

# ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES** of a meeting of the Environment Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday 13 January 2021 virtually.

**PRESENT:**

Cllr Phil Awford	Cllr Stephen Hirst
Cllr Robert Bird (Chair)	Cllr Sajid Patel
Cllr Dr John Cordwell (Vice-Chair)	Cllr Suzanne Williams
Cllr Kevin Cromwell	

Substitutes: Cllr Rachel Smith

Officers in attendance: Cllr Nigel Moor (Cabinet Member for Environment and Planning), Cllr Vernon Smith (Cabinet Member for Highways and Flood), Colin Chick, Simon Excell and Philip Williams

Apologies: Cllr Eva Ward and Cllr Keith Rippington

## 2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2020 were approved.

## 3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Phil Awford declared an interest as Chair of the National Flood Forum and as a representative for the Wessex/Severn Wye at the Regional Flood Defence Committee.

## 4. ELECTRIC VEHICLES INFRASTRUCTURE UPDATE

4.1 The Chair invited Philip Williams, Lead Commissioner – Community Infrastructure, to present this update report. Members noted the following points:

- This report was a follow on update from the draft Gloucestershire Ultra Low Emission Vehicle (ULEV) strategy members considered at their meeting in March 2020.
- The Electric Vehicle (EV) infrastructure rollout had been impacted by Covid as resource from the department had to be diverted to other areas. Atkins were therefore approached last summer and additional resource was procured to help support the rollout going forward.
- This report summarised the work that had been ongoing during the Covid pandemic and the next steps.
- There had been continued learning from networking with other local authorities and electricity suppliers in the south west. The Energy Savings Trust also provided useful challenge on the Strategy during discussions on funding.

- The team had been working closely with GCC's procurement department to understand how the new Dynamic Purchasing System for the Council would work for this Strategy. They had also explored how to make sure the procurement contract was available for other local authorities and bodies in Gloucestershire to use so they did not have to go through the lengthy process GCC has had to.
  - The next stage was for the lead Cabinet Member to decide whether or not to adopt the Strategy as it was, which would then enable officers to begin the tender process.
- 4.2 It was questioned how long after the decision from Cabinet would the rollout begin. It was advised once the Strategy had been approved; it would only be a few months. The rollout would be done in phases, and would depend on the levels of funding received from central Govt. through the procurement process. Unlike many other councils however, GCC had been investing its own money in this project for some time. This therefore gave us leverage to secure more Government grant funding and also with the charging companies in terms of where charging points would be installed.
- 4.3 Feedback from the Committee and experts had steered the first stage of the rollout to focus on areas where there was the greatest on-street residential demand for charging points. It was stressed therefore that even though the rollout may appear to focus on towns in the first instance, this did not mean the more rural areas would be forgotten. There were requirements attached to the grant funding from Govt. and we also had to be mindful of equitable access. Members were reminded that the EV charging market was vast and GCC was only one part of the overall rollout.
- 4.4 It was added that the rollout had to be organic, what we needed to avoid was starting with a list of locations and a roadmap rollout of 200 charging points, as by the time we got to completing the list the demand locations would have changed. The level of take up had increased dramatically in the past few years and we need to be able to respond in a more agile way to the varying demand. It was noted that the rollout will take account of areas where chargers have been requested, but will also have to match demand in that area so we did not end up with a charger being installed and only ever used by one resident.
- 4.5 It was queried how GCC judged potential utilisation of EV chargers. It was highlighted that in Tewkesbury for example, many areas struggled to have access to parking for their houses, let alone areas to park and charge. The rollout in such areas was going to be complex and could lead to residential streets becoming even more overloaded with vehicles looking to park than they already were.
- 4.6 In response, members heard that officers were using a wide range of data sets to understand the demographics of areas, taking into account a range of factors from economic to social requirements. This would help identify communities who were, for example, less financially able or less interested in

making the change to EV at the moment whilst the market was still new. There was also an ongoing exercise of collating views from a number of organisations to share knowledge of what was happening on the ground.

