

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET COUNCIL

PLANNING, TRANSPORT AND ENVIRONMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Thursday 26th July, 2012

Present:- Councillors Marie Longstaff (Chair), Caroline Roberts (Vice-Chair), Malcolm Hanney, Geoff Ward, Ian Gilchrist, Douglas Nicol and Nicholas Coombes

Also in attendance: David Trigwell (Divisional Director for Planning and Transport), Peter Dawson (Group Manager, Planning Policy & Transport), Graham Evans (Parks and Estates Manager), Cathryn Humphries (Neighbourhood Environment Manager) and Donna Vercoe (Policy Development & Scrutiny Manager)

15 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

16 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

17 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor David Martin had sent his apologies to the Panel. Councillor Nicholas Coombes was present as a substitute for Councillor David Martin for the duration of the meeting.

18 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

There were none.

19 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There was none.

20 ITEMS FROM THE PUBLIC OR COUNCILLORS - TO RECEIVE DEPUTATIONS, STATEMENTS, PETITIONS OR QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OF THIS MEETING

Five members of the public had registered to make a statement to the Panel. Three of these were general statements and two were relating to items on the agenda for the meeting.

Mr George Bailey addressed the Panel on behalf of the Radstock Public Transport Group, a copy of the statement can be found on the Panel's Minute Book, a summary is set out below.

The Halcrow Report on the Frome – Radstock Branch is easily dissected, but today I will study only one particular aspect. The Capital Costs show a range of costs headed Track Infrastructure, Signalling, Station Costs and finally Project Management & Contingency. The first three total about £14m, which is probably inflated but the last is £27m.

I am sure that this Authority would not countenance any quotation for internal work where Management and Contingency constitutes 2/3 of the estimated costs so why permit such a statement in this document? Having developed Project Plans in the distant past, I know that presenting an outline with overheads of such magnitude to a Divisional Director would have earned me a rapid exit.

This Report cannot be approved with such a glaring fault in its structure and should be re-worked with more care.

Councillor Ian Gilchrist asked if he was able to say how much he thought the costs should be.

Mr Bailey replied that the group were working on some cost components but felt that a figure of £7.5m was more reasonable assuming the proposal involved high speed rail. He added that the existing track could be used and that Halcrow had allowed for full possession of the line and to work on the track at night and at weekends. This he said would simply inflict further costs.

Councillor Malcolm Hanney proposed that his comments be passed to the relevant Cabinet Member and Council officer.

Mr Bailey replied that he was due to meet Councillor Roger Symonds, Cabinet Member for Transport on Tuesday 31st July.

The Chairman on behalf of the Panel thanked him for his statement.

Lin Patterson addressed the Panel on behalf of the Save our 6-7 Buses Campaign, a copy of the statement can be found on the Panel's Minute Book, a summary is set out below.

The 6-7 bus route runs in north east Bath, over 3 wards with approximately 9,000 residents, which is around 10% of the population of the city. B&NES' statistics show a slightly larger elderly population here than in other areas of Bath.

As you may know, starting in May 2010, our grass-roots campaign succeeded in reversing an ill-advised attempt to re-route the bus service which dismembered the two halves of our very hilly community. But with the reconnection of the route, First Bus removed two of the five buses travelling the circuit and we were left with half the former frequency, plummeting from 20 minutes to 40. That resulting 40 minute gap between buses caused overcrowding and full buses which left people behind at bus stops in freezing weather. So the vigorous campaign continued, and with the advent

of the new Council in May 2011 a subsidy was granted for one additional bus, creating the compromise of a 30 minute frequency.

We have it on good authority that in the budget now being planned for after March 2013 the Council intend to withdraw the funding to this route.

We have sought to alert the public and gauge their level of commitment to this issue and have received over 150 feedback forms in the last two weeks, many from frail, elderly or disabled people who depend on the 30 minute service.

We would like to hear where you stand on this matter.

Councillor Geoff Ward commented that he wished to commend the campaign.

Councillor Douglas Nicol commented that he felt that the service should be retained.

Councillor Malcolm Hanney suggested the Panel should receive a report on all subsidised bus services and that the campaigners should address a meeting of the Cabinet.

The Chairman on behalf of the Panel thanked her for her statement and commented that she would discuss the matter with Councillor Roger Symonds, Cabinet Member for Transport.

Mr David Redgewell on behalf of the South West Transport Network addressed the Panel, a copy of the statement can be found on the Panel's Minute Book, a summary is set out below.

