THIRLMERE FAMILY FRIENDLY CYCLEWAY

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This Report summarises the good progress made to date on the development of proposals by United Utilities for an 11 mile long Cycleway around Thirlmere reservoir. The project has widespread support, with partners including the Lake District National Park Authority, Cumbria Tourism, Bassenthwaite Reflections and Cumbria County Council, and support from Impact Housing, The Forestry Commission, Friends of the Lake District and St Johns & Wythburn Parish Council.

1.2 The proposed route is to be part on forest roads within United Utilities land, and part on existing highway. The highway section would require a Traffic Regulation Order, with implications for use of the highway, which Members will have to consider, in due course, after the responses have been received to public consultation and to formal advertising.

1.3 This Report seeks the Committee's agreement to consultation with the public over the Traffic Regulation Order to prohibit vehicular traffic from the road on the west side of Thirlmere, to accommodate the proposed Cycleway.

2.0 STRATEGIC PLANNING AND EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

2.1 The initiative is in accordance with the cycling policies of the Local Transport Plan, the Cumbria Rights of Way Improvement Plan and the Lake District Management Plan.

2.2 The initiative supports the Council Plan in terms of making Cumbria Greener, Healthier and Wealthier.

2.3 The initiative implies changes to the use of the existing highway.
3.0 **RECOMMENDATION**

3.1 *That Members agree to the carrying out by Cumbria Highways of consultation with the public on a Traffic Regulation Order, for the prohibition of motor vehicles on approximately 2½ miles of U7003 road, as requested by United Utilities, the promoters of the Thirlmere Family Friendly Cycleway.*

4.0 **BACKGROUND**

4.1 A paper describing United Utilities proposal for a Family Friendly Cycle Way around Thirlmere, was presented to Allerdale Area Transport Advisory Group, and to the Allerdale Highways and Transport Working Group, in March 2008, and reported to Allerdale Local Committee in April 2008. The Local Committee has delegated powers to deal with Traffic Regulation Orders within its area. At that time Members expressed reservations about the proposed prohibition of traffic on part of the minor road on the west side of Thirlmere, but agreed to review the feasibility of the scheme when a Report (on proposals for the necessary Traffic Regulation Order) came before the Committee.

4.2 In the intervening 18 months considerable progress has been made on the development of the proposal. The project launch at Thirlmere on 26 August was attended by the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Environment, and a presentation was made to the Highways & Transport Working Group on 30 September, by officers of the Lake District National Park Authority and United Utilities, expanding on the background and providing an update on progress.

4.3 The Committee’s Highways and Transport Working Group considered a Report on the background and on the highway implications of the proposals on 4 November. This Report includes, and adds to, that Report, and seeks authority to consult the public on the Traffic Regulation Order which would be required.

4.4 The proposal involves partnership working with input from United Utilities, Lake District National Park Authority, Cumbria Tourism, Bassenthwaite Reflections and the County Council. The Committee’s interest is in the interaction between the proposal and the (operation and safety of) existing highways, A591 principal road and the U7003 minor road on the west side of Thirlmere.

4.5 United Utilities operates the Thirlmere Reservoir, (originally built by Manchester Corporation) but also owns large areas of forestry and farm land forming the water catchment. Recent years have seen a major change of approach by forestry and reservoir operators, with United Utilities embracing public access, sustainability, and job creation through sustainable tourism.

4.6 The Cumbria Cycle Tourism Strategy identified that the Lake District lacks routes aimed at family friendly cycling, while the Cumbria Rights of Way Improvement Plan identified Thirlmere as an ideal location for such a facility.
4.7 A vision for the Thirlmere valley, involving a range of projects, has been developed under the umbrella of Sustainable Thirlmere, an informal partnership involving United Utilities, Impact Housing, Lake District National Park Authority, St Johns and Wythburn Parish Council, the Forestry Commission, Friends of the Lake District, Bassenthwaite Reflections, Cumbria Tourism and Cumbria County Council.

4.8 Thirlmere Vision includes the proposal for an 11 mile long family friendly cycleway, shown on the map at Appendix A, and comprising three main elements:

1. **Forest Roads**

   5.5 miles of improved forest roads on the east side of Thirlmere, of which 3.4 miles (Phase 2 of the scheme) are already in place (funded by United Utilities and Cumbria Tourism’s Adventure Capital grant scheme) with the remaining 2.1 miles (Phase 3) programmed for completion by March 2010, funded by mainly by Bassenthwaite Reflections with support from United Utilities.

2. **Crossings of A591**

   The Cycleway must cross A591 at two places (Swirls and Wythburn) in an appropriately safe manner. A study, jointly funded by Cumbria County Council and Lake District National Park Authority, has revealed that grade separated crossings are feasible at both locations. At Wythburn the cycleway can be accommodated within the existing Raise Bridge. At Swirls a new underpass can be provided at a similar cost to an at-grade crossing (because of the ancillary works required to provide a satisfactory at-grade crossing). Thus segregated crossings are now proposed at both crossing points. The crossings form Phase 4 of the scheme, and a funding package is currently being assembled.

3. **Use of Minor Roads**

   The remaining 5.4 miles of the route uses the existing U7003 road, 2.5 miles of which would be closed to through vehicular traffic, by means of a Traffic Regulation Order. This is Phase 1 of the scheme, originally brought to the attention of Members in 2008.

