

Minutes of the Meeting of the Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 9 February 2021 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors John Allen (Chair), David Van Day (Vice-Chair), Alex Anderson, Oliver Gerrish, Martin Kerin and David Potter

In attendance: Andrew Millard, Director of Place
Anna Eastgate, Assistant Director of Lower Thames Crossing and Place Delivery
Gerard McCleave, Assistant Director for Economic Growth & Partnerships
Leigh Nicholson, Assistant Director of Planning, Transport and Public Protection
Mat Kiely, Transportation Services Strategic Lead
Stephen Taylor, Strategic Lead for Economic Development
Peter Wright, Strategic Lead of Highways and Infrastructure
Kenna-Victoria Healey, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being live streamed to the Council's online webcast channel.

31. Minutes

The minutes of the Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 8 December 2020 were approved as a true and correct record.

32. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

33. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

34. Active Travel Tranche 2

The Assistant Director for Planning, Transport and Public Protection presented the report to the committee and in doing so highlighted that the government had provided funding to enable local authorities to deliver walking and cycling improvements, to encourage and enable sustainable travel for shorter journeys. He continued by explaining the government had confirmed Thurrock's allocation for the national active travel fund was £690,000.

Members then heard from the Strategic Lead for Transport Services who explained the funding was to be used to support, encourage and enhance walking and cycling routes across the borough and to engage with local

communities and key stakeholders during consultations which would inform the development and delivery of proposed schemes which local people could then endorse.

He continued by advising Members that the active travel fund was to continue supporting the ongoing delivery of the Tilbury cycle Hub which acted as a focus point and further supported the enabling of walking and cycling within the borough. The Committee were further advised that the Department of Transport had requested the Council commit to developing, prioritising and delivering proposals from the list of schemes and initiatives which were put forward when applying for the funding. The proposed schemes included not only the Tilbury Cycle Hub but signalled crossing on the A128 and also enhancements of cycle, parking and signage for cyclists and pedestrians across the borough.

Chair of the Committee thanked officers for the report and enquired as to when the implementation date for the scheme relating to the A128 was due. Officers explained consultation to be undertaken, if this was an agreed officers hoped to implement the scheme during the first quarter of the new financial year.

Councillor Kerin thanked officers for the report however commented he was disappointed that the Council only received 40% of the initial £1.2 million grant and asked the reason for this. Members were advised the application was based on the first tranche of emergency travel which was awarded at the end of 2020, Officers continued to explain the Department for Transport looked at the delivery of tranche one and following this tranche two had been slightly reduced. During discussions it was confirmed that officers were learning lessons from this and agreed to circulate a letter from the Department of Transport explaining the decision to Members of the Committee.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 That the Committee note and endorse the approach to develop and implement a programme of Active Travel Tranche 2 schemes.**
- 1.2 That the Committee note and endorse the engagement and consultation process required to inform the Tranche 2 programme.**
- 1.3 That the Committee notes the requirement to delegate authority to the Director of Place, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, to review and make local changes to the Active Travel Tranche 2 programme taking into account local views and priorities.**

35. A13 Widening Project

The Assistant Director of Lower Thames Crossing and Place Delivery addressed members commenting that section 3 of the report highlighted the

current position of the project. She continued by highlighting the issues which had arisen since the December meeting which included a number of COVID-19 cases before Christmas which forced an early closure before the Christmas break as staff were required to self-isolate, there was now additional safety processes in place in line with government guidance and work was back up to 80% productivity. The Assistant Director of Lower Thames Crossing and Place Delivery continued commenting programming for the demolition of formal structures was being undertaken and the new footbridge was due to be reopened in the coming weeks.

Members heard the cost review was a work in progress as set out within the report, and in terms of programme completion the project was on plan for a completion date in March 2022, however the team were working to bring this forward to December 2021.

The Chair thanked the Assistant Director of Lower Thames Crossing and Place Delivery for her report and queried as to whether there would be a taxation on Thurrock residents to assist with the overspend on the project. It was explained that the cost of the project at present was still an estimate and therefore the final cost was a work in progress, with regular update reports being presented not only to this committee but the Standards and Audit Committee.

