

Director's Report, Economy, Environment & Infrastructure Scrutiny Committee Report

August 2021

This report summarises key areas likely to lead to decisions over the next 6 months, including updates on areas previously reported.

1.0 Decisions

1.1 Relevant forthcoming decisions, by date due:

- [A435 Bishops Cleeve to Cheltenham Capacity Improvements – Contract Procurement](#) Between 12 Jan 2021 and 31 Aug 2021
- [Gloucestershire County Council's partnership agreement with Gloucester City Council, Cheltenham Borough Council and Tewkesbury Borough Council in relation to the Joint Core Strategy](#) Between 3 Aug 2020 and 30 Sep 2021
- [A417 Missing Link Development Consent Order \(DCO\) process](#) Between 1 Sep 2021 and 15 Sep 2021
- [Network Rail Bristol to Birmingham Corridor Strategic Study](#) 22 Sep 2021 by Cabinet
- [Gloucestershire Statement of Common Ground - Strategic Planning](#) 10 Nov 2021 by Cabinet

1.2 Pending Items not yet published on the Forward Plan:

- Blakeney West - Construction Procurement
- Highways Major Projects Framework
- Bus Service Improvement Plan
- Transport DPS Update on Procurement and Contract Awards
- Library Stock Procurement
- Parking ICT Contracts

2.0 Highways

2.1 Highways Contracts

- Term maintenance (Ringway) – Third year of contract underway. Some focus now required on progressing collaborative working relationship. Performance on cyclical maintenance and defect repair remains on target, but there continue to be high numbers of defects being found through inspections or reported by public – continue to experience 4000-5000 defects per month (incl. predicted August). At this time of year it would normally be expected to see 2000-2500 defects per month. This is primarily recovery of the road network following the prolonged wet and sub-zero period between December and March which has caused accelerated deterioration of the fragile parts of the network which have not yet been addressed with long term solutions such as resurfacing. Patching and jetpatcher resource have been mobilised to help address repairs but implementation has been delayed as a result of covid isolations impacting resource levels.
- Professional services (Atkins) – Third year of contract underway.
- Structural maintenance (Tarmac) – Last year of current contract. Continued good performance and final year of £150m investment commenced. Procurement of next surfacing contract to be considered over next 6 months in readiness for April 2022.
- Street lighting (M Group) – Performance on key indicators remains satisfactory.
- Highway Skills Academy – Current focus is on the formation of a development/career path for those staff which are progressing through their apprenticeships in order that GCC retains the investment in time, funds and skills. First Level 4 (HNC equivalent) Apprentice

has been appointed and now progressing opportunities for the same Level 4 course for existing members of the team. First cohort of 12 no. Level 4 apprentices start their training over the summer with a second cohort planned to follow.

- Awards – submissions made for CIHT Active Travel (London Road), CIHT Structures (A38 Canal Bridges) and ICE Structures (A38 Canal Bridges) awards. A38 Canal Bridges shortlisted for the ICE award.

2.2 Highways Delivery

- Depots/property – development of strategic plan for highways depots included in 21/22 Service Plan in order to ensure facilities are fit for purpose.
- Ash die back – continued programme in 21/22 including planting programme to ensure that two trees are planted for each one felled with ash die back disease. Discussions are underway with external organisations such as National Trust and others to identify larger woodland planting schemes off the public highway.

2.3 Major Projects

J10

- Non-statutory public consultation results now published. Preferred Route Announcement took place on 16th June 2021 along with associated communications and publication via GCC website.
- Land agents appointed to progress land acquisition and negotiations in partnership with GCC Property.
- Claims to date total just over £10m including 'historic claim' claw back.

A435 Capacity Improvements

- Preparing to go out to tender on capacity improvements on A435 between Cheltenham and Bishops Cleeve. Funding/need associated with local housing developments.

A419 Junction Improvements (Stonehouse)

- Works substantially complete.

Ashchurch Bridge over Rail (Delivery for Tewkesbury Borough Council)

- Planning permission for the bridge has been granted. Detailed design continues (Atkins).
- Works continue with Tewkesbury Borough Council and Network Rail to understand the complexities of the legal agreements required for the construction phase.

GSWB / Llanthony Road

- Planning permission granted April 2019;
- Public Inquiry decision announced in early April by the DfT for the CPO process – this is subject to a 6 week Judicial Review Period and a Notice of Intent Period which extends until Autumn 2021.
- Advance preparatory works have commenced and signage is in place for information.
- Planning application in with GCC for change of use (part of City Business Centre to become car park for displaced parking)
- Bat Survey completed in May 2021, which highlighted no licencing requirements
- The Llanthony Priory Access works have been completed in April 2021, signage has been used to promote the completion of this phase.