- 4.7 The member welcomed the second part of this response, stressing that it was a very narrow alley to go down if we were simply going to look at datasets for assessing green credentials in areas. It was vital to take account of local representatives' knowledge and awareness as opposed to only using data based marketing tools.
- 4.8 It was added that the team had listened to previous comments from members about not taking space away from pedestrians and cyclists in the installation of the chargers. The more compact equipment was expected to fit on pavements, otherwise there would be small islands on the road to accommodate it.
- 4.9 Noting that we had seen a significant increase in the uptake of EV in recent years, it was queried how GCC would meet the infrastructure demands if this level of increase continued. It was reminded that this was not GCC's responsibility alone to provide the infrastructure; the rollout would include a mixed market of businesses, private residents and local authorities providing the charging points. For GCC its focus would primarily be on-street parking, for districts it would likely be off-street car parks, for example. The Govt.'s prioritisation of this area had been increasing, which brought more secured and maintained funding streams. A member requested data on the number of EV currently circulating in the county.

**ACTION: Philip Williams**

- 4.10 A member questioned whether GCC were actively working with district councils in order to achieve an efficient county wide policy. It was advised that at this stage in the rollout, there was closer working with some councils more than others. The area where there would be the greatest overlap was in sharing of experience and also sharing knowledge on the contractual angle. Members noted GCC had spent a lot of time and money to acquire the technical knowledge this project needed and wanted to avoid others councils in Gloucestershire needing to do the same.
- 4.11 In addition it was highlighted that it was hard to collaborate at the moment due to the pressures inflicted by the ongoing pandemic on all councils. This programme was only at the beginning of an initial three year implementation plan, meaning there will be a lot of future opportunities to work closer with districts and parishes. It was stressed however that there was not as much overlap between different council priorities as some may think.
- 4.12 An action was taken to liaise with the project team on having proactive conversations with others councils and establishing these procurement links where they were wanted.

**ACTION: Philip Williams**

- 4.13 Members noted that all councils could have access to the OLEV Govt. funding, as long as their request met the grant restrictions. For example, the fund could not be used to supply charging points in shopping car parks as this was classed as commercially viable. They would however be able to apply for a grant for a parish car park that was regularly used by residents for overnight parking for example. There were grey areas of the criteria that OLEV were encouraging councils to take advantage of.
- 4.14 In terms of mapping location and availability of charging points, the Committee heard that there were a lot of open source mapping systems out there which Gloucestershire could feed into. It was important to understand that these points were not dedicated to residents or houses, they would be shared and open to those travelling through. It may also be that in certain areas, there will need to be a legal requirement that the bays can only be used to charge vehicles and not for general parking.
- 4.15 The Lead Cabinet Member added that what the team had demonstrated in this update was the careful tracking of the Govt. funding progress and should be congratulated for putting GCC in a good position to bid for this. One of the dangers we had to be aware of was thinking that this rollout was similar to planning for new housing developments, for example. This was a developing market, which was changing incredibly quickly, we had to make sure our strategy did not become too prescriptive. The market would continue respond, and we needed to be conscious we did not over provide whilst it was still in its infancy. Range anxiety was an issue when petrol stations first began to roll out in mass across the country, electric charging points would soon catch up the same way.
- 4.16 In respect to the planning system, the Cabinet Member urged that it needed to enable development for this project to be a success. A recent example was given of a site in the Cotswolds which faced a lot of objections from all angles and eventually ended up going to appeal. The appeal decision was given in less than 3 weeks and it was successful. The conclusions we could draw from this was that this Govt. was determined to see the planning system as an enabler in respect of EV infrastructure rollout.

**5. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT: ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT & INFRASTRUCTURE**

- 5.1 Colin Chick, Executive Director of Economy, Environment and Infrastructure, updated the Committee on current issues. In particular, members noted that:
- M5 J10 had completed its public consultation which ran from October – November last year, the process of land acquisition for the project had started and it aimed to secure as much in advance as possible, hoping for a Preferred Route Announcement in spring 2021.