During discussions Councillor Kerin commented he was pleased to see the purchase costs had been reduced by £800,000 since the original budget, he further commented that the Council's costs had decreased by £128,000 and asked how this was the case. The Assistant Director of Lower Thames Crossing and Place Delivery explained in relation to land acquisitions, additional land acquisitions had recently been purchased for further utilities diversions to be completed.

He further queried as to the 711 compensation events which were issued and enquired as to what they were, who paid and who received costs. It was explained compensation events or matters were issues which had arisen or events which occurred after the scope of the contract had been agreed between parties. Any compensation events on this project would either be paid by the Council to the relevant delivery partner and could be for a range of issues such as utility diversions that were now required or related to design work. The Assistant Director of Lower Thames Crossing and Place Delivery commented it was important to note not all compensation events were subject to payment sometimes there could be a negative value compensation event, meaning there was little or no compensation payable so a like for like cost.

Councillor Kerin asked for a recent update on the CE's in terms of number and value. The Assistant Director of Lower Thames Crossing and Place Delivery advised that the quantum and value was something that was regularly changing but could provide more recent figures.

Councillor Kerin then put forward an additional recommendation "Request that Cabinet to commission a LGA peer review into the A13 Widening Project" this

was seconded by Councillor Gerrish who stated he felt it was a good suggestion for a major project where lessons needed to be learned, and by having an LGA Review would help to shine light on these lessons and offer support.

The Committee discussed the suggestion of an additional recommendation and enquired the cost of such a peer review. The Director of Place advised it was unknown if there would be a cost. The Assistant Director of Lower Thames Crossing and Place Delivery assured the Committee that lessons from this project had been learnt and as of September 2019 a different approach had been taken, and issues arising were from historic decisions at the start of the project.

Upon being put to the vote, Members voted as follows:

For: Councillors Kerin, Gerrish

Against: Councillors Anderson, Potter and Van Day

Abstained: Councillor Allen

The suggested recommendation was refused.

The Chair of the Committee sought clarification as to the cost of an LGA Peer Review and asked that the Director of Place circulate this to all Members.

RESOLVED:

That the Planning Transport Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes and comments on the report content.

36. Stanford-le-Hope Interchange Report

The Assistant Director of Lower Thames Crossing and Place Delivery advised Members the planning application for phase 1 station had been submitted and was due to be presented to the Planning Committee on the 11th of February. She continued to advise designs for phase 2 The Transport Hub had been submitted for pre-application feedback, with the aim to have the final application for planning permission submitted in late spring.

The Committee further heard that invitations for tenders were due to be sent out later this month, the budget and program of the project were on track. The Assistant Director of Lower Thames Crossing and Place Delivery then took Members through a presentation of the possible designs for project.

Councillor Allen Chair of the Committee, thanked the Assistant Director of Lower Thames Crossing and Place Delivery for her report commenting he felt the design was better than the original. He continued by enquiring as to whether there would be a separate taxi drop-off point at the station or if taxi's were to use the bus turnaround hub as well. It was explained that officers

were unsure if there was to be a taxi drop-off point, however this could be checked with the design team for the project and feedback to Members.

Councillor Kerin commented that he had concerns due to the lack of figures noted within the report, stating Members only seemed to get the figures on costs when seeking them at committees. He therefore asked the Assistant Director of Lower Thames Crossing and Place Delivery if she could confirm the specific budget and how much the project would cost. The Assistant Director of Lower Thames Crossing and Place Delivery commented the original budget envelope was around £16 million, this was then increased to £19.6 million and confirmed that officers had not spent the budget envelope on the project, although she didn't have a breakdown of the figures of the overall project in front of her. She continued by stating the team had been instructed to design the scheme with a clear scope to design to the available budget it was not until they were able to test the market and receive the returns on the tenders that they would have more information in terms of the cost to deliver the project.

