

JOINT ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AND GLOUCESTESHIRE ECONOMIC GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Joint Environment Scrutiny Committee and Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday 23 September 2020 virtually.

PRESENT:

Cllr Phil Awford	Cllr Gina Blomefield
Cllr Robert Bird (Chair)	Cllr Stephen Davies
Cllr Dr John Cordwell (Vice-Chair)	Cllr Ben Evans
Cllr Kevin Cromwell	Cllr Kate Haigh
Cllr Stephen Hirst	Cllr Paul McCloskey
Cllr Sajid Patel	Cllr John Murphy
Cllr Eva Ward	Cllr Nicky Packer
Cllr Keith Rippington	Cllr Simon Pickering
Cllr Matt Babbage	Cllr Brian Robinson

Officers in attendance: Colin Chick, Simon Excell, Luisa Senft-Hayward and Orlagh Stoner

Apologies: Cllr Suzanne Williams and Cllr Klara Sudbury (Cheltenham Borough Council)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllrs Klara Sudbury and Suzanne Williams.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were received.

3. LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN REVIEW

3.1 The Chair invited Simon Excell, Lead Commissioner for Strategic Infrastructure, to present this item. Members were shown the attached PowerPoint presentation and noted the following points.

Background

3.2 Members were reminded that at a joint meeting in September 2019, both Committees considered and commented on, the draft Local Transport Plan (LTP). This draft was then signed off by Cabinet and went to public consultation between January and March this year.

- 3.3 Due to the onset of the pandemic, today's session had to be delayed from July and therefore the timeline had adjusted accordingly. Today, members were asked to comment on the revised LTP, following comments received from the public consultation. The final LTP would be presented to Cabinet in January 2021, with an aim for the full adoption in March 2021.
- 3.4 Members noted that the LTP had last been adopted in 2016 and was now therefore increasingly out of date with national, regional, county and local priorities and policies. The review needed to bring the LTP inline with these changes, whilst also strengthening its climate change agenda and reflecting the significant progress in the district local plans e.g. the Joint Core Strategy and Cotswold Local Plan. It was highlighted that both the county council and all six district councils had now declared a climate change emergency.
- 3.5 Slide 4 outlined the new vision and objectives for the Plan, which officers believed reflected national and local plans, as well as the challenges we all face at present. Slide 5 reminded members of the three key themes that emerged from scrutiny's feedback in September 2019.
- 3.6 Members heard that the public consultation response was very good. Officers made good use of social media to publicise the consultation which received over 14,000 hits and the dedicated LTP webpage received 8,000 views. In addition the team had 250 face to face discussions across the county and almost 500 written responses to the LTP Review. Feedback was analysed and themed in a three stage approach: headline categories, sub-categories and key theme.
- 3.7 Slide 7 & 8 outlined the responses received from the public consultation. In both the open and closed questions, the respondent's main concerns could be categorised into: perceived lack of travel choice, safety concerns, congestion, frequency of public transport, environmental impacts and the need for sustainable transport (walking and cycling improvements). There were also several comments made about the length and complexity of the LTP document.

Proposed changes

- 3.8 The Committee were informed that officers had acted on all the comments received from the consultation, which were outlined on slides 9 – 14. Members noted the following points in relation to the proposed changes:
- The document will be shortened and simplified, reduced in size by about one third and removed any repetition to provide a more user friendly LTP.
 - A merging of the overarching vision and objectives and shaping the way to 2041 will become a new 'Vision Towards 2041' chapter.
 - The overarching policy document had been shortened and strengthened.
 - The team were also in the process of developing a multi-modal transport model that would be made available to and assist all district councils in developing their future Local Plans.

- Various new transport schemes were proposed through the consultation, all of which had been priority assessed by officers and resulted in eight new schemes that would be added to the Plan. All new schemes promoted active travel choices – cycling, walking and e-scooter.
- Further clarity on the funding status of the schemes will be added, Members were reminded that not all schemes were currently funded, this was no longer a requirement of the LTP. The LTP provided the high level transport strategy for the county.
- A new annex will be created which includes the summary evidence base compiled through drafting the Plan.
- It was viewed that the public consultation will result in significant and positive changes for the Plan and enhance its sustainability.

Questions

General

- 3.9 The Committee noted a comment that due to there no longer being a need for all schemes to be funded before becoming part of the Plan, there was a concern that some projects were potentially unlikely to get funding for over the next 10 years or so, and they may then begin to blight other projects. An example was given of the Northern Relief Road scheme having an impact on future redevelopment in Tewkesbury town centre.
- 3.10 It was noted that to remove schemes at this stage would require another formal process, with further consultation and delay so this would not be advisable. It was however advised that the LTP was viewed as a 'living' document that will be routinely reviewed. It would therefore be worth members being mindful of the long- term schemes in their area, which may need to be re-examined in the future if they were causing delay to short-term projects whilst awaiting funding.
- 3.11 A member queried why this meeting for Scrutiny had not be delayed until January 2021 as there was concern scrutiny members did not receive the same information that Cabinet would in January (as per slide 2).
- 3.12 It was advised that the latter part of the timeline had been delayed as Government announced they were due to produce a Decarbonising Transport strategy document later this year, which officers wanted time to react to within the LTP where necessary. Today's meeting was aimed at feedback to the Committee the results of the public consultation and take a view on the proposed changes. Officers had already received a preamble to the Government strategy so were fairly confident they had already taken into account the relevant policies. It was agreed that if there were any substantial changes after this meeting; officers would bring these to the Committee's attention, before taking a final version to Cabinet for approval.

