



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Streetscene and Engineering Cabinet

24th September 2021

**Report of the Head of Engineering & Transport
David W. Griffiths**

Footway/cycleway link to Eglwys Nunnydd and St Davids Park, Margam.

Matter for Decision

Wards Affected: Margam

Purpose of the Report:

To seek approval for capital investment in the provision of a footway/cycleway on Water Street to link Eglwys Nunnydd and St Davids Park to the A48 Margam.

Executive Summary:

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council (“the Council”), are aware, initially through the Safe Routes in Communities process and more recently through our Learner Travel work of the requirement to provide safe pedestrian/cycleway access for the residents of Eglwys Nunnydd and St Davids Park, Margam.

After several bid attempts we have been unable to secure Welsh Government (“WG”) external grant funding for a scheme to address the fact that this residential area is not served by a public bus service, footpath or cycleway linking it to the wider area.

The previously unsuccessful bids for funding for schemes that were first identified as part of a wider WG Safe Routes in Communities bid to encourage modal shift amongst pupils of the then Dyffryn Comprehensive school, and were not therefore subject to the same cost analysis comparators.

Since that time, and in light of the recent pandemic, it is clear that many people have taken the opportunity to explore their local area either by foot or by bicycle especially when the 'stay local' restrictions were in force. Whilst these restrictions have been relaxed, it remains evident that more and more people want to access this residential area by means other than a car. The benefits of improved linkages to this residential area must therefore be expanded beyond school children alone. It should also be noted that there are no public bus services on this route for the residents to utilise.

Officers have reviewed the areas identified in the LDP dormitory settlements, with 'minimal or no facilities, or served by minimal or no public transport', however there are no settlements of a comparable size to Eglwys Nunnydd/St Davids Park i.e. 44 in Eglwys Nunnydd and 27 in St Davids Park making 71 properties in total, which have no public footpath or public transport provision. For completeness the Learner Travel outcomes are also included. The list of other sites are scheduled within Appendix B of this report.

In the past, the need to acquire additional land has stalled the roll out of the project, however there have been positive negotiations with land owners on a without prejudice basis more recently.

The phased approach to the delivery of this scheme should ensure that with in principal agreements concluded the scheme, could now proceed, without further delay, subject to member approval.

The phased delivery of this project is illustrated on the plan attached as Appendix C. It should be noted that the project could be financed over two consecutive years 2021/2022 and 2022/2023.

Background:

Water Street, Margam was first identified as part a wider WG Safe Routes in Communities bid to encourage modal shift amongst pupils of the then Dyffryn Comprehensive school.

Water Street has no footpath leading from the Eglwys Nunnydd estate to the school and pupils were therefore classed as living on a hazardous route and were being bussed in. The provision of a footway/ cycleway to serve pupils residing in the area was identified as crucial if pupils who receive free school transport were to be able to walk/cycle to school safely.

It should be noted that WG previously funded works to the Water Street Bridge to enable access to the Kenfig Industrial Estate, to alleviate HGV traffic having to travel through the rural village of Pyle, resulting in said HGV traffic now exiting junction 38 of the M4 and travelling along Water Street to service the Industrial estate. This therefore resulted in a higher volume of HGV traffic utilising this route to access the industrial estate.

Provided below for members background information is the timeline of WG Grant/Internal Applications for Water Street, Margam:

2014/2015

The Councils initial bid was centred on the routes pupils were taking to the old Dyffryn Comprehensive School, with a heavy emphasis on tackling parent/pupil reliance on the car and the promotion of walking and cycling as an alternative mode; to this end a number of engineering solutions were identified.

The overall bid totalled £696k and included the following identified works:

- Provision of additional Crossing Points
- Improvements to ramp on Tygroes Drive
- Provide surfacing and lighting to existing gravel track to sports centre
- Provide footway around car park at Dyffryn Upper School
- Provision of ramped footway between Cwmavon Road and Ford Road
- Improvement to existing steps between cycle route and Afan Street
- Improvements to shared footway/cycleway on A48 Margam Road
- Provision of footway/cycleway (Water Street) to connect Eglwys Nunnydd community to A48

The scheme was partially funded up to £250k allowing the majority of the works to be carried out except for the Water Street and A48, Margam Road footway/cycle route improvements.

