

# Consultation Response to the Norfolk Walking and Cycling Action Plan

Robert J. Whittaker

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## 1 Overview

1. This document represents my response to the consultation on the Norfolk County Council Walking and Cycling Action Plan [6].
2. I am a volunteer with Sustrans, and am the Group Coordinator for the Breckland and Waveney Valley Volunteer Group. The group area covers the National Cycle Network (NCN) Routes 13 and 30 from Thetford to Ten-Mile Bank, Gatley, and Harleston, and includes the towns of Thetford, Brandon, Dereham, Swaffham, and Diss. However, this response is made in a personal capacity, and should not be taken to represent the views of Sustrans.
3. Overall I am very supportive of this Action Plan and the aims it is promoting. I must congratulate those in Norfolk County Council for pushing forward with this.
4. However, I feel that the Action Plan is let down by a lack of lack of specific plans for improvements, and a lack of clarity/commitment on where the resources will come from. Funding from County and District budgets should be guaranteed, and it would have been nice to see more specific plans for improvements / additions to the networks highlighted – or at least a commitment to develop such plans within a specified timescale.
5. Further comments and suggestions on specific aspects of the document are provided in the sections below.

## 2 Positive points

6. I would like to highlight the following as particularly positive features of the Action Plan:
  - (a) The commitment for each District Council to appoint a ‘Walking and Cycling Champion’. It will be very useful to have a named contact to work with at Breckland District Council, as I have found it difficult in the past to get engagement from them on cycling issues.

- (b) The target to increase levels of cycling and to target a spend of £10 per capita per annum in Norfolk. This is excellent, and follows the recommendation of the APPG *Get Britain Cycling* report [7].
- (c) The commitment to improve the cycle networks in the the other urban areas and market towns following the example of the Norwich Pedalways. The Pedalways are an excellent scheme. The challenge now will be getting the funding to roll out similar versions in other towns.
- (d) The commitment to plan for walking and cycling in new developments and allocate CIL funding to cycling and walking schemes. This will need particular focus, as previous attempts to build cycling and walking into development criteria (e.g. in the Thetford Area Action Plan [4]) have often been ignored or sidelined by planners when evaluating applications.

### 3 Typographical errors and other minor issues

- 7. Page 3: “Successfully worked . . . very successfully”
- 8. Page 3: It seems a bit of an exaggeration to claim “a joined up cycling and walking network” if this is intended to apply county-wide. Perhaps it could be applied to some specific schemes though.
- 9. Page 3: Citations should be provided for the “various studies” quote.
- 10. Page 4: “2,400 public rights of way”. This should be “2,400 miles of public rights of way”. (There are about 5693 individual rights of way.) It would also be good to quote the total length of bridleways and byways that are available to horse-riders and cyclists, which I think is roughly 700 miles.
- 11. Page 15: A citation should be provided for the GlaxoSmithKline claim. Also, I think the name should be all one word, rather than with spaces.
- 12. Page 15: The existence of the Sustrans National Cycle Network routes should be mentioned under the “infrastructure” bullet.
- 13. Page 17: The heading for section 4.4 is in black, whereas the other headings of that level are green.
- 14. Page 20: Again, the existence of the Sustrans National Cycle Network routes should be mentioned when describing Norfolk’s cycle network. The other significant route, the Peddar’s Way Cycle Route should also be explicitly mentioned.
- 15. Page 22: The “other main urban areas and market towns” where the pedalways model will be reproduced should be listed explicitly here. Also what is the time-frame for these improvements?
- 16. Page 22: The licence for the photo should be “GFDL” not “GRDL”, and I’m not sure what the “via Commons” part is supposed to mean. However, of the two licences offered for the image in question, it would make more sense to chose CC-By-SA.

17. Page 23: Relevant cycle design guidance should be referenced in section 6.1, e.g. [8].
18. Page 26: Parkrun [3] could be mentioned in the list of activities supporting walking. While most participants will run or jog, a significant number walk one of the dozen 5 km routes in the County each week.
19. Page 32: For context, the current level should be listed in target (d), and the current level of spending in target (e).
20. Page 32: I presume that the spending in point (e) is supposed to be per annum. If so, this should be made explicit.
21. Page 44–47: The location descriptions in the table are not specific enough to allow readers to quickly identify the place. A town/village name or similar needs to be added to those that currently just have a road name. Perhaps a new “Parish” column could be added for all the entries for consistency.
22. Page 48–53: I presume that there is some significance in the groups 1a-f, 2a–e, 3a–c, etc. Could the theme for each be added?
23. Page 48: What are “CCGs”? The abbreviation should either be defined or spelt out in full.