- 3.13 It was acknowledged that the level of public engagement on this document was good, but noted that it was significantly lower in some areas compared to others. It was queried whether officers were aware of a reason for this.
- 3.14 Officers assured members that the consultation had been broad across the whole county, and did not focus more on some areas than others so they were unaware of why some districts were more engaged than others. It was however something officers had identified and would note it for future consultations.
- 3.15 Members noted that in the pie chart on slide 8, the section on 'document specific' which reflected 9% of responses related to the concerns on the document itself e.g. it was too long and needed simplifying.
- 3.16 Noting that the public consultation was before Covid, a member questioned whether there should be another chance for feedback, in light of peoples experience of the 'new normal'. Members acknowledged that it was still very difficult to predict what the 'new normal' would look like. The team had been very busy reacting to Covid, and this had resulted in a lot of new walking and cycling schemes, which would be reflected in the revised Plan. It was agreed that the impacts of Covid should be referenced in the preamble of the LTP.
- 3.17 Following a question on the objective of the LTP, the Committee heard that it was a document that worked with partner stakeholders to influence transport, a strategy for transport in Gloucestershire to 2041 and beyond. The LTP was no longer solely a funded Plan.
- 3.18 In response, a member stressed that influencing transport, involved changing people's behaviours and they felt the Plan was lacking ambition on changing behaviours, giving an example that you cannot address climate change by simply offering the public cycling schemes. Officers noted these points but felt a start to changing behaviour was enabling people to do something differently, e.g. giving a chance to cycle to work or use an e-scooter.
- 3.19 It was queried what happened to the link road between A38 and A40 proposal. Officers would provide further information offline to the member. It was advised that the Maisemore Elevation scheme was still a part of the LTP.

ACTION: LUISA SENFT-HAYWARD/ORLAGH STONER

- 3.20 A member requested that the pie chart on slide 8 was provided at a district level rather than the whole county.

ACTION: LUISA SENFT-HAYWARD/ORLAGH STONER

Environmental issues

- 3.21 It was questioned whether there had been a missed opportunity by not adding in a specific chapter on climate change. It was advised that the whole document had been strengthened in terms of climate change and stronger targets had been set.
- 3.22 In addition a member asked why the schemes did not address, in any detail, their impact on carbon emissions. Officers informed that they had included climate impact data as far as was known, which included GCC's ambition to be carbon neutral by 2050 target. It was acknowledged that further work needed to be done in this area to understand how we get there as a county, this was referenced in the LTP.
- 3.23 A member noted the mention of school transport in different areas of the Plan, but that there was no overall chapter to tie these initiatives together. It was advised that the LTP did not include a specific section to address school transport, but this forms part of many different policies, for example, air quality, travel safety etc. It was also part of the *Thinktravel – Influencing Behaviour Change* policy. The Thinktravel team worked closely with schools on developing their own travel plans.
- 3.24 The Committee noted that there were a few trial schemes due to be up and running at schools in Cheltenham, Tewkesbury and Gloucester after the half term break. The Cabinet Member for Environment and Planning offered to bring an update to the Committee once these had settled in.

ACTION: DSU

Cycling

- 3.25 There was a lengthy discussion regarding the prevalence of cycling during the pandemic. Whilst the Committee acknowledged the increase, it was also appreciated that in recent weeks, since the lockdown has ended, there appeared to be a return to pre-Covid cycle levels and resistant attitudes.
- 3.26 An example was given of a cycle scheme being trialled on Estcourt Road in Gloucester. The location was chosen to extend a safe cycling route beyond the newly placed London Road segregated cycle lane, as part of the strategic cycle route between Gloucester and Cheltenham. In the few weeks that the scheme was live, there was no indication of increased traffic on the junction but the backlash from the local community was at such a level that the scheme had to be removed.
- 3.27 Officers felt they had reacted to the positivity around walking and cycling during the peak of Covid, but officers were now facing a return to resistance against anything taking road space away from motorists.
- 3.28 A member of the Committee suggested that getting local members involved much earlier in the new schemes, may help to manage local expectations and response. It may also require Council's to be 'braver for longer' in order

for schemes of this nature to remain long-term. Some driver's sense of entitlement needed to be addressed whether unpopular or not.

- 3.29 There was a request for an update on the Highways England Cheltenham to Gloucester cycle route. It was informed that it had been estimated that the project would cost around £10m and Highways England had agreed to put forward half of the money if GCC could match the other £5m. Unfortunately a recent bid to the LEP for funding had not been successful; the project was therefore still awaiting funding.
- 3.30 Members attention was also drawn towards the Travel by-cycle strategy that was launched in 2019 with an aim to link the county from Tewkesbury (North) all the way to Tetbury (South) via cycle routes.
- <https://www.thinktravel.info/media/2092291/travel-by-cycle-around-gloucestershire-booklet.pdf>
- 3.31 Both the Cabinet Member for Highways and Flood and Cabinet Member Environment and Planning thanked the Committee for their very useful, construction and supportive feedback during this session. They echoed officer's feelings toward the Estcourt Road cycle scheme and welcomed Members ongoing support if the Council was going to move forward with its cycle agenda.
- 3.32 Officers thanked the Committee for their feedback and positivity, especially towards the cycle schemes and echoed the urge for members to support officers in order for these proposals to be carried forward.

CHAIR

Meeting concluded at 12:15.