2016 – 2017

The Council submitted a further bid for WG Safe Routes in Communities funding solely for the route linking Eglwys Nunnydd up to the A48 at a cost of £290k.

The proposed works were as before:

- Improvements to shared footway/cycleway on A48 Margam Road
- Provision of footway/cycleway (Water Street) to connect Eglwys Nunnydd community to A48

Regrettably this bid was unsuccessful.

2017/2018

This was the final Safe Routes in Communities bid to WG specifically for Water Street, it was to be undertaken over a two year period, with the first year seeing a feasibility study with second year scheme at a cost of £327k. This was again rejected by WG.

During this year the Council were successful in a second bid for Dyffryn Comprehensive School for construction of a shared footway/carriageway and a toucan crossing point along Margam Road at a cost of £250K.

A meeting was convened on 25th July 2017, between the Council and Welsh Government representatives to discuss the Safe Routes in Communities bid, in particular the Water Street submission.

Feedback from Welsh Government representatives, that explained the aforementioned rejections of funding, was:

- There was limited feasibility of how many school pupils would actually benefit from the scheme – at that time there were 10 pupils living on the route, currently there are 8.

- WG felt that a full shared use path would have been better received – we were unable to deliver on all areas due to land/highway width issues.
- There were doubts from WG around deliverability as they noted the land issues.

2018 – 2019

During this year the local ward member during the member's surgery prioritised the Water Street scheme over any other works in the Margam ward.

Accordingly, officers considered whether the work proposed could be carried out as staged delivery over several years:

- Initial works – feasibility, detailed design and land issues etc.
- Phase 1 – Shared path construction at Eglwys Nunnydd
- Phase 2 – Connection to A48
- Phase 3 – Scheme extended to St Davids Park

Pedestrian warning signs had since been erected on Water Street.

The current proposed scheme has been estimated to have an overall cost of £550k (though it should be noted that land negotiation estimated costs are included in the overall estimate based on current valuations by the Property and Regeneration section) but subject to further negotiations.

2019 - 2020

During this year the Council made a bid to WG for Road Safety Capital grant funding to improve the route between A48, junction 38 off the M4 to our boundary with Pyle. This was in part in preparation to support the feasibility study and proposed works on Water Street.

The Council proposed at the time:

- A reduction in the National speed limit along the A48 route from 50mph to 40mph.
- Central traffic islands and pedestrian refuges to assist vulnerable pedestrians in crossing the highway.

- Provide highly visible yellow backed advanced warning signs and distinctive road markings at localised hazards to heighten driver awareness with sensitivity for vulnerable two wheeled users.
- Provide highly visible chevron signage to sharp sweeping bends.

The total bid for £198k was unsupported by WG with the following work being funded internally from the councils capital programme:

- Reduce the national speed limit from 50mph to 40mph on the A48
- Installation of a central island

This work was carried out in direct response to Highway/Health and Safety concerns, where visitors to Margam Park were being forced to cross a wide 50mph carriageway to access the bus stops.

Accordingly, this would also have had a benefit to residents of Eglwys Nunnydd and St Davids Park in allowing them to access bus services, once the path has been constructed.

The Council need to acquire from the respective landowners four separate small areas of land at various locations to facilitate the proposed scheme for which without prejudice negotiations are ongoing and it is anticipated would be concluded in the near future should members approve this report.

Current Position

In light of the recent pandemic, it is clear that many residents across Neath Port Talbot have taken the opportunity to explore their local area either by foot or by bicycle especially when the 'stay local' restrictions were in force.

