossing of busy roads.

4.6.

As result of the three feasibility studies and ground investigations we have identified

key sections of the routes to prioritise for development.

4.7. **Weavers' Way**

On the Weavers' Way there are two existing station sites at Felmingham and Honing which can be redeveloped to benefit the local communities. These are both on land owned by Norfolk County Council and as part of the detailed feasibility reports we will make recommendations on how these can be improved for the communities at Aylsham and North Walsham, utilising standalone bids with learning from existing Marriott's Way projects.

4.8. **King's Lynn to Fakenham**

The potential King's Lynn to Fakenham route is not achievable using the current network. A key barrier to this route is getting out of King's Lynn and crossing over the A149 and part of the feasibility will be focused on different options to overcome this. The A148 has also been built over the route of some of the railway so alternatives using existing public rights of way have been identified.

4.9. **King's Lynn to Hunstanton**

The King's Lynn to Hunstanton route has some of the greatest opportunities to link the communities along the route but also provides some of the largest challenges of the project. Due to the nature of the Site of Scientific Special Interest at Dersingham bog we are looking to divert the route via Sandringham estate. Initial conversations with the estate have been positive about this move. At Heacham and Hunstanton a large amount of the railway has been built on so we are focusing on creating a route that would run alongside the seafront instead of following the exact route of the disused railway.

4.10. **Heritage and Ecology**

From our ground based feasibility study we have been gathering more detailed information on the heritage and ecology present on the routes to complement the desk based feasibility and also provide narrative overviews of the routes that could be used for public engagement to the routes.

4.11. **Landowner communications**

For all of the routes the landowners have been identified and prioritised for each of the routes with initial Landowner communication beginning at the start of October.

4.12. **Detailed Highways Design**

Highways have been briefed on all three routes and gateway meetings have been completed for the highways infrastructure design. This will provide a detailed overview of the infrastructure work required on each section of the route and detailed costs for the route. Highways are also working on creating standardised surface options that can be reused across Norfolk and also standardised highways interactions for road crossings.

5. Work for rest of the project

- 5.1. Detailed project plans have been created for each Quarter. The project team meet every week to update on project progress and a full team meeting occurs at the end of each quarter to review the outputs of the quarter and key actions for the next quarter as set out in figure 5.

Fig 5: Key Outputs for the Project

Qtr.	Outputs
Q1 April-June 2018	Set up of the Project
	Creation of Template for Feasibility checklists
	Completion of the Feasibility Checklists for pilot routes
Q2 July- September 2018	Begin Landowner Engagement
	Begin ground Investigations of the Routes
	Begin highways detailed design
	Begin co-work with UEA
	Communication plan completed
	Begin Stakeholder communications
Q3 October – December 2018	Complete Ground Investigations
	Continue Stakeholder communications
	Gain wider public feedback
	Final UEA Report completed
Q4 January – March 2019	Completion of Detailed Highways design
	Completion of Detailed Feasibility studies
	Completion of Network Feasibility study

- 5.2. If the project was to continue for next financial year we would look to undertake detailed design for prioritised schemes from the Overall Network Feasibility study and oversee the delivery of the Weavers' Way RDPE project.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1. A main focus for the project is to identify external funding opportunities and ensure that information is gathered for and aligned to the outputs for the project. With £1,000,000 of RDPE money secured for Weaver's way against a project spend of £164,640 this clearly proves the value of the project.
- 6.2. To allow us to continue this work and identify further funding opportunities, we have submitted a capital bid for future Norfolk County Council funding for £350,000 as per the current year. This would allow us to complete a further five detailed feasibility studies on priority routes identified as part of this year's wider feasibility work.
- 6.3. We are already looking for other opportunities for funding for application once the feasibility studies are complete and have already had meetings with Sport England and the New Anglia LEP to discuss the project. We will continue to engage with potential funders and partners as the project continues.

6.4. Overview of Current Spend of Project

Item	Current Spend	Forecast Spend
Project Management Costs for the Detailed Feasibility design costs	£94,140	£180,000
Highways design for the 3X detailed feasibility routes	£60,000	£60,000
UEA Valuation Study	£6,000	£25,000
Sustrans Consultation	£4,500	£20,000
Public Consultation	-	£35,000
Landholder Engagement	-	£30,000
TOTAL	£164,640	£350,000

7. Background

- 7.1. The original Policy and Resources Committee paper on Recycling Norfolk's Disused Railways is available online on [this link](#).

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper or want to see copies of any assessments, eg equality impact assessment, please get in touch with:

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