

Report to	Partnership Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting	4 th November 2021
Lead Member / Officer	Lead Member for Waste, Transport and the Environment / Head of Planning, Public Protection and Countryside
Report author	Traffic, Parking and Road Safety Manager
Title	COVID-19 Active Travel Plan Schemes

1. What is the report about?

- 1.1 The report is about the temporary active travel schemes that were implemented in a number of Denbighshire town centres in late 2020 and which have now all subsequently been removed.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

- 2.1 To provide the Scrutiny Committee with a further update on the findings from project as a follow-up to the report that was presented to the Committee in December 2020 and which is included in Appendix A to this report.

3. What are the Recommendations?

- 3.1 That the Committee considers the contents of the report and provides observations and the conclusions drawn from the Covid AT schemes.

4. Report details

4.1 Background and purpose of the grant

- 4.1.1 In May 2020, the Welsh Government invited local authorities to bid for projects that would encourage active travel and support social distancing in town centres.
- 4.1.2 Following an initial selection process led by officers and email notification to the MAGs, schemes were developed for Denbigh, Llangollen, Rhyl and Ruthin town centres. With the exception of Denbigh which was withdrawn, these were awarded

WG funding in June 2020. The December 2020 report included in Appendix A provides more detail surrounding the grant and process followed.

- 4.1.3 A short public consultation process was undertaken for each of the four schemes in July 2020 and the results were then presented to the relevant MAGs. The response rates for both the Denbigh and Ruthin schemes was very good with approximately 500 people responding to the Denbigh consultation and over 600 responding to the Ruthin consultation. Whilst 80% of the Ruthin responses were supportive of the proposals, a similar proportion opposed the Denbigh scheme. The response rates for the Llangollen and Rhyl schemes were much lower. Approximately 90 people responded to the Llangollen consultation with just over 60% being supportive of the proposals. The response to the Rhyl consultation saw just 30 responses received, again with 60% of respondents in support.
- 4.1.4 The above findings from the consultation led to the scheme for Denbigh being withdrawn but the other three schemes proceeding. The Lead Member for Waste, Transport and the Environment made the formal decision whether each scheme should proceed after considering the views of each respective MAG.
- 4.1.5 Following initial delays due to contractor availability and material shortages. The schemes in Llangollen, Rhyl and Ruthin were implemented by November 2020.

4.2 Ruthin scheme

- 4.2.1 The scheme in Ruthin encountered initial teething problems which were largely addressed by making slight amendments to the scheme. A number of businesses that had been directly affected by the measures complained about the loss of spaces for parking and loading outside their premises. Whilst some mitigation for these losses had been included within the overall scheme, this wasn't considered to be enough by some business owners. In light of the concerns, meetings were held with Ruthin MAG which led to the Lead Member taking the decision to withdraw the scheme and this work took place in February 2021.

4.3 Llangollen scheme

- 4.3.1 Initially, little feedback was received in response to the Llangollen scheme following its introduction in early November 2020. However from March 2021, a number of incidents began to occur involving pedestrians tripping over the bases of the temporary bollards that had been introduced. As these incidents continued,

the bollards were replaced with narrow planter boxes which put a stop to the tripping incidents. The temporary scheme also resulted in an increase in some large vehicles mounting the pavement in order to manoeuvre past obstructions caused by the opposing lane of traffic.

4.3.2 Despite the above concerns, the Dee Valley MAG were keen to retain the temporary scheme on the basis that the additional pavement width that had been created was proving really useful for the heavy pedestrian footfall that was being experienced in Llangollen. This view had also been based on the feedback from a follow-up online consultation where although views on the temporary scheme were mixed, approximately 60% of respondents indicated that they felt that the scheme should remain either because they felt it was working well, or because they felt it was too early to draw any conclusions to the contrary. On-site observations by officers observed plenty of usage of the widened pavement area even outside of tradition peak periods such as weekends and school holidays.

4.3.3 Following the relaxation of the Welsh Government Covid restrictions in mid-August 2021 and the move to Alert Level 0, the Lead Member for Waste, Transport and the Environment took the decision to remove the temporary scheme following discussion with the local members.

4.4 Rhyl scheme

4.4.1 Once implemented the Rhyl temporary scheme generated little feedback from residents. However, concerns were raised by local businesses who said that the loss of on-street parking was having a detrimental impact on their businesses. Some of residents and local members raised concerns that the scheme was increasing traffic queues at the A548 Wellington Road/Bodfor Street junction. The Lead Member took the decision for the scheme following consultation with the Rhyl MAG. The scheme was removed in late April 2021.

4.5 Conclusions

4.5.1 As discussed in the previous scrutiny committee report in December 2020 (see Appendix A), the short timescales for submitting bids to Welsh Government left little time to develop projects and to adequately engage residents, business and visitors. This was because of the need to try and implement works quickly and to help businesses, shoppers and visitors feel safe when town centres reopened.

- 4.5.2 The particularly negative reaction to the Denbigh scheme resulted in a short consultation being agreed for all four of the temporary schemes proposed.
- 4.5.3 With the exception of the Denbigh scheme, the other three schemes were mostly supported by the consultation respondents. By the time the projects were introduced in late October/early November the peak spring/summer footfall had subsided and the October “firebreak” had just taken place. The colder weather combined with the further lockdown that commenced on the 20th December 2020, and ran until Spring, resulted in many of our town centres being relatively deserted. This made the purpose of the temporary schemes seem less obvious especially as this had often been at the expense of on-street parking. This was undoubtedly a factor in the early removal of the Rhyl and Ruthin schemes.
- 4.5.4 In the event that similar funding becomes available in the future at similarly short notice, it is recommended that such funding is limited to projects that have either been sufficiently developed already, or to projects that are relatively simple in scope and can be implemented fairly easily.
- 4.5.5 A presentation about the Covid Active Travel project was given to SLT in late October in order to share lessons learnt with other services.

5. How does the decision contribute to Corporate Priorities?

- 5.1 The active travel schemes contribute towards the Connected Communities priority.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

- 6.1 The total costs for all the works including staff costs incurred was fully met from the grant award of £825,000.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?

- 7.1 A Well-being Impact Assessment has not been undertaken as a decision isn't being sought from the Committee.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

- 8.1 Consultation was undertaken with the Lead Member and MAGs initially. This was then followed-up by a two-week on-line consultation exercise in July 2020. A follow-

up consultation was undertaken for Llangollen as this project remained for a longer period.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

- 9.1 As the report is focused on a review of processes there are no direct ongoing financial implications. However, it should be noted that some of the issues raised in this report are common themes with regard to grant funding. The balance between the aim to ensure external funding sources are maximised and the need to ensure that projects reflect local priorities is an important task, but also sometimes difficult. This is particularly acute when funding is announced at short notice. These wider issues are regularly raised with WLGA and Welsh Government.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

- 10.1 Reputational damage owing to elements of the schemes being unpopular, such as where parking has been removed to enable pavements to be widened.

11. Power to make the decision

- 11.1 Section 7.4.2 of the Council's Constitution outlines Scrutiny's powers with respect to examining the impact of decisions and the application of policies.