Whilst these restrictions have been relaxed, it remains evident that more and more people want access from this residential area by means other than a car. This is further evidenced by the recently received petition from 59 residents of both Eglwys Nunnydd and St Davids Park where they describe themselves as 'isolated as a Community, with no bus route, and no safe path to gain access to a bus stop, town or other villages'. The benefits of improved linkages to this residential area must therefore go beyond the initial WG bid for school children alone.

With 71 properties situated off Water Street - 44 in Eglwys Nunnydd and 27 in St Davids Park, and historical speed data showing 85% of vehicles are

travelling in excess of 56mph on a 40mph road, it is clearly evident that there is a highway/pedestrian safety need to invest in the provision of a footpath/cycleway along the length of Water Street, linking this settlement to the wider area.

This need has been further compounded by the requirement to divert and decrease heavy HGV traffic movement through Pyle, improvements have previously been undertaken under the railway bridge on Water Street, to enable the HGV traffic to access Kenfig Industrial Estate via junction 38 off the M4. However, in doing so it has significantly increased the number of vehicles with the added subsequent risk to pedestrians and cyclists negotiating this highway.

Should the scheme not proceed then the current risk of potential for personal injury/accident to users of this part of the highway network will remain.

Financial Impacts:

Should the scheme be supported then it is proposed that £550k be allocated from the Highways improvement funding within the Councils approved capital programme which includes projected land transaction costs, profiled over two consecutive financial years 2021/2022 and 2022/2023, to facilitate the phased delivery of the scheme. It should be noted that due to the pandemic current material costs are subject to fluctuations across the construction industry, and will be monitored closely with any adverse impact on the budget being reported to Cabinet via the regular Capital Programme Monitoring Reports.

In considering this investment Members may be interested to note that the annual cost to the economy of a Road Traffic Accident resulting in a fatality is circa £4 million (cost per casualty £2,029,237, cost per accident £2,260,633) ref: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/reported-road-accidents-vehicles-and-casualties-tables-for-great-britain>

Integrated Impact Assessment:

A first stage Impact Assessment has been undertaken to assist the Council in discharging its legislative duties (under the Equality Act 2010, the Welsh

Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

The first stage assessment, attached at Appendix A, has indicated that a more in-depth assessment is not required.

Valleys Communities Impacts:

No impacts.

Workforce Impacts:

No impacts.

Legal Impacts:

No impacts.

Risk Management Impacts:

On implementation the new shared footway/cycleway path will significantly reduce the risk to residents on access/egress of both estates.

It should be noted that in principle land agreements have been reached with land owners to facilitate the construction of the proposed new shared footpath/cycleway.

A bio diversity mitigation plan has been produced and will be implemented as part of the scheme if approved.

Consultation:

Local residents have been actively requesting for such linkages to be provided to their community for some time. A letter at Appendix D and combined petition has been submitted to the Council from 59 residents of Eglwys Nunnydd and St Davids Park. The petition is available for inspection on request.

The local member for Margam has been consulted on this scheme and is supportive of the proposal.

Recommendations:

It is recommended having due regard to the Integrated Impact Screening Assessment that:

1. Members endorse the proposal to construct a shared footpath/cycleway to serve the residents of Eglwys Nunnydd and St Davids Park, Margam.
2. That £550k within the Highways Improvement programme be allocated to this scheme from within the Council's existing Capital programme, profiled over two consecutive financial years 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 to facilitate the phased delivery of the scheme be authorised.
3. That the Director of Environment and Regeneration be granted delegated powers to enter into agreements with land owners to secure land to facilitate the construction of the footway/cycle path.
4. That the proposed construction work be undertaken by the Council's Streetcare Services over the two year period.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To provide a safe walking and cycle footpath for the residents of Eglwys Nunnydd and St Davids Park and the wider community in the interest of road safety.

Implementation of Decision:

The decision is proposed for implementation after the three day call in period.

Appendices:

Appendix A – IIA First Stage report.

Appendix B – LDP dormitory settlements.

Appendix C – Plan of proposed phased works.

Appendix D – Residents of Eglwys Nunnydd and St Davids Park petition letter.

List of Background Papers:

The full resident's petition is available for inspection on request.

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