## 4 Walking and Cycling Network Maps

### 4.1 The ‘Schematic’ Maps

24. The ‘Schematic’ cycling and walking maps on pages 20 and 21 should be replaced by geographically accurate maps. The maps can still be blank apart from the named places and the routes, but the correct geography should be used. Given the sparsity of the networks, there is no advantage to the simplified network view over geographically accurate representation. On the contrary, it is important for readers to be able to see not just the topology of the network, but also the actual routes taken, to give a proper impression of distances and directness.
25. The named/numbered routes on these maps should be labelled. For the cycling map, the routes should be coloured to indicate route characteristics (traffic levels and surface smoothness) I would suggest four categories: ‘off-road rough’, ‘off-road smooth’, ‘quiet road’, ‘busier road’. These distinctions will be crucial for many users, and so should be obvious at a glance from the network map.
26. On the current cycling map, NCN11 running south from Brandon Creek (Ten Mile Bank) is missing, and I am not sure what the route depicted between King’s Lynn and Gressenhall is supposed to be. There is also a new Sustrans route signed as “(30)” from Weeting to Dereham via Oxborough, which is missing from the map in the Action Plan. The route doesn’t yet appear on the Sustrans online map, but can be seen on OpenCycleMap [1].

## 4.2 Local Network Maps

27. I am not convinced that it is particularly helpful to include maps which simply extract all Adopted Footways, Adopted Cycleways and Public Rights of Way from the council's GIS data. But maybe such maps are better than nothing.
28. I can't speak for other towns, but in Thetford there are existing signed walking and cycling networks under the "Thetford Connect" label. The maps for Thetford should show these networks. (I have already been in touch with you about this, and have provided a GIS file for the cycling network).
29. To help inform stakeholders about the current cycling networks, routes should be coloured according to their surface and traffic levels. I would suggest 4 categories: off-road smooth surface, off-road rough surface, quiet road, busy road. (The distinction between quiet and busy roads in an urban setting could be determined by whether or not the route falls within the "shared carriageway" region of the chart on page 6 of the Sustrans Handbook for Cycle Friendly Design [8].)

## 5 Vision, Goals, Targets, Aims

30. This seems to be the most confused aspect of the Action Plan. Section 2.2 contains what appears to be a list of targets, and there are also two separate lists in section 9. Surely there should be one summary list of actions, and one single list of measurable targets, relating to the plans spelt out in detail sections 3-7.
31. Several of the bullet points in section 2.2 do not seem to fit as a measurable measures of success; namely "The needs of users...", "We will pool and coordinate...", and "look to development our progress...".
32. The bullet points at the start of section 9.1 are not "targets" in the way I understand the word, and as phrased they are certainly not measurable. The list of points (a)-(e) are what I would expect from a list of targets, but why are these not entirely consistent with the list in section 2.2?

### 5.1 County-Wide Rural Cycling Network Plans

33. The plan shows a distinct lack of ambition not to include at least tentative suggestions for adding the obvious missing links to the cycling network. In particular, I would like to see specific commitments included in the Action Plan to at least investigate:
  - (a) A link from Thetford to Wymondham along the A11 corridor
  - (b) A link from King's Lynn or Downham Market to Norwich via Swaffham and Dereham.
34. For my thoughts on potential new Sustrans NCN routes in south-west Norfolk, see [10].

## 5.2 Local Cycling Network Improvement Plans

35. Similarly, no specific plans are given for improvements to local urban networks. I would like to see more detail here. A time frame should be given for an initial audit / review of the current network and the production of development plans, together with an indication of how the community and other stakeholders will be involved.
36. Specifically I would like to see a commitment to establish local working groups comprising councillors, Sustrans and CTC volunteers, and community representatives in each of the market towns and urban areas. These groups would be tasked with reviewing current provision and making prioritised recommendations for where improvements are most needed.
37. It is also disappointing not to see any specific targets relating to the quality of local cycling networks in market towns. One could set a measurable target of having a cycling network to the standards of the Sustrans *Handbook for Cycle Friendly Design* [8] which connects all key destinations, and is within (say) 5 minutes reach of 95% of all households in each town.

## 5.3 Thetford Sustainable Urban Expansion

38. There is particular urgency for reviewing and planning cycling and walking infrastructure in Thetford, with planning for the Thetford Sustainable Urban Expansion (SUE) well underway. The plans I have seen so far do not include sufficient provision for a local cycling network of the standard described in the Action Plan. They also fail to make any significant progress with implementing the main cycling policies in the Thetford Area Action Plan (TAAP) [4].
39. There is significant urgency here to make sure opportunities are not missed. I feel that this warrants an explicit mention in the Action Plan. I would like to see a commitment for appropriate Norfolk County Council officers to immediately set up a working group of key stakeholders to work with Breckland District Council, the SUE developers, and the Greater Thetford Development Partnership to ensure that both the TAAP policies and the Action Plan are properly implemented in Thetford. Previous experience in Thetford shows that cycling policies can all too easily be neglected under pressure from competing interests.