- Arrangements are being made to prepare tender documents for the City Business Centre demolition contract.

West Cheltenham / Cyber £22M

- Work started on site for Phases 1 and 2 in June 2020 and works are currently on programme to be completed by Summer 2021.
- The Phase 3 and 4 Design and Build contract started in January 2021 and is due to be completed in early Spring 2022.
- Highways England's safety critical works at Staverton Bridge and M5 Junction 11 are underway with Arle Court forming part of the M5J11 diversion route, whilst this has resulted in an increase in stakeholder contact there has been no impact on the Phase 1 & 2 works programme, largely due to reduced traffic volumes during covid restrictions.

3.0 Community & Infrastructure

3.1 DfT Emergency Active Travel Fund

- Tranche 2: (B4063 Chelt-Glos cycle route): Following criticism last summer of (historic) plans for this route further design work has been done by the council's consultants, Atkins. The amended plans are more compliant with recent government guidance on designing for cycling (LTN 1/20) and were well received in a public consultation in February and March. To make the route as attractive as possible we have invited a critical friend panel to review the design. This work is underway.
- A £231k revenue bid has been submitted to the DfT's Local Authority Capability Fund for a programme of active travel activities in 2021/22. This will support the development of an ambitious and high-quality local cycling and walking infrastructure plan (LCWIP) compliant with LTN 1/20, work on a pipeline of schemes and engagement with communities including employers and schools. We are waiting for an announcement from the DfT.

3.2 ITU Public Transport and School Transport

- As part of its "Bus Back Better" strategy to increase the proportion of trips made on public transport the government has provided a Coronavirus Bus Service Support Grant (CBSSG) scheme for bus operators whose incomes have been hit hard by travel restrictions and social distancing rules. The DfT has informed us that this CBSSG fund will end at the end of August and will be replaced by a £226.5m Recovery Funding package. We are awaiting detail on exactly what this new fund means for Gloucestershire, all public transport operators are aware of the imminent changes. Work on the Bus Service Improvement Plan also continues at pace.
- September Service Changes – Stagecoach have registered a series of changes to public services mainly in and around the Stroud and Dursley area. They are also going to host a series of public events in the next two weeks to inform the public of these changes, a member of the ITU public transport team will also attend to understand the information being delivered and the public reaction.
- As per recent guidelines and the relaxation of capacity restrictions, schools returning in September will be provided with their normal pre-Covid level of transport. The additional funding from the DfE that paid for the extra capacity has also ended. We will continue to strongly advise the wearing of face coverings on board by both drivers and pupils.

3.3 Sustainability

- We are focusing work on development and implementation of measures in the Climate Change Action Plan. These include the Tree Strategy, funding bids, transitioning from fossil

fuels to an electric fleet and rolling out 1000 EV charge points. The team will be expanding this autumn following success in recruiting to two posts: a new Climate Change and Air Quality officer post and a shared post with Waste which will concentrate on engagement and encouraging sustainable behaviours.

3.4 Highways Development Management

- The HDM Improvement Plan is being implemented with vertical teams delivering a personal geographic service to the LPA's. On the policy front the new Planning Policy Framework has been published with a much stronger emphasis on delivery of street trees to help tackle climate change. This will necessitate a review of the Manual for Gloucestershire Streets and commuted sums for maintenance.

4.0 Strategic Infrastructure

4.1 B4063 / A40 Highways England Cycling Scheme – Cheltenham to Gloucester

- The original HE scheme, in order to fulfil funding criteria, needed to be completed by March 2020. This, however, was subsequently extended to construction starting in 2021, as part of the RIS2 process. GCC officers continue to engage with HE's Route Manager to attempt to ensure everything is 'joined up'.
- GCC has decided to take over the detailed design of this project, with the design fully underway with the East part of the route designed and consulted upon in Spring 2021, an independent audit has now been completed by a leading industry expert to ensure we provide the best possible facility we can within the constraints. The audit findings have led to extensive enhancement of the provision, which have been heavily endorsed by Sustrans to the extent that they are due to become a major funding provider for the scheme,
- Works are expected to start in late 2021, delivering the east part of the route first.
- This scheme will have the key advantage of directly linking the project to the emerging £22M West Cheltenham Transport Improvement Scheme (WCTIS) providing a continuous link between Gloucester and Cheltenham rail station once complete and include the recently successfully delivered Emergency Active Travel Scheme on London Road in Gloucester. The GFirst LEP Board, in December 2020, agreed that any future underspend on the £22M WCTIS would be ringfenced to the B4063 cycle scheme. Prior to this, in November 2020, £864k was secured from an EATF Tranche 2 bid from the Department for Transport (DfT), which will part fund a section of the works. We have submitted a DfT Levelling Up fund to deliver the scheme in its entirety.

4.2 M5 Junction 9 and A46 (Ashchurch)

- The Strategic Outline Business Case for the M5 J9 / A46 scheme was submitted to the DfT in January 2020;
- Positive Government announcement in March 2020, stating that the scheme should progress to the next stage;
- This is to progress to the Outline Business Case – the cost of which is likely to be £2M-£3M – part of the funding came from the approved £4M GCC funding for 'business case development' in 2020/21;
- The progression of the scheme was considered and approved by GCC Cabinet on 24th March 2021;
- Discussions re- possible future funding ongoing with both Homes England and Tewkesbury BC due to the links to the emerging 'garden town';

- Ongoing discussions with HE to secure approval of options for Junction 9;
- Detailed HE feedback has been received and is currently being analysed by officers and Atkins.

4.3 Digital connectivity

- Cabinet considered and approved the latest, revised Fastershire Broadband Strategy 2019-2022 in December 2019;
- This is now being implemented, with a view to securing solutions for ‘the final 3%’.

4.4 A417 Missing Link

- Preferred Route Announcement (Route 30) made March 2019;
- Further public consultation took place in Autumn 2019;
- A supportive officer-level response to this consultation (a joint response from CDC, TBC and GCC) was sent on 8th November 2019;
- Positive announcement in March 2020 stating that the scheme has secured funding and should progress to DCO;
- Revised proposals were subject to a further public consultation, which started on 12th October 2020. A detailed GCC officer response was sent, meeting the external deadline of 12th November 2020;
- The DCO planning application has now been submitted in June 2021 and is currently being considered by the Planning Inspectorate.

4.5 Local Transport Plan (LTP)

- The LTP was adopted at Full Council on 17th March 2021.

4.6 Chepstow Transport Improvements

- Consultant’s report outlined scheme options;
- Monmouthshire CC keen to progress to Full Business Cases;
- GCC Lead Cabinet Members supported a GCC financial contribution of £20K (2020/21) towards Stage 2 of the Chepstow Transport Study;
- A possible further GCC financial contribution for 2021/22 is currently being considered.

4.7 Cinderford

- FoDDC yet to secure planning permission and funding for proposed extension of phase one of the road;
- A Section 73 amendment to vary the existing planning permission has been submitted in April 2021 and is awaiting determination by FoDDC;
- Until planning and funding is in place, no further action for GCC.

4.8 Local Plans / JCS / CIL

- Review of JCS now underway following an ‘Issues and Options’ consultation which ended in January 2019;
- The JCS Reg.18 consultation is anticipated in Autumn 2021;
- Progress has been made with the JCS authorities to review the JCS CIL – consultants have now been appointed to undertake this task;
- GCC education and library contributions continue to be challenged and declined by some District Councils and developers – these are in the process of being reviewed by GCC;
- GCC continues to not receive a penny of CIL from any of the JCS authorities;

- Stroud Local Plan – Consultation on Draft Local Plan – closed 22nd January 2020. Significant officer-level concerns submitted to SDC – especially transport issues re- the significant proposed development at Sharpness. Another SDC consultation took place with additional possible housing sites, which was responded to in December 2020. The most recent public consultation stage (pre-submission draft consultation) ended on 21st July 2021. GCC officer comments were submitted prior to the deadline.
- Cotswold Local Plan – Adopted in August 2018;
- Forest of Dean Local Plan – Issues and Options consultation ended on 31st October 2019. FoDDC consulted on a ‘preferred option’ – the closing date for comments was 29th January 2021. GCC officers commented before this deadline.

5.0 Libraries & Registration

5.1 Libraries

- Library opening hours are almost all back to their pre-pandemic patterns. There are a handful of libraries that are still not able to open their full hours due to recruitment to vacancies.
- The Summer Reading challenge launched on 10th July 2021 – the theme this year is Wild World Heroes with the Reading Agency partnering with the World Wildlife Fund – this year has an emphasis on wildlife and protecting the environment.
- Two expressions of interest have been submitted to the Libraries Improvement Fund – part of the Government’s levelling up fund. One of the projects based around provision in Oakley, Cheltenham has been invited to submit a full bid with a closing date of 23rd September 2021.

5.2 Registration

- Ceremonies are extremely busy – wedding and civil partnership ceremonies that were performed in July were up by 53% on our last full year in 2019/20.
- Due to the ongoing works in Shire Hall we urgently need to find an alternative location for the delivery of citizenship ceremonies. Prior to the pandemic these were held in the Coroner’s Court but the Coroner has advised that we cannot use this facility for the foreseeable future.

6.0 Waste Management

- Waiting times for an appointment to visit a Household Recycling Centre (HRC) by car remain low. Next day appointments are currently available at four of the sites (as of 16.40pm, 4th August). There is a two day wait at Pyke Quarry.
- Customer Surveys have been completed at the HRCs during July to monitor customer satisfaction with the booking system, site staff and the facilities. A report will be available in August.
- The new contract for the management of the HRC service with Ubico comes in to effect on 7th August, with the team working with Legal Services colleagues to complete the contract.
- Work continues on the procurement of new materials off-take contracts for the various waste streams collected for reuse, recycling and recovery at the HRCs. There are currently 28 different contracts in place, which are to be retendered and awarded ahead of contract commencement on 1st April 2022. The duration of these new contracts will be synchronised with the duration of the new Ubico management contract.

- Preparation continues for the annual two-week maintenance outage at the Gloucestershire Energy from Waste facility. The outage is scheduled to commence on 30th August. Covid safe working practices will be used (regardless of the prevailing national advice).
- The visitor and education centre at the Energy from Waste facility, which has remained closed throughout the pandemic, has now reopened.
- A soft marketing testing exercise was completed in July with potential providers for the sale of electricity generated by the Energy from Waste Facility. This service is currently provided by EDF, which is under contract with the council until 2023. The work will be coordinated with the procurement of an energy buying service for the council (which is currently provided by WME). Discussions focussed on the optimum length of the contract, providers willingness to take on the risk on the volume of electricity generated by the plant (the council bears the price risk) and how future developments such as a heat off-take arrangement with a neighbour to the plant might be accommodated.
- A contract has been agreed with Cheltenham B.C to allow them to deliver waste from their trade waste rounds to the Energy from Waste Facility. The waste is currently landfilled. The contract offers CBC a saving over its current landfill arrangements and provides full cost recovery for GCC.

7.0 Employment and Skills

7.1 Adult Education Service

- Since the implementation of the new staffing structure (commenced 1st September), good progress is being made with staff being embedded into new roles. The transition from old to new is progressing very well despite Covid-19 related challenges. An internal full review of our current processes and procedures is still underway to enable the Service to continue making improvements (streamlining, efficiency gains and cost savings). Full impact of the changes will not be shown from a working point of view until full service is up and running post Covid restrictions but so far staff are embracing the process well.
- Staff Questionnaire was sent out to all AES staff to ascertain how they felt about returning to work post Covid restrictions and with a view to continuing AGILE working. Majority of staff are keen to return to 3 days a week in the office and 2 days a week working from home. This will work well for the provision provided there is enough desk space in the office to allow for this post Covid. Discussions will take place with the team over the coming weeks to work out how the GCC Agile Working changes will fit around our service delivery.
- It is likely that longer-term the Service will retain more of a blended learning approach combining online and face-to-face learning, although this remains challenging with Community learning, we continued through the second and third lockdowns to provide face to face learning to those most vulnerable and facing digital poverty, which has seen all classes at capacity with 6 learners (socially distanced). The third lockdown led to 80% of our provision moving online, with only 20% of courses taking place face to face to support those who are facing extreme vulnerability with digital skills and mental health/wellbeing.
- Full process review is being undertaken by the new HoS to standardise procedures across the department, this includes new observation, enrolment and course development procedures and processes to allow for better Ofsted and Matrix readiness.
- Our current subcontractor framework is due to end with our 5 current subcontractors on July 31st 2021, and we would now like to go out to tender again (new ESFA 21/22 allocation, has been announced and detailed below). Documents have been submitted for

Cabinet review at the June meeting to ensure that this process is completed by the deadline and service is not disrupted.

- ESFA funding allocation has been announced for 21/22 as follows:
 - Total £2,616,429 grant 1 – August 21 – March 22 - £1,639,193, grant 2 – April 22 – July 22 - £977,236
 - Distribution of grant as follows:
 - Adult Skills Allocation - £536,481
 - Community Learning Allocation - £2,064,048
 - National Skills Fund (Level 3 offer over 24yr) - £15,900
 - Advanced Learner Loans for 2021-2022
 - Total - £20,128 (August 21-March 22 - £12,715, April 22- July 22 - £7,413)
 - Planned Community Learning Allocation (total £2,064,048)
 - Subcontractors - £499,999
 - Direct Delivery - £1,564,049

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