

Norfolk Local Access Forum

Item No.

Report title:	Recycling the Railways
Date of meeting:	18 April 2018
Responsible Officer:	Steve Miller, Assistant Director Culture and Heritage

Strategic impact

At the recent Policy and Resources Committee (29 January 2018) the Environment Team at NCC secured £350,000 of funding for a feasibility study on recycling disused railways for walking and cycling.

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.

Executive summary

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 walking and horse riding routes have multiple benefits including health, mental-wellbeing, economy, increased biodiversity, alleviation of congestion and air quality improvements.

Disused railways and under-used parts of the road and public rights of way network exist in various locations across Norfolk. The proposal is to investigate, through an appropriately aimed feasibility exercise, the likely costs, timescales, land ownership issues, the business case and overall deliverability of bringing this disused railway infrastructure back into intensive use as an integrated cycling and walking network. Priority will be given to maximising opportunities to link existing and proposed residential areas with places of employment, education, retail and leisure. Such a network will be a significant selling point for Norfolk as a visitor destination.

Norfolk County Council is ideally placed to take this work forward having recently produced a Cycling & Walking Strategy. We have also appointed a Cycling & Walking Champion, and were successful in securing £1.5m of central government funding to promote walking and cycling in key growth areas of Norwich and Great Yarmouth. Norfolk is required by central government to produce a local cycling and walking infrastructure plan and £65k has been secured from the DfT to achieve this. Disused railways are a key element in delivering good cycling and walking infrastructure for Norfolk.

A feasibility study will be undertaken to examine how best to make use of disused railways in Norfolk for non-motorised users.

See appendix 1 for more detail and maps of the planned feasibility areas.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

The Norfolk Local Access Forum endorse this feasibility project and that members take up opportunities to become involved with the project as it progresses.

1. **Proposal (or options)**

Undertaking a feasibility study into creating a better off-road network available for cyclists, walkers and horse riders by utilising disused railways and other under-used parts of the public rights of way and unclassified roads has approved capital funding within Norfolk County Council.

Three routes will be looked at in detail:

- **Weaver's Way – the section from Aylsham to Stalham consisting of a disused railway**
- **King's Lynn to Fakenham**
- **King's Lynn to Hunstanton**

Also key to the feasibility is understanding how the various components will form a better off-road network for the county. Looking at key challenges and making a business case for investment will be the focus of this work.

It is proposed that the LAF both endorses the feasibility study and provides its expertise to achieve the project's key aims. Disused railways being returned to use as paths is the headline aim but the project will also be able to think around how to make better use of public rights of way and unclassified roads.

2. **Evidence**

Previous Experience on Marriotts Way

Marriott's Way is a disused railway owned by Norfolk County Council, Norwich City Council and Broadland District Council. Recent work on the Marriott's Way demonstrates the potential for upgrading former railways as cycling and walking routes. The experience from Marriott's Way of carrying out the feasibility, bidding for, and obtaining funding is directly transferrable to this work. Work on the Marriott's Way included exploration of economic and social benefits, what consents would be required, value for money and sought the approval of the local community regarding the proposals. The number of Marriott's Way users has gone up as a result of the improvements. Marriott's Way counter data shows a recent trajectory of use, with almost 500,000 people per annum now using the Marriott's Way as a cycling and walking route. It is used for leisure cycling, with many families, in particular, choosing to cycle it due to the absence of traffic.

Health benefits

Particularly notable in the analysis of this data is the Health Economic Impact Tools (HEAT) results. This analysis shows a total health economic benefit over ten years of £46m. The total investment in the Marriott's Way over the last decade is estimated at £3M, with the bulk of that in the last three years mainly from CIL funding and through the construction of a green bridge built as mitigation for the Northern Distributer Road severing the route just to the north of Taverham. This gives a benefit to cost ratio (BCR) of 15:1.

Economic benefits

The direct economic benefit of the Marriott's Way can be determined through statistical methods based on survey and movement counters. An analysis has been undertaken using Natural England's Measure of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) baseline economic estimate. MENE includes all visits to green space, including urban parks. It further includes visits of very short duration, such as dog walking, which are both numerous and unlikely to include

an economic transaction. That gives a baseline figure of £6 per visit to the countryside. Using this as the measure the direct economic benefit of the Marriott's Way can be estimated as £2.9m per annum. This gives a further BCR of 9.7:1. Norfolk Trails are currently working on a more refined methodology for understanding the direct economic benefit of visits to the countryside. That work, still in its early stages, indicates a more significant baseline figure. In some cases that figure is as high as £33 per visit.

Additional evidence regarding the rural economy in Norfolk, public health, the countryside, green corridors, schools and funding can be found in the full report, accessed [here](#) or alternatively at <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/what-we-do-and-how-we-work/councillors-meetings-decisions-and-elections/committees-agendas-and-recent-decisions/policy-and-resources-committee>; page 344 onwards.

3. Financial Implications

None of this body.

4. Issues, risks and innovation

A once in a generation opportunity for the Local Access Forum to help the County Council create a better off-road cycling, walking and horse riding network.

5. Background

The National Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cycling-and-walking-investment-strategy>

Norfolk Cycling and Walking Strategy:
<https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/alternative-ways-to-travel/cycling>

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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