- The Highways contracts continued to move forward, regardless of any implications of the third lockdown, although the team had been heavily impacted by the recent flooding events and need for increased gritting delivery.
  - Phases 3 and 4 of the West Cheltenham project were due to go on site through this third lockdown. Additional work had been needed to reduce the risk of Covid transmission on site.
  - Positive early feedback from parents and children about the School Streets pilots in Tewkesbury and in Warden Hill (Cheltenham).
  - The funding pot for the B4603 project was almost there, it was about £1.5m short but there were a number of funding options to consider.
  - Unfortunately the M5 J9 scheme had returned to negotiation on scheme options due to a last minute challenge from Highways England on the chosen option.
- 5.2 A member raised the ongoing issue of flooding on the A417 to Maisemore, noting that the closure of this road was happening more frequently and was having a considerable impact on residents and businesses. It was questioned whether a prevention scheme could be added to the Local Transport Plan for future considering. The cabinet member responsible encouraged the member to raise this in a question at the next Cabinet meeting.
- 5.3 Noting at 4.1 that the current rail strategy was published in March 2020, a member questioned whether there was a plan to update this soon. It was advised that with the strategy being only 9 months old, officers would not be looking to update it yet. It had been very useful in driving recent improvements to the rail services in the county, with the metro service to Gloucester going live at the end of this year. Members noted the need to keep pressure on rail companies post-Covid to reinstate the level of service Gloucestershire had before, as it was possible to become stuck in a cycle of residents not using services due to their infrequency and rail companies therefore feeling the demand was not there to justify increasing them.
- 5.4 Further detail was requested regarding the failure to secure funds mentioned at 4.11. It was explained that GCC could request two forms of funding from developers for housing – Section 106 and CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy). As the latter did not generally go towards education/library facilities, the section 106 contributions were vital for being able to provide this infrastructure. What GCC were beginning to experience however was developers (or district councils in some cases) refusing to pay the section 106 monies due to a misunderstanding of where the CIL contributions would go.
- 5.5 Officers informed that GCC were battling hard against these cases, but unfortunately due to the 2 tiered system of council in Gloucestershire, it was only an advisory body to planning applications. It was on developers to agree to the infrastructure contribution suggestions, rather than GCC being able to demand them. The team were due to attend a court hearing on one

particular development soon, which they believe will form the basis of precedent going forward and had therefore spent a lot of time preparing for.

- 5.6 It was advised that the Stroud Local Plan may have to be reviewed by Stroud District Council in light of the recent change in Govt. policy on planning for the future. As members were aware, GCC could only act as an advisory body for local plans but it was noted that GCC officers were currently objecting to the Sharpness development as it stood due to its unsustainable transport issues.
- 5.7 A member questioned whether GCC supported the reopening of community rail stations in the county e.g. the one at Stonehouse. It was advised that for every person you improve their convenience in access to a local rail station; there was a disadvantage to the multiple users of the services going through that area, due to the additional stop. With each additional stop leading to an increased connection time. Network Rail had advised that the line from Bristol to Birmingham could only accommodate 1 or 2 additional stations without a major negative impact on services. It was therefore critical that detailed analysis be undertaken to assess where these were best placed to support and maximise large scale growth in the future in the most sustainable manner.
- 5.8 On the innovation of libraries at 5.1, it was queried whether there was access to 3D printers/scanners. It was advised that the Innovation Lab concept, which was now live in Coleford and due to be rolled out in the other 5 districts, would have all such 3D facilities. These Lab's had been designed to encourage, excite and enthuse young people into the field of cyber and IT careers, but also to provide the necessary support services for SMEs.
- 5.9 There was a query about local cycling objections to the A419 works taking place in Stonehouse. It was informed that when the scheme was approved, it was more of a traditional type scheme that potentially gave motorist priority over cyclists and would probably not be approved nowadays. The team were in constant dialogue with the cycling group and were actively considering how to best amend the scheme to address their concerns.
- 5.10 On the list of Emergency Active Travel (EATF) schemes that were submitted but not allocated funding back in the summer, it was advised that officers were working through the list to see if it was possible to at least move some of the schemes forward from a design perspective with GCC's own funding and then if an external funding pot became available, schemes would be available to bid for it.
- 5.11 The smaller, local schemes were being considered in parallel with continuing to develop the cycle lane 'spine' throughout the county. The focus needed to be on developing the spine for smaller schemes to feed off, but officers appreciated member comments that these smaller schemes offered vital cycle connections for local residents making smaller journeys.