Councillor Kerin continued to reference paragraph 3.5 within the report and enquired the following questions when the estimated cost of valuation was to take place, where the two checkpoints were, when was the final design due to be approved, and when was the benchmark to evaluate the tender submissions due to take place. It was clarified the first of the high-level estimated project cost evaluation exercises had already been undertaken, with the second being part of the tender exercise. Officers would then evaluate the tenders when returned, Members were advised an independent estimator would be instructed to do a quality check on the tender pricing which would support the tender evaluation exercise. Councillor Kerin then queried when with the final design approval would be agreed. Members were informed if the planning application was to be approved at the meeting on 11th of February, the next stage was detailed design drawings to inform the tender process, of which all tender documentation was prepared, the tender process would have a six week return date following this project officers would carry out the evaluation exercise which could be around April 2021.

Councillor Anderson thanked the Assistant Director of Lower Thames Crossing and Place Delivery for her report and positive presentation. He commented it was important to include input from all stakeholders including the resident steering groups to ascertain views of local residents.

During discussions Members raise concerns as to the different height levels of the land on the project site. Officers assured the Committee this was to be looked at by the design team and more detail would be provided when known, as for the number of car park spaces there would be at least the same number of parking spaces currently for the station if not more.

RESOLVED:

That the Planning Transport Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes and comments on the information provided relating to the Stanford le Hope Interchange project.

37. Integrated Transport Block Capital Programme 2021/22 - Highways Maintenance allocation and programme 2021/22

The Assistant Director for Planning, Transport and Public Protection presented the report alongside the Strategic Lead for Transportation Services, in doing so Members heard how the council's transportation service would prioritise funding from the Department for Transport integrated transport block capital program, to enhance the transport infrastructure and service position within the borough.

Members heard the total of ITB capital program allocation for Thurrock for the current year amounted to £971,000. It was explained the program had the ability to deliver an extensive range of transport improvements which reflected the vision and aims as set out within the Councils Transport Strategy. The main aims were to tackle congestion, deliver accessibility, improve air quality all making Thurrock roads safer which were key elements within the transport strategy. Officers further explained the Department for Transport block allocation program also prioritised the alignment of the highway assets management strategy.

The Strategic Lead for Highways Infrastructure advised Members the Department for Transport's annual statement provided the funds for the maintenance block allocation, the total of which was expected to be £193,800. It was advised this funding would assist to ensure ongoing improvements to the transport infrastructure and support ongoing improvements undertaken on the boroughs adopted highway network.

During the discussion Members enquired as to how local residents had been consulted and the feedback received. The Strategic Lead for Transport Services commented that officers had been in contact with the Chair and Vice-Chair of community forums to discuss the scheme proposals and seek feedback on any issues and concerns. He continued to explain the bus user groups and walking cycling network groups had also been consulted, as well as a separate page on council's consultation web page. Councillor Kerin stated that ward councillors attended community forums and could help officers in receiving feedback from the consultation if needed.

The Committee were taken through the various allocated programs and projects with each one being explained and outlined. Councillor Gerrish enquired as to concerns raised by residents regarding HGVs on the road network and the impact they had on the road. He enquired what mitigation the Council had with regards to HGVs. It was explained the freight management strategy required amending and updating, the team were currently working on this as it would outline the priorities for freight management moving forwards.

RESOLVED: The Planning Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny provide comment on the report and the following Cabinet recommendations:

- 1.1 Endorse the ITB Capital Programme, policy and prioritisation direction for the DfT ITB Block funding under the key Policy areas of Road Safety Engineering, Safer Routes to School, Area Intervention Programme and EV charging programme.**
- 1.2 Endorse the Highways Maintenance Block Allocation Programme (as detailed in Appendix 4) for 2021/22.**
- 1.3 Support the process which delegates authority to the Director of Place, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, to review and make local changes to the ITB programme (and additional funding allocations that may arise) taking into account local views and priorities.**
- 1.4 Delegate authority to the Director of Environment, Highways and Counter Fraud, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, to review and make local changes to the DfT Maintenance Block Allocation programme.**

(The Committee agreed to suspend standing orders at 9.15pm to enable the rest of the items on the Agenda to be completed).

