North Yorkshire Council

Skipton and Ripon Area Committee

04 December 2025

Nidderdale Greenway Extension update

Report of the Corporate Director – Environment

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To update Members on the review of the Nidderdale Greenway Extension feasibility study, including revised key metrics, an updated assessment of scheme viability, and proposed next steps.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 The Nidderdale Greenway opened in 2013 as a multi-user route between Harrogate and Ripley, with the route subsequently extended further through Hollybank Wood and Clint. The Community Development Agency, Nidderdale Plus, later commissioned Sustrans to undertake a scoping study to consider the potential for extending the route further to Pateley Bridge. The study was part funded from a variety of sources, including an NYC member's environmental locality budget contribution.

2.2 'Extending the Nidderdale Greenway: A feasibility study' was produced by Sustrans in July 2021 and included detailed descriptions of each section of proposed route, preliminary costings and a high-level value for money assessment. NYC officers were not aware the study was taking place and had no input into its production.

2.3 The study shows the majority of the proposed 20.92km route would be traffic free using a mixture of disused railway, riverside path, existing track/route, public road and new alignment. The study suggests the main usage of the route would be recreation/leisure and cycle tourism.

2.4 The Sustrans study suggests the route can be delivered at a cost of £4,451,989 and would provide an uplift of 295 additional cycle trips per day and 345 additional walking trips per day, generating a Benefit Cost Ratio of 2.94 which is classed as 'High' value for money by the Department for Transport (DfT).

2.5 A report was presented to BES Executive Members in August 2021, following NYCC becoming aware the Sustrans report had been produced. The BES Executive Members report noted a series of challenges to the project, which it did not consider to be a priority for the Council and recommended NYCC involvement be limited to input into the project, through its role as part of a project board or steering group. The 2021 report also highlighted a number of key questions, which are picked up later, over future maintenance liability and general route management, as well as which organisation should take on accountable body status for any grant award.

2.6 More recently, NYC Officers have been asked by Members at a previous Area Committee how best to progress this project. Officers have therefore reviewed the background documents and updated the key metrics with respect to estimated costs and value for money. This review has highlighted an overly optimistic assessment of the benefits, missing risks and cost items and therefore, an underplaying of the likely overall project costs. Officers have also highlighted any significant challenges with delivery of this project.

2.7 It is worth noting that NYC has received generally low levels of active travel funding over the past five years, totalling £2.7m across seven tranches of funding. Due to this NYC has had to focus on low complexity/ low-cost schemes including new crossings, pedestrian improvements, school streets and small sections of cycling improvements – mostly within Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIP) networks.

2.8 Additionally, following our own assessment which is expanded upon further below, the extension offers potentially very low levels of benefit, in contrast to what the Sustrans report stated.

3.0 REVIEW AND UPDATE OF KEY METRICS

3.1 Officers have reviewed and updated the key metrics of the Sustrans feasibility report to obtain an updated position of the viability of the scheme. The update that officers have undertaken brings the appraisal in line with standardised approaches expected by Government funding bodies. Officers have also applied sensitivity tests, which provide a degree of rigour to the figures produced and is again in line with standard practice.

3.2 The review applied inflationary cost increases within the construction sector (using a June 2021 base for the original pricing) and added in costs that were missing from the study cost breakdown including preliminary fees.

3.3 At this stage of the development (akin to Strategic Outline Case) Department for Transport's Transport Analysis Guidance recommends an optimism bias of 46% to account for the lack of a detailed design and thorough assessment of the possible risks. Optimism Bias is a proportional increase applied to cost estimates to reflect the extent to which the true cost of an intervention is likely to be greater than the estimated cost. It also accounts for the tendency to underestimate the length of time for intervention development and delivery. The Sustrans feasibility study does not include any optimism bias and instead includes a 10% contingency. Officers have therefore replaced the 10% contingency figure, with 46% optimism bias. Risk and contingency can be introduced as the project progresses and optimism bias level updated as appropriate.

3.4 These amendments increase the total cost estimate to circa £8m, although it is worth noting no landowner compensation costs or maintenance costs are included at this stage.

3.5 In order to update the Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) officers produced numerous sensitivity tests assessing length of appraisal period and forecast demand. To keep things simple for this update, if we apply the same methodology as the original study and only change the costs, the BCR drops from 2.94 to 1.65 – which is classed as Medium Value for Money by the DfT.

3.6 Sensitivity testing showed that in a scenario where usage was 50% lower than forecast, the BCR drops below one, which is classed as poor value for money by the DfT.

3.7 There are some other items to note that would also have an impact on the scheme viability going forward. Firstly, landowners present a significant barrier, and whilst still at an early stage within the scheme development this is a significant concern. If landowners are not supportive, it will be difficult to enforce conversion to a bridleway. Further, no landowner compensation is included within the costs. This cost is likely to be substantial, and delivery of the scheme in such circumstances could be protracted.

3.8 The legal aspect of creating a new route will need to be funded as part of this project as NYC does not have the capacity to deal with Creation Orders over and above statutory duties. The project would therefore need to fund a dedicated FTE and/or engage with consultants and is likely to require a project team. The resource required for the legal work is also not included within the indicative costs within this report. This is a key element of any development work going forward and will require funding.