- 5.12 The team were focused on delivering all levels of the cycle network as quickly as possible but these schemes cost serious money and needed to be conscious of budget implications. GCC's capacity to deliver and design cycle schemes, particularly the smaller ones, could be significantly improved subject to this years budget approval, was it included money to increase capacity for an in-house design team, which would result in a faster and more efficient process, as opposed to fielding everything out to external consultants.

**ACTION: SHARE A LIST OF THE 5 EATF SCHEMES**

- 5.13 A member stressed that it was vital to ensure the highway was safe and fit for purpose when implementing these cycle schemes. If potholes, for example, were resident, motorists tended to weave into cycle lanes to avoid them.
- 5.14 It was noted that the waiting times at Hempsted and Pike Quarry Home Recycling Centres had experienced an increase in waiting times. It was advised that HRC's were constantly reviewed and improved where possible. One of the advantages of moving to a permanent booking system was the possibility to develop a new platform, as the current platform being used was fairly inflexible. This option was being actively discussed with cabinet.
- 5.15 A member added that some residents in Tewkesbury were travelling to out of county HRCs instead where there were no booking systems. There had also been a major increase in fly tipping in the area and It was questioned whether there was there any coloration wit this.
- 5.16 In response, members appreciated that not having a booking system at the moment would not be advisable due to the need to enforce Covid restrictions. Fly tipping was, in the main, a criminal commercial operation and therefore officers would not make the link between having to wait for a couple of days to visit a HRC, with the criminal activity of fly tipping. It may however cause residents to consider other waste removal companies instead, who themselves were then illegal disposing of waste they collected.

**6. WORK PLAN**

- 6.1 The Committee reviewed the work plan for their final meeting in March 2021 (attached). The tentative item on flooding had been suggested at the meeting in November in relation to an issue specifically on the more frequent flooding of the A417 at Maisemore.
- 6.2 In light of recent flood events across the county in December, it was stressed by several members that this item should be expanded to include urgent consideration of these events. Members were aware that flood events in December 2020 had been from surface water run off, and were therefore different to those normally experienced in Gloucestershire from river overflow.

*Minutes subject to their acceptance as a correct record at the next meeting*

- 6.3 Members and officers noted a commitment made at the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee for a scrutiny task group to be formed to specifically review the events of the December floods, and they wanted to be mindful that the Committee were not duplicating work that was already ongoing elsewhere.
- 6.4 Officers requested to take this away as an action to understand the remit of the task group request, and where, as the lead scrutiny committee for flooding, this Committee would be involved.
- 6.5 The Chair concluded that it was the Committee's will overall to receive a report reviewing the flood events in December 2020, subject to advice from officers on other ongoing avenues of work. Members were all in agreement that this was a very urgent and important piece of work that needed to take priority on behalf of all residents who had been affected.

**ACTION: DSU / Colin Chick / Simon Excell**

- 6.6. There was a request for an item to be considered at a future Committee meeting on the climate change impacts of cabinet decisions at GCC. Officers advised this work was ongoing and it would be feasible to bring a report on this to a future meeting.

**ACTION: Philip Williams / DSU**

**CHAIR**

Meeting concluded at 12:45.