   U7003 is a winding fairly narrow minor road, built at the time the reservoir was created, which contours around the west side of the lake. It includes a branch along the top of the dam, which would be included in the cycleway. The road currently provides a very pleasant, slow, scenic drive used by tourists, including car-bound disabled people. It also provides access for forestry operations (and to some extent farming). United Utilities operates three car parks along this route, used primarily by walkers to access walks within the wooded areas, alongside becks feeding the reservoir, and on the fells behind, and there is also an informal parking area at Raven Crag, at the northern junction with the dam road. The road is not suitable for use as a signed diversion route when A591 is closed. Recent closures of A591 for forestry operations were limited to winter night-time only, because of the very long diversion
route necessary, with U7003 remaining available only for informal use by low overnight volumes of local smaller vehicles.

The proposal would prohibit use by motor vehicles of 2.5 miles of the road, between the car parks at Armboth and Dobgill. Locked gates would prevent use by through traffic. There would be exemptions for the emergency services, forestry and reservoir activities, highway maintenance etc. The locked gates could be opened to allow informal use of the road in the event of an incident on A591. However, although United Utilities staff are in the vicinity, (and lock the car-parks daily), and the Police could be key-holders, quick opening of the gates could not, in reality, be guaranteed. A suggestion for variable closure/opening of the road, on a seasonal or peak time basis, is not considered feasible.

This proposal would provide 2.5 miles of level route which would be traffic free, and ideal as a safe family friendly cycling route, equally suitable for wheelchair users. However it does leave 3 miles of the route which would remain open to vehicular traffic. The remainder of the road behind the lake (between Wythburn and Dobgill, and between Armboth and Raven Crag) would no longer be subject to through traffic, but would be shared with vehicles accessing the car parks. North of Raven Crag, the route turns east and crosses the dam, continuing beyond Bridge End Farm, with its camping/caravan site, as far as the junction with A591. This road is also narrow and winding, and is subject to some through traffic, as well as traffic accessing the camp site. The route is also shown using the west verge of A591 for a short distance, before returning to the lakeside and continuing to the A591 crossing point at Swirls.

4.9 The U7003 already forms part of the Strategic Cycle Route 6 from Kendal to Keswick, which the promoters consider would be enhanced by the proposal, though it implies use by different kinds of cyclists with conflicting interests.

4.10 The proposal offers the possibility of a Visitor Centre at the Dobgill Car Park, with sustainable power supplied by hydro-electricity from Dobgill, and cycle hire and café facilities at Legburthwaite, creating potential local jobs.

4.11 A request has now been received from United Utilities for Cumbria Highways to start the process leading to a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO). United Utilities have agreed to fund the TRO process, and have initially provided funding for the consultation stage.

4.12 It is considered that, should Members be minded to authorise the TRO, (following consideration of responses to consultation and advertising), the TRO should not be implemented until the segregated crossings of A591 have been provided by the promoters of the Cycleway.

5.0 OPTIONS

Members could decide not to instruct Cumbria Highways to consult upon the requested proposed Traffic Regulation Order.
6.0 RESOURCE AND VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 All costs associated with the Traffic Regulation Order will be recovered from the promoters. The County Council have already contributed to the cost of the assessment of the A591 crossings from central budgets, and may be asked to consider contributions to the costs of completion of the project.

7.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no direct legal implications associated with this report.

8.0 CONCLUSION

8.1 Good progress has been made on the development of proposals for a Thirlmere Family Friendly Cycleway.

8.2 The proposals include the wish for a Traffic Regulation Order, for prohibition of vehicular traffic from part of the minor road on the west side of Thirlmere. This has now been requested by the promoters. The Committee will consider the responses to consultation with the public on this potential Traffic Regulation Order, and consider responses, thereafter, to formal advertising of the resulting Traffic Regulation Order proposals. The Committee is asked, at this stage, to agree to Cumbria Highways undertaking the consultation process, and to Report the outcome.

Andrew Moss
Head of Highways
26 October 2009

APPENDICES

A Thirlmere Family Friendly Cycleway - Map

IMPLICATIONS

Electoral Division(s): Keswick & Derwent

Executive Decision

Key Decision

If a Key Decision, is the proposal published in the current Forward Plan? N/A

Is the decision exempt from call-in on grounds of urgency? No

If exempt from call-in, has the agreement of the Chair of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee been sought or obtained? N/A

Has this matter been considered by Overview and Scrutiny? No
If so, give details below.

Has an environmental or sustainability impact assessment been undertaken?  

Has an equality impact assessment been undertaken?  

N.B. If an executive decision is made, then a decision cannot be implemented until the expiry of the eighth working day after the date of the meeting – unless the decision is urgent and exempt from call-in and the Head of Member Services and Scrutiny has obtained the necessary approvals.

PREVIOUS RELEVANT COUNCIL OR EXECUTIVE DECISIONS
[including Local Committees]

ALC 15 April 2008 Minute 145(1) H&T Working Group - initial paper
ALC 2 September 2009 Minute 36(1) H&T Working Group - project launch
ALC H&T Working Group 30 Sept 09 Minute 18 Presentation by UU/LDNPA
ALC H&T Working Group 4 Nov 2009

CONSIDERATION BY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

Not considered by Overview and Scrutiny.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

No background papers.

Contact: Ed Noble - Capita Symonds – 01946 506550 – ed.noble@capita.co.uk