Radstock is on the cusp of attaining the public transport connections it deserves. We call upon B&NES to *actively pursue* the following projects:

- **Radstock – Frome Railway:** The Halcrow Study for the WEP recognises services from Radstock to Frome, Westbury, or Bristol/Severn Beach (for cross regional journeys – common in e.g. Greater Manchester). An additional route, which has recently received a grant from the Local Sustainable Transport Fund, the improved TransWilts rail service (Westbury – Swindon via Melksham), is a great step forward in realising the potential of a neglected railway for sustainable transport connections to work & leisure. We believe this service should be extended to Frome & Radstock also.

We are still concerned that the WEP is not functioning as the sole Greater Bristol Authority. We would like to remind B&NES that there is a Duty of Co-operation for Local Authorities, and the required set-up of a Stakeholder Relations Forum, under the Localism Act.

Consultants (of WS Atkins, Halcrow Fox Rail & Steer Davies Gleave) must be cast-aside in favour of dedicated public rail & 'bus Officers/Directors. They do not have the appropriate relationship with the local area to be effective, and are unnecessarily costly.

We would like to know the date of the next meeting of the Joint Executive Transport Committee to discuss the proposed Transport Board, which should oversee the development of three bodies, managing rail, bus, and ferry operations respectively. The rail body must work with the neighbouring Authorities of Gloucestershire, Swindon, Wiltshire, Somerset & Dorset on Greater Bristol Sub-Regional services, in a similar manner to the collaborations of the Welsh Government (with Shropshire, Herefordshire, Cheshire, Gloucestershire), and Centro (Birmingham) (with Shropshire, Staffordshire, Herefordshire, Gloucestershire).

We would like to know if action has been taken to restore WEP Scrutiny, and the next Housing & Planning Board meetings. If we do not witness the re-instatement of adequate Scrutiny by the end of July 2012, South West Transport Network & the Transport Unions (RMT, TSSA, ASLEF, Unite) will raise the matter with the Local Government Ombudsman.

Councillor Malcolm Hanney commented that he felt there was a lack of West of England items on the Panel's workplan and suggested that the Chairman discuss with officers some of the broader issues that could be debated.

The Chairman on behalf of the Panel thanked him for his statement and commented that she would endeavour to have a discussion with officers over the coming month.

21 MINUTES - 15TH MAY 2012

The Panel confirmed the minutes of the previous meeting as a true record and they were duly signed by the Chairman.

22 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

Councillor Tim Ball, Cabinet Member for Homes & Planning addressed the Panel. He informed them that the Inspector had suspended the examination on the Core Strategy for up to a year. He added that the suggested timetable would result in a suspension from now until around June 2013 with anticipated further hearings in July 2013, but that this could easily slip if the re-assessment of the housing requirement indicates that a significant change of strategy should be considered.

Councillor Malcolm Hanney suggested that the Council should withdraw the current strategy. He asked if a year would give the Council enough time to complete the work that was required.

Councillor Tim Ball replied that he was reasonably confident that the Council would be able to meet the new timescales. He added that if the Council had chosen to approve an urban extension this would have provided a solution to the matter.

The Chairman highlighted that the Panel were due to receive an update on the Core Strategy at its meeting in August.

Councillor Nicholas Coombes commented that he had read the Inspector's report and suggested that the best option may be to withdraw.

Councillor Geoff Ward commented that he was concerned over the revised timescale and asked if the departments involved had enough resources.

Councillor Tim Ball replied that the Local Development Framework Steering Group would be discussing the matter next week. He added that if further resources are required he would seek them.

The Chairman on behalf of the Panel thanked him for his update.

23 SERVICE LED POLICY REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT: TRAVEL TO WORK

The Policy Development & Scrutiny Manager introduced this item to the Panel.

Councillor Malcolm Hanney commented that he felt the current scope of the review to be quite inward looking.

The Chairman commented that the Panel could decide the review requires a second element to it that would involve the whole of the Panel.

Councillor Caroline Roberts replied that she felt that the input of the whole Panel would be required.

Councillor Ian Gilchrist commented that the main element of the review should be to tackle congestion at rush hour.

The Chairman asked for volunteers to join herself and Councillor Caroline Roberts on the steering group.

