

Minutes of the Meeting of the Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 21 January 2020 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Martin Kerin (Chair), John Allen (Vice-Chair), Oliver Gerrish, Andrew Jefferies and David Van Day

Apologies: Councillor Alex Anderson

In attendance:

Leigh Nicholson, Interim Assistant Director of Planning, Transport and Public Protection
Anna Eastgate, Assistant Director of Lower Thames Crossing and Transport Infrastructure Projects
Julie Nelder, Assistant Director of Highways, Fleet and Logistics
Stephen Taylor, Strategic Lead of Economic Development
Peter Wright, Strategic Lead of Highways and Infrastructure
Matthew Ford, Chief Engineer
Lisa Preston, Enforcement Manager
Navtej Tung, Principal Transport Planner
Colin Walker, Mott Macdonald Representative
Wendy Le, Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

11. Minutes

The minutes of the Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 9 October 2019 was approved as a true and correct record.

12. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

13. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

14. Fees and Charges Pricing Strategy 2020/21

The Chair announced that item 10 of the agenda – Fees and Charges Pricing Strategy 2020/21, would be heard first on the agenda due to the number of

officers in attendance for that meeting. After, the agenda would follow the order shown from item 5 downwards.

Presented by Leigh Nicholson, Interim Assistant Director of Planning, Transport and Public Protection, the report set out the proposed fees and charges to the services within the remit of the Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee. There was a slight amendment to the wording of 'in line with inflation' found in paragraph 3.5 and 5.2 on pages 81 and 83 of the agenda. The amended wording was 'in line with forecasted inflation'.

Officers gave an outline of:

- The decrease in permit fees under network management as the maximum fees previously charged had not been reached so was brought back down to the previous charge. Income was not affected.
- The fees relating to the town centre where charges were to support and regulate services and events.

Referring to appendix 1 of the report, Councillor Gerrish commented that the travel plans appeared to have a significant reduction in charges and questioned the impact on people using the travel plans. Navtej Tung, Principal Transport Planner, explained that the travel plans had been in place for a long time but had not decreased before. The reason for the decrease was to reflect what the service aimed to undertake with the travel plans. The intