

## Agenda Item 5

### For decision – School Streets Feasibility and Consultation

Author: Anna Francis, Resilience Manager

#### Summary

Safe walking and cycling are amongst the top priorities for the Frome community. At the Council meeting in June it was agreed that £20,000 could be allocated from the existing Resilience budget to support the development of a safer cycling route connecting Welshmill with Stonebridge.

Further analysis of local opportunities has found that a quicker and potentially more impactful initial project is to trial the implementation of the first School Street in Somerset around Oakfield, Trinity and Critchill Schools. It is proposed that the Council commissions detailed feasibility and community consultation during August. Subject to the outcome of the feasibility and consultation programme, a report will be brought back to councillors as soon as possible with a view to implementing the scheme as early as possible in the Autumn school term.

It is anticipated that the 'Connecting Stonebridge' project will still be taken forward and the Town Council is working with Somerset County Council to secure national government funding to support this project.

Councillors' approval is sought for the commissioning of a feasibility and consultation programme.

#### Context

Following the Covid-19 crisis, national interest in walking and cycling has never been higher. The Council's 'What Next for Frome' survey identified transport and safe walking and cycling as one of the top actions local residents would like the Town Council to support. The Council's interactive map has to date received over 2000 comments and ideas on how walking and cycling routes could be improved in the town.

Around the country councils are using this opportunity to implement new walking, cycling and shared space projects. National government has instructed and funded local authorities to undertake a 'Traffic Management Response' to Covid19. This means temporary highways measures to help people walk and cycle safely during Covid19. The creation of 'School Streets' is one of the measures recommended by the Department for Transport, and they are seeking "ambitious, transformational projects". The funded projects need to be installed within a few weeks ideally as close as possible to the start of the school term, so the timeline is spritely. Conducting detailed feasibility and consultation over the next few weeks would, if found to be supported, enable implementation at the beginning of the Autumn school term which would maximise engagement and participation.

The Covid19 pandemic is happening within the context of the Climate Emergency and a health crisis. One in three children in Mendip District show indication of metabolic disease and 46% of children in Mendip are not meeting the basic health requirement for being active. The journey to school is the single most important setting for children to be active every day and is important for parents too. The School Street is a way of building more resilience for health and climate into daily routines.

### How does a School Street work?

The School Street works by limiting vehicle access to permit holders only and prioritising walking and cycling. This means that residents can still park in front of their house, if needed teachers can still park at school and buses can also still access the area without restriction. The School Street area is typically marked by big planters at all road junctions with signage 'School Street' and 'Pedestrian and Cycle Zone'. See images below.

Oakfield Road, Somerset Road and a small section of Nunney Road have been identified as a 1.5km potential school street because they link three schools (Oakfield Academy, Trinity First School and Critchill School, with Avanti Park nearby), Victoria Park and the street runs along the NCN24 cycle route so has value as an active transport corridor for wider Frome. The layout of side streets also means that there are a range of options for people to use if they need to drive.

### Feasibility and Consultation

This is an ambitious, transformational project and would be the first time that Somerset will install a school street. A detailed feasibility report which clearly shows the potential impacts, including not only the increase in active travel and safety around the schools, but also where the displaced vehicles will need to park is important. It would also detail how traffic would be managed around the street.

Ensuring that the community is engaged and supportive is also vital. A consultation programme has been developed including leaflets that will be delivered to all local households, maps showing how local routes and streets may be affected, an online survey and a team of door knockers, as well as neighbourhood meetings. Trinity First School and Critchill School are already very supportive of the School Streets proposal. We will work closely with Trinity, Critchill and Oakfield to engage with students and their families to enable them to understand the proposed project and input their ideas and opinions. We will also engage with Nunney Parish Council and residents of the village as Nunney Road is a route for residents into Frome.

Table 1: Community Consultation Plan

	July			August				Sept		Sept	
Date	13th - 17th	20th - 25th	27th - 31st	3rd - 7th	10th - 14th	17 - 21	24-27th	31st - 4th	7th - 11th	14th - 18th	21st - 26th
Week	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	2	1
Council meeting				05/08/2020							
Consult with schools											
Consult with neighbourhood groups					11/08/2020						
Consult with local residents					11/08/2020						
Residents meetings					11/08/2020						
Consult with Nunney Parish Council											
Leaflet developed											
Recruit doorknockers											
Door knocking meeting / training					10/08/2020						
Door knockers with leaflet											
Press release											
Online survey on website and social media											
Decision made by councillors											
Potential implementation											

## The next steps

If the feasibility report and consultation process show that the majority of the local residents and school community are supportive and that the overall impact will be positive it is proposed that a report is brought back to councillors at the earliest possible opportunity. Subject to councillors' approval the trial School Streets programme could then be implemented in the early part of the Autumn school term. Trialling the measure as soon as possible after the start of the term is important to enable families to integrate new travel patterns from the outset.

This would be a trial programme implemented using a temporary traffic regulation order, so it can be removed if so desired. There would be a period of adjustment for users and monthly feedback meetings would be held to refine and review the project.

Frome Town Council in partnership with Frome's Missing Links has run the Active Travel Challenge for the past three years. Through this programme we know that when active travel is promoted, families walk and cycle 20% more and drive 20% less.

As part of the engagement programme we will explore setting up walking buses led by local parents from Broadway/the Butts and Nunney Road and will promote active school bubbles travelling together. The Council will provide 'park and stride' maps to all families so it is clear where parents can park and walk if needed. We would also work with local residents and volunteers to help encourage people to walk at drop off and pick up times and explore implementing colourful painting on the roads around the schools to differentiate the area for drivers and to create an attractive space for pupils.

As well as the increase in active travel and associated health benefits we will also measure how much carbon the school street saves and the reduction in tyre-based microplastics.

## Funding the School Streets feasibility and consultation programme

In 2019 the Town Council received a £5k donation from a local benefactor to support the implementation of a Citizen's Assembly on climate change in Frome. This sum currently resides within a Citizens Assembly EMR. The Council was not able to secure additional funding for the Assembly and instead a range of community workshops were held to enable the

community to feed into the Council's Climate Emergency Strategy. Anna has been in touch with the funder who is happy for £4k of this money to be allocated to developing the School Street proposals further. This will enable the Council to work with a leading transport consultant with expertise of School Streets projects, to develop the full feasibility and to support the community consultation process.

In line with Financial Regulations, all councillors (not just those on this Committee) have been contacted separately by email by the Business Manager and have been asked to vote on whether they support the use of £4k of the approved Citizen's Assembly EMR to be used to support the School Streets Feasibility & Consultation Programme. The outcome of that vote will be reported at the meeting.

If following the completion of the feasibility and consultation programme, the project is found to have a potentially positive impact and the local community are supportive, a further report will be brought to Council setting out how the implementation would be funded. In the meantime, and as part of the feasibility work, the Council will work with Somerset County Council to explore how funding for this and the Connecting Stonebridge project can be secured.

Low traffic neighbourhoods are popping up across East London using planters (Lee, London). Note: different signage preferred.



### Recommendations

1. Approve the commissioning of a School Streets feasibility and consultation programme
2. Subject to the outcome of the feasibility and consultation programme bring a report back to councillors as soon as possible