

Active Travel England: A New Statutory Consultee on Major Planning Applications

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Introduction

On the 21st July 2022, the Department for Transport (DfT) published the framework document for **Active Travel England** (ATE). This document confirmed ATE's responsibilities and objectives and set out its relationship with, and accountability to, the DfT and Parliament.

In the framework document it was confirmed that ATE will lead the delivery of the Government's strategy and vision for creating a new 'golden age' of sustainable travel. The document sets a target of 50% of all journeys in towns and cities to be made by walking or cycling in 2030.

Importantly, for any planning applications, ATE will be a statutory consultee and will review the suitability of active travel proposals put forward in major planning applications.

Active Travel England as a statutory consultee. What are the thresholds and potential impacts?

The DfT has confirmed that, from the 1st June 2023, Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) outside of London (within London, TfL and Borough policy and guidance will still apply) will be required to consult ATE on larger planning applications. This will help to ensure that, when new developments are being planned, the opportunities to build in active travel routes are fully considered and explored in detail at the pre-planning stage and not tacked on as an afterthought post consent. The application thresholds which will trigger an ATE consultation are as follows:

- 150 + residential units;
- 7,500 sqm + commercial use; and
- Developments with a site area of 5 hectares or more.

What does this mean for applicants?

So, what does this mean for qualifying developments, going forward? In short, it formalises the already existing

requirement for active travel measures to be considered in detail as part of the initial masterplanning process as well as at the pre-application and application stage, with a full assessment of existing opportunities and potential improvement measures to be considered within technical planning documents.

In particular, the provision of this information in the pre-application process will allow for early consultation with ATE, which should increase the chances of a positive consultation response as part of any formal application submission.

Whilst the delivery of appropriate active travel provision should already be a material consideration in development masterplanning and in the preparation of Transport Assessments and Travel Plans, having ATE as a statutory consultee is likely to lead to far greater scrutiny of what is being proposed.

In addition to this, more emphasis is anticipated to be placed on how the proposals link with the wider active travel provision, with the aim of providing a more holistic review of active travel provision rather than a narrow, development-specific assessment.

For example, where a new footway/cycleway is proposed as part of a planning application, we would expect that additional details over and above the width/route will be required at the initial planning stage rather than this being left to post consent detailed design.

These additional details could include high level information on how the route links with the wider active travel provision in the surrounding area or information typically provided at the detailed design stage, including details of lighting, surfacing, and proposed gradients and crossfalls.

It is also anticipated that Travel Plans and the measures required to be included in these could be more onerous in ATE-relevant applications, with S106 requirements

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associated with sustainable travel infrastructure subject to more stringent monitoring regimes.

Final Thoughts

Whilst some could see an Active Travel consultation as just one more hoop to jump through, the inclusion of active travel measures at the outset of scheme development allows for pedestrians and cyclists to be placed at the very top of the movement hierarchy, which will improve placemaking and allow the delivery of more attractive, accessible developments which could add value to the overall scheme.

This could also allow for a justified argument to be made for mode shift to more sustainable travel methods which, in turn, could reduce the requirement for costly off-site junction improvement works associated with development related car trips. In this instance, everybody wins!

Whilst the impacts of ATE being a statutory consultee are yet to be seen, we consider that detailed consideration of active travel measures will be significantly important for such large applications in developing active travel strategies at the earliest concept stages of master planning scheme layouts.

If you wish to find out more about Active Travel England and their potential impact on the planning process or how DLP Planning (through the Sustainable Development and Delivery (SDD) Team) can assist with sustainable travel planning, masterplanning and delivery or any other transport planning / planning queries, please get in touch at enquiries@dipconsultants.co.uk