## 6 Public Rights of Way Maintenance

40. The Action Plan makes several references to the extensive Rights of Way network in the County. It is therefore odd that it makes no reference to the current level of defects/obstructions identified, nor to any plan to improve the maintenance enforcement regime.
41. As a keen recreational walker and volunteer surveyor for the OpenStreetMap project [2], I have come across numerous obstructed Rights of Way in the last few years. (The more serious of these are listed at [12].) These have all been reported to the Council, but I have seen little progress in tackling many of these. Despite budgetary constraints, the Council has legal obligations here.

42. The Action Plan should be open about these issues, and include details of the current number of known defects of different classes on Public Rights of Way. It should also include details of how these will be addressed to improve the situation moving forward.
43. The Action Plan should also include a specific commitment to open the Highways defects database to the public. Details of (and progress with) known issues should be available to the public via the Council's website, and are also shown as an additional layer on the Council's interactive highways map [5]. This will help users find out about problems in advance and avoid impassible or difficult routes. The additional transparency should also help ensure issues are addressed in a timely fashion.
44. As part of my work for OpenStreetMap, I have identified a significant number of discrepancies between the electronic Definitive Statement and GIS version of the Definitive Map [9]. These discrepancies should be acknowledged in the Action Plan, and a plan put in place to address them.
45. I have also identified a number of missing links in the Rights of Way network where there is a gap between the end of a path and the public highway, or a path ends at a parish boundary with a continuation in the next parish [11]. Again the Action Plan should acknowledge these issues, and include a commitment of Officer time to investigate them prior to the 2016 cut-off date. Project 1f on page 48 should be expanded to include effort by the Council to help identify and support claims for missing links too.
46. It seems that these issues should be mentioned in section 6.8, and a new set of projects needs to be added to the table on pages 48–55 to tackle them.

## 7 Administrative Matters

47. It was disappointing that as a Sustrans Local Group Coordinator I was not included in the initial Stakeholder consultation stage for the Action Plan, despite a promise from one of your Officers that I would be. Indeed, I was not even informed when the public consultation was started.
48. The Action Plan document does not have page or paragraph numbers, making it more difficult than necessary to refer to specific parts.

## References

- [1] OpenCycleMap. <http://www.opencyclemap.org/>.
- [2] OpenStreetMap. <http://www.openstreetmap.org/>.
- [3] Parkrun UK. <http://www.parkrun.org.uk>.
- [4] Breckland District Council. *Thetford Area Action Plan*, 2012.  
[https://www.breckland.gov.uk/media/1900/Thetford-Area-Action-Plan-ADOPTED-Background-/pdf/Final\\_Adopted\\_TAAP\\_Background](https://www.breckland.gov.uk/media/1900/Thetford-Area-Action-Plan-ADOPTED-Background-/pdf/Final_Adopted_TAAP_Background).

- [5] Norfolk County Council. Interactive Highways Map, 2016.  
<http://maps.norfolk.gov.uk/highways/>.
- [6] Norfolk County Council. Walking and cycling action plan consultation, 2016.  
<https://norfolk.citizenspace.com/consultation/norfolk-cycling-and-walking-action-plan>.
- [7] All-Party Parliamentary Cycling Group. Get Britain Cycling, 2013. <https://allpartycycling.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/get-britain-cycling1.pdf>.
- [8] Sustrans. *Handbook for Cycle Friendly Design*, 2014. Available online at [http://www.sustrans.org.uk/sites/default/files/file\\_content\\_type/sustrans\\_handbook\\_for\\_cycle-friendly\\_design\\_11\\_04\\_14.pdf](http://www.sustrans.org.uk/sites/default/files/file_content_type/sustrans_handbook_for_cycle-friendly_design_11_04_14.pdf).
- [9] Robert Whittaker. Definitive map and statement discrepancies in norfolk, 2016.  
<http://robert.mathmos.net/osm/prow/progress/norfolk/discrepancies>.
- [10] Robert Whittaker. Potential new sustrans routes in the breckland and waveney valley area, 2016.  
<http://robert.mathmos.net/cycling/PotentialNewRoutes.pdf>.
- [11] Robert Whittaker. Rights of way network gaps in norfolk, 2016.  
<http://robert.mathmos.net/osm/prow/progress/norfolk/network-issues>.
- [12] Robert Whittaker. Rights of way obstructions in norfolk, 2016.  
<http://robert.mathmos.net/osm/prow/progress/norfolk/obstructions>.