Councillor Geoff Ward agreed to join and Councillor David Martin was nominated to join by Councillor Douglas Nicol and Councillor Ian Gilchrist.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to:

- (i) Note the Draft Terms of Reference and agree that a full Panel review would take place later in the year.
- (ii) Agree to undertake the review within the timescales set out in the terms of reference.

24 DRAFT STRATEGY FOR THE PROVISION OF ALLOTMENTS IN BATH & NORTH EAST SOMERSET

The Parks and Estates Manager introduced this item to the Panel. He stated that extensive work had been undertaken with the Allotments Association and subsequently the Allotment Forum to jointly create the draft strategy. He added that the strategy incorporates best practice from other authorities as well as guidance from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

Mr Geoffrey Dart, Chair of the B&NES Allotments Association addressed the Panel, a full copy of his statement is on the Panel's Minute Book and a summary is set out below.

I'm here today with my colleague Virginia Williamson, the Association's Secretary who drafted much of the Strategy presented in your agenda.

Despite Allotments being a statutory responsibility B&NES does not currently have a strategy for allotments or a consolidated operations manual setting out its responsibilities or relationship with tenants. This absence leads to widespread confusion and dis-satisfaction amongst tenants and does not allow the quality of service to be monitored against an agreed standard. This is compounded by poor communication.

Over the last three years the Association has worked with Officers and Councillors on four initiatives. The first is the draft strategy before you. The second is an annual site inspection report to record agreed actions between site representatives and the allotments officer and to monitor their implementation. The third is a six monthly public forum chaired by Councillor David Dixon and finally a 'More Plots for Bath' initiative to begin to tackle the waiting list of over 500 people.

Whilst we see a strategy as a necessary and long overdue first step, we are disappointed that Officers have made no progress in costing it – we are concerned that after so much hard work a strategy without costs could be kicked into the long grass.

In conclusion we ask that the draft strategy is accepted and that statutory responsibilities are addressed urgently.

Councillor Malcolm Hanney commented that the strategy really did require some costing within it.

Mr Dart replied that the Association would be happy to go forward and work on some costs.

Councillor Geoff Ward asked if he could give a judgement on the likely costs required.

Mr Dart replied that one full time employee dedicated to the matter would solve a number of issues.

Councillor Geoff Ward asked for further information on the allotments database.

Mr Dart replied that it was well overdue and would cost between £6,000 - £7,000.

The Neighbourhood Environment Manager commented that there was bespoke software available but a decision had not yet been made as to whether it could be integrated with the incoming CRM system.

Mr Dart commented that there was a need to bring vacant and derelict plots back into use. He added that he felt let down by the officers as they had been working on the strategy for around 15 months.

Councillor Douglas Nicol asked how many plots were currently derelict.

The Parks and Estates Manager replied that it was almost impossible to give that figure to the Panel. He added that inspections will be carried out over the summer and notices will be served on any that are unkempt.

Councillor Nicholas Coombes commented that he was largely in support of the strategy and suggested that officers concentrate on the elements within it that were highlighted as a priority.

Councillor Douglas Nicol suggested that a study be carried out as to how many derelict plots there were within B&NES.

The Chairman asked how the consultation process would be funded.

The Parks and Estates Manager replied that it would be absorbed from within the current department budget.

The Chairman summed up the debate by asking for a report to come back to the Panel in November which will give details of the costs associated with the strategy and figures on the number of derelict / vacant plots.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to recommend that:

- (i) Consultation be undertaken to determine the standard of service provision for allotments in Bath & North East Somerset through the adoption of the Allotments Strategy.
- (ii) The results of the consultation are incorporated into the draft Allotment Strategy to be reported back to the Panel later this year.

25 PARKING CHARGES UPDATE

Councillor Michael Evans addressed the Panel. He stated that he was concerned over the use of the word anomaly in paragraph 4.6 of the report in relation to the pressure placed on the Council to keep low cost or free parking outside of Bath to ensure the competitiveness of the town centres.

Councillor Paul Myers addressed the Panel. He stated that Midsomer Norton and other small market towns were concerned about the prospect of parking charges being increased or introduced. He called for the evidence of any need in such action to be shown to the Panel.

Councillor Geoff Ward commented that he was pleased with the report as no actual increase in charges was shown. He added that a comprehensive plan on car parking in Bath was required.

Councillor Malcolm Hanney agreed with the comments made by Councillor Ward and stated there was a need for a Parking Strategy and Parking Business Plan.

Councillor Caroline Roberts commented that a Parking Strategy was long overdue and she wished to alleviate the concerns mentioned by the Councillors representing Midsomer Norton.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to:

- (i) Note the decision of Full Council on 14th February 2012 that the parking charges in Bath & North East Somerset should not be increased.
- (ii) Ask that a report on the Council's Car Parking Strategy and Parking Business Plan be submitted to its October meeting.

26 TRANSPORT STRATEGY

The Chairman announced that the presentation would encompass the next two agenda items – 12 (Transport Strategy) & 13 (London Road Congestion).

Patrick Rotherham, Federation of Bath Residents Association (FoBRA) addressed the Panel. He stated that transport was a top priority for the group and welcomed the conference that was planned to take place on 18th September. He added that a version of a strategy does exist as FoBRA had commented upon it.

The Chairman thanked him for his comments and suggested he could be considered as a stakeholder in the upcoming Single Day Inquiry on Travel to Work.

The Group Manager for Planning Policy & Transport gave a presentation to the Panel. A full copy can be found on the Panel's Minute Book, a summary is set out below.

He said that an articulate strategy was in place, but currently over four separate documents.

Traffic levels to the City of Bath are stable.

Bath retains a large catchment area for its commuters and visitors.

The majority of traffic on Cleveland Bridge is not through traffic except for HGV's. HGV's tend to avoid the morning peak of travel.

The Highways Authority, Somerset CC & Wiltshire CC are appealing the proposed HGV restriction. The DfT will decide in next couple of months whether to support the appeal or not.

Councillor Malcolm Hanney suggested the increased revenue from bus and train use could be used for the wider benefit of the Council. He asked if there were still plans to have a Park & Ride to the East of Bath.

The Group Manager for Planning Policy & Transport replied that the Council was still committed to having one and was looking for the best site. He added that there may be a fuel rebate offered to Local Authorities with a view to attempting to increase bus patronage.

Councillor Geoff Ward asked if the duration of visits to the City were recorded.

The Group Manager for Planning Policy & Transport replied that the length of time that cars spent in the car parks was recorded during the study. He added that a balance was required so that commuters did not use the spaces within the City as they needed to be available for shoppers.

Councillor Geoff Ward commented that there should be more routes in and out of the City.

The Group Manager for Planning Policy & Transport replied that ideally visitors should use either the bus or train as the City is quite constrained. He added that the Council may need to be brave in its future decision making.

The Chairman on behalf of the Panel thanked him for his presentation.

27 MOD SITES - CONCEPT STATEMENTS

The Senior Planning Policy Officer gave an update to the Panel on this item. He informed them that the consultation had been very comprehensive and had been well attended by the public. He added that all of the comments that had been received during the consultation period were due to be placed on the Council's website by the end of the month.

He explained that the Cabinet had requested Officers to investigate the implications of increasing the proportion of homes meeting the Code for Sustainable Homes Level 5 or above (zero carbon).

Councillor Douglas Nicol commented that the Council should push hard on sustainability issues when in discussions with the developers.

The Chairman asked if a report could come back to the Panel prior to a decision being made at the September Cabinet meeting.

The Senior Planning Policy Officer replied that it could.

Councillor Nicholas Coombes commented that he agreed with the proposition that the number of Level 5 homes could increase on the sites.

Councillor Geoff Ward asked if anybody present could comment on a rumour he had heard regarding the MOD site of Ensleigh. He said that he had read in the local paper that plans for the site may attempt to spread onto the land of Kingswood School.

The Senior Planning Policy Officer replied that it was very much a live issue and concerned an area of land adjacent to the playing fields. He added that the land in question was outside of the Green Belt and not within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The Divisional Director for Planning and Transport added that they were assessing the area in advance of any potential enquiries from developers.

The Chairman on behalf of the Panel thanked the Senior Planning Officer for the update.

28 PANEL WORKPLAN

The Chairman introduced this item to the Panel. She announced that a date for the August meeting had been set for 10.00am on Thursday 23rd August.

She also reminded them that earlier in the meeting they had agreed to receive the following reports.

Core Strategy Update – August

MoD Concept Statements – September

Bus Tendering Process – September / October

Car Parking Strategy – October

Allotments Strategy – November

Councillor Malcolm Hanney reiterated his earlier comments that the Panel should look to add some elements of Joint Scrutiny to its workplan.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to agree with all of the above proposals.

The meeting ended at 5.20 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services