3.9 Should NYC have to proceed with a Creation Order against the wishes of any affected landowners, NYC would have to demonstrate there is significant local need for such a route. Objections to a Creation Order would require referral to the Secretary of State (Planning Inspectorate) and legal costs and compensation claims are unknowns but as noted above are likely to be significant.

3.10 Projected usage is optimistic. The existing greenway is popular with cyclists as the converted railway track bed is direct, wide, flat with a paved surface and offers the only safe traffic free route for cyclists from the north and west of Harrogate. Parts of the proposed extension will be much narrower, not as direct and cross through farmland which won't be as appealing for cyclists as one constructed entirely on a disused railway. Also, once cyclists reach Ripley there is an extensive network of minor roads that cyclists currently use and, depending on their ultimate destination, will continue to use should the Greenway be extended so it is unlikely that all cyclists currently using the existing Greenway will all continue along the extension.

3.11 Officers would also point out that surfacing could have an impact on potential funding bids. Active Travel England guidance states that a sealed surface is preferred to ensure the route is suitable for all users all year round. The costings do provide for a sealed surface, however further discussion would be needed to ensure a surface type is sympathetic to the natural environment along the route, whilst also meeting the needs of all relevant user groups.

3.12 There is significant engineering works required to deliver the scheme and the high ongoing maintenance costs for 5 bridges including a 30m span crossing the river Nidd, 13km of tarmac path and retaining structures where the route is adjacent to the river. NYC has limited budget to maintain the existing extensive public rights of way network and this scheme if created as a public bridleway and built as proposed would create an unsustainable maintenance burden for NYC's public rights of way budget.

3.13 It is considered that phasing of the route offers the best opportunity for delivery, for whichever organisation takes on the lead role, but key concerns remain around funding, landowner support/compensation, surface type (affecting appraisal period and maintenance costs), rising construction costs (Construction Price Indices increase of circa 21% in 3 years), impact on value for money, Creation Order costs/resource and where this project sits as a priority for NYC going forward.

3.14 Active Travel Funding has so far been directed at Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan routes, which are mostly urban and high impact commuter/utility routes. NYC currently has ten LCWIPs covering all population centres above 10,000 and the LCWIPs include over 80 priority corridors across the county priced at approximately £265m to deliver them all. Due to the route not being within an LCWIP network, this scheme may not be eligible for Active Travel England funding nor is it likely to be a priority active travel scheme for NYC.

3.15 The CA is currently writing a new Local Transport Plan for York and North Yorkshire, which will include an Active Travel Strategy. Given the route does not form part of an NYC LCWIP it is important to understand how this project may fit with the wider active travel strategy and what type of priority this scheme may take. NYC is currently prioritising the development and delivery of LCWIP corridors and resources are being directed toward these priorities.

3.16 The Combined Authority recently produced a Strategic Transport Framework and appointed an Active Travel Commissioner. Whilst the Framework supports and encourages active travel (both leisure and commuting), the development of a wider active travel strategy may provide opportunities to progress a major active travel scheme outside of the NYC LCWIP networks should appropriate funding be available to cover development costs (and issues raised in section 3.7).

4.0 NEXT STEPS

4.1 Revenue funding to develop significant active travel schemes are currently directed at priority LCWIP corridors. This project, which is outside of an LCWIP network, will need considerable resource and funding to progress further, including a dedicated FTE and/or consultant to deal with Creation Orders and further development of routing options and designs. It would therefore be prudent to await the CA Active Travel Strategy to understand if this scheme may be more of a priority for CA funding.

4.2 In conclusion, the Nidderdale Greenway development is not currently a priority for NYC due to the reasons outlined in this report.

5.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

5.1 Officers have undertaken a very high-level review of the Sustrans feasibility study costs and value for money assessment with the aim to provide an updated position of the viability of the scheme and proposed next steps. No other options at this stage were considered appropriate.

6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 As this report is for information, there are no financial implications directly resulting from the report. The potential costs of the scheme are significant and subject to a significant degree of risk. There is currently no funding available to develop this scheme further or to undertake the works. Furthermore, once completed, the project would result in significant ongoing maintenance costs, for which no budget currently exists.

7.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 This report is for information, there are no legal implications resulting from the report.

8.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

8.1 This report is for information, there are no equalities implications resulting from the report.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 This report is for information, there are no climate change implications resulting from this report.

10.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 The Sustrans report has been reviewed at a high level in order to provide a more realistic indication of the costs, risks and issues associated with the potential scheme.

11.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

11.1 It is recommended that Members note the contents of this report.

APPENDICES:
Appendix A – Sustrans Nidderdale Greenway Extension study

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

NYCC BES Executive Members Nidderdale Greenway Extension Report (August 2021)

Karl Battersby
Corporate Director – Environment
County Hall
Northallerton
25 November 2025

Report Author – *Alexander Kay, Senior Transport Planning Officer*
Presenter of Report – *As above*

Note: Members are invited to contact the author in advance of the meeting with any detailed queries or questions.