

Maidstone Borough Council

Planning, Transport and Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 22 July 2014

Review of Transport in Maidstone Borough - alternatives to using a car Review of Walking and Cycling as an alternative to using the car

Report of: Sarah Shearsmith, Community Development Team Leader

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Planning, Transport and Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee are reviewing transport within Maidstone and how we can get people to use alternative transport such as walking and cycling when accessing the town centre.
- 1.2 By actively encouraging walking and cycling it can help to: reduce traffic congestion and air pollution; improve road safety; reduce danger; increase independence; improve personal health and wellbeing.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That Committee note the contents of this report.

3. Existing Programmes and Schemes

- 3.1 Maidstone Health Walks – Maidstone has some great parks, countryside and river walks to enjoy. There is no better way to socialise, meet new people and get fit. Maidstone Health Walks are led by trained volunteers in the local community and supported by Maidstone Borough Council. They provide free short walks which people can do at their own pace and are open to all ages and abilities, provided in a safe and friendly environment. There are 3 walks currently operating weekly within Maidstone:
 - Tuesday – Mote Park, 10.30am
 - Wednesday – Cherry Orchard, 12.30pm
 - Thursday – Maidstone Town Centre, 11.00am

Data shows (as of 07.07.14) that 662 walk hours have taken place since January 2014 with 57 registered walkers. Of those registered walkers 70.2% are female and 29.8% are men with the large proportion of walkers (45.6%) aged 65 – 74 years old and only 3.5% aged 25-34.
<http://www.walkingforhealth.org.uk/>

- 3.2 Sky Ride – British Cycling and Sky have come together to help get even more people riding their bikes. There is a range of ways for all levels of bike users to get involved, from traffic-free events, to local guide rides;

from women-only rides and support, to tips, ideas and great routes. Whether you are an experienced rider or beginner there are rides out there for everyone. Over the coming months the following rides are taking place in Maidstone:

- Sunday 20th July – Mote Park Lakeside Lap, 10.00am
- Sunday 31st August – Fusion Figure of Eight, 10.00am
- Sunday 7th September – Mote Park Lakeside Lap, 10.00am
- Sunday 9th November – Fusion Figure of Eight, 10.00am

<http://www.goskyride.com/>

- 3.3 KM (Kent Messenger) Charity Team – Maidstone Borough Council works alongside the KM Charity Team to encourage parents and pupils to ditch the car and walk to school.

A Walking Bus is a fun, healthy, safe and sustainable way of travelling to school. 'Buses' operate along set routes, picking up children at pre-arranged points. Parents take turns to escort the column of children to school. Everyone involved wears high-visibility tabards provided.

In addition to the Walk to School Scheme, KM Charity Team run 'Catch the Active Bug'. It provides an attractive alternative to those schools where a walking bus is not feasible or an existing bus needs revitalising. Active Bug incorporates all modes of green travel including walking, scooting, cycling, and park-and-stride. Schools receive class charts and a whole-school wall chart to record progress with stickers and certificates issued to those who participate.

The facts:

- 200 primary schools use KM Walk to School resources to promote green travel every week;
- Last academic year 218,000 school run car journeys were removed from local roads by participating schools.;
- KM Walk to School packages include road safety skill tests and provide Ofsted self-evaluation evidence for school management teams;
- So far, this academic year, we have removed 22,517 school run car journeys from local roads in Maidstone.

So the initiative is growing and making a very positive contribution from an environmental, child health and road safety perspective

- 3.4 Cycle to Work Scheme – Cycleplus is a government approved scheme that allows Maidstone Borough Council staff to hire purchase a bike and safety equipment from their employers for the purpose of commuting to and from work and for use at weekends and evenings. The bike staff hire will be provided at up to 32% less than the usual cost paid and can result in savings of up to £320. Staff can choose a bike up to the value of £1,000 from a list of local retailers. The value is spread across a period of 12 to 18 months depending on the scheme.

<http://www.maidstonebenefits.co.uk>

4. Barriers and facilitators

- 4.1 When making transport choices, habit is important for most people, most of the time. Choosing to use a different mode of transport from usual is also likely to require more planning and thought. For instance, making a decision to start cycling might mean obtaining appropriate clothing, preparing the bike, route planning and allowing time for a trip of an unknown duration. These factors are unlikely to remain as significant barriers once walking or cycling becomes the norm. For instance, both will usually involve reliable and more predictable journey times. Many journeys may be quicker, as well as being more healthy. There are also wider community benefits from reduced congestion and pollution.
- 4.2 Walking and cycling, like any form of transport, involve exposure to a certain level of risk. This includes the risk of injury from falls or from collisions and exposure to air pollution. These risks are not unique to transport involving physical activity. However, evidence shows that the health benefits of being more physically active outweigh these disadvantages.
- 4.3 Attitudes to walking and cycling are generally positive or neutral, with walking generally regarded more favourably. However, a combination of factors discourages people from taking up either if it is a question of choice, rather than necessity. These include:
 - Concerns about the physical environment, in particular, with regard to perceptions of and actual safety. Motor traffic is a major deterrent for many cyclists and pedestrians in rural areas and for children in all areas. Many potential walkers restrict their journeys on foot because of their perceptions that empty streets, particularly at night, are dangerous;
 - Complex household routines (especially for those with young children). For many people it is a combination of circumstances that prevent them from walking or cycling for everyday travel. These include the logistics of organising and travelling with children; pressures of time and other commitments; and parental concerns about safety;
 - The perception that walking and cycling are not things to do as a matter of routine.
- 3.4 Traffic volume and speed act as barriers to walking and cycling. The level of traffic creates congestion which, in turn, imposes costs on the economy, through loss of productive time. Vehicles are also major contributors to air and noise pollution, as well as to carbon dioxide emissions.
- 3.5 Lack of awareness of existing schemes in place to local residents and health care professionals to attend.
- 3.6 Lack of lockable storage to allow residents the opportunity to use their cycles within the town centre.

5 Suggested Recommendations

- 5.1 In partnership with Kent County Council, develop a cycling strategy for the Maidstone Borough in line with other local districts (Ashford, Canterbury, Dover, Sevenoaks, Shepway, Thanet and Tonbridge & Malling) to increase walking and cycling to schools, commuters, residents and visitors.
<http://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/strategies-and-policies/transport-and-highways-policies/cycling-strategies>
- 5.2 Implement an identified network of safer walking and cycling routes with innovative maps, leaflets and information boards including codes of practice for considerate behaviour.
- 5.3 Identify and train local residents to become Health Walk Leaders to enable additional routes to be developed using the council's green spaces and rural areas.
- 5.4 Review existing cycle parking facilities to ascertain whether there is sufficient accessibility for local cyclists and visitors.
- 5.5 Link with Kent Healthy Business Awards to develop cycle to work schemes with local businesses and office health walks to get staff out and about at lunch times. The Kent Healthy Business Awards are self-assessment standards that can help to improve the health of your workforce and build reputation for the commitment to best practise in health, safety and wellbeing.
- 5.6 Work with local developers to ensure new developments are cycle and pedestrian friendly.