

Annie Kilvington's Speech for Scrutiny Panel 23 November 2016

In order to make an informed recommendation to cabinet on whether to proceed with an East of Bath P&R and if so on which Site, the Council needs to spend some money. The question is "on what".

Expenditure designed to determine whether the project is needed, and if so, how to deliver so that public benefit will clearly outweigh harm is legitimate in shaping recommendations to Cabinet. Expenditure to progress commercial negotiations on individual sites is not. This would be to put the cart before the horse.

So, examples of appropriate spend might be:

1. Proper investigation of travel patterns and need
2. An options appraisal that concludes that park and ride best meets this need
3. A robust weighing of planning considerations including heritage and environmental impact in order to exclude sites where the benefit will clearly not outweigh harm.

Examples of inappropriate expenditure would be sums spent on negotiating and securing financial options with landowners of potential sites. Remember that Cabinet has (quite rightly) yet to take a decision to proceed with a Park & Ride to the East. Yet, if I read it correctly, this delegated decision permits council officers to enter into a contracts, for value (so money will change hands), which will commit the council at some time in the future to buy for a price, fixed now, but both undisclosed and unapproved, one or more parcels of land should planning permission be granted. It is astonishing that the delegated decision process can be abused in this way.

So far £600,000 – two tranches of a neat £300k a time (presumably the limit of Mr Clarke's discretionary spend), has been drawn down under cover of the delegated process. We know some of this has been spent on a sequence of transport modelling reports, by different firms, which have concluded that congestion and pollution, the cornerstone of the consultation aims of the project, will remain undiminished by the proposal. But none of this 600k has been spent on a proper Heritage Impact Assessment of any site, despite being told by Historic England in September 2015 that the criteria based strategy in the draft Placemaking Plan meant that a robust assessment was required at this stage, and that existing 2013 Halcrow settings assessments were inadequate.

So a further delegated decision, no doubt for a further neat £300k is doubtless will on its way, to pay fund work which should have been done but for which there is no money because spent large sums have been spent pursuing a commercial agenda before ensuring it has a deliverable project. And all in secret, with the detail unknown to Cabinet, let alone the public. So please, Scrutiny panel, call for full transparency in this spend and an explanation as to why the cart is before the horse.