38. Backing Thurrock: A roadmap for economic recovery, resilience and an return to growth

The Director of Place presented the report in doing so he explained, the strategy had been developed in two parts, the first of which had already been presented to the Committee in September and had gained Cabinet approval to go to the consultation stage. The consultation had now been completed and a final version of the roadmap for economic recovery had been prepared for approval by the Committee and then Cabinet.

The Assistant Director for Economic Growth and Partnership outlined the report to Members which was on pages 61 to 86 of the agenda via a presentation. He then invited Members to comment and asked if Members had any questions.

In discussions Members commented on the success of the COVID financial support to businesses and that this had been well received. Members also commented that it was disappointing to see a low turnout to the consultation, and enquired which methods officers used to advertise the consultation. Officers explained that the consultation process was about sharing the strategy, raising awareness as well as gathering feedback. A range of methods were used to engage on the strategy including reaching over 2500

businesses through Business Buzz. Although it seemed the consultation received a low response it isn't particularly unusual for that to be the case with a consultation of this type. Officers had sought and received feedback from some key stakeholders and representative bodies including Thurrock Business Board.

Officers explained that there would be opportunities for stakeholders to influence delivery for the lifetime of the strategy as the Action Plan will be a live document able to flex and adapt as opportunities arise. For example the relatively recent opportunity to bid for Freeport Status was added to the draft Action Plan. .

Councillor Kerin commented that within the report it noted the claimant count had increased by 4%, he continued by stating the adult education college was due to be closed and enquired what officers were doing to invest in long-term learning and to offer the skill sets required for upcoming jobs in the Borough. The Assistant Director for Economic Growth and Partnership commented that improving skills was crucial for economic growth and that the Council was committed to and had included within the action plan specific actions relating to skills including examining the need for a refresh of the Council's skills and employment support programmes, making them specific to meeting the future skills needs in Thurrock.

Councillor Kerin continued by enquiring what officers had planned in relation to broadband connectivity and the broadband gap within the borough. The Strategic Lead for Economic Growth explained the Council was part of the LFFN programme, which involves rollout of a fibre network across South Essex. He continued by advising, the Council had recently bid for funding through the SELEP to enable the LFFN program to be spread out even further across south Essex including a number of sites within Thurrock.

Members asked if the action plan could be put on the Committees work programme, so it could be monitored and for the Committee to be kept up to date with its progress.

RESOLVED:

That Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee were asked to:

- 1.1 Note the outcome of the consultation on the Backing Thurrock Roadmap;**
- 1.2 Note and comment on the final version of the Backing Thurrock Roadmap Part 1 which will be presented to Cabinet for approval;**
- 1.3 Note and comment on the draft Backing Thurrock Action Plan which will be a live document subject to further engagement with anchor public, private and voluntary organisations to refine actions and agree delivery mechanisms;**

39. Work Programme

The Chair of the Committee thanked officers and Members for their support and continued contribution to the Committee throughout the year. He further asked if an item on the Local Plan could be brought to the Committee at the next meeting.

Councillor Allen Chair of the Committee stated that he would like officers to answer the following question in relation to the new home targets within the Local Plan, he continued by stating if Thurrock were unable to build and develop the required housing then the Government through the National Planning Policy could tell the Authority where they should be developing for housing purposes.

Question 1. Who was halting the development of local homes?

Question 2. The Government's target was to produce 1058 homes in the last 3 years, the Council had completed 580, this was only 59% of the overall target. Were officers aware of any identified sites to be developed for housing?

The Director of Place confirmed a report on the Local Plan would be presented to the Committee at the first meeting of the new municipal year and would respond to the Chair's questions in writing as requested.

Members also sought that the following reports be included onto the Committees work programme:

- Update on the A13 Widening Project
- Backing Thurrock: A roadmap for economic recovery, resilience and an return to growth

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme be updated as per Members suggestions.

The meeting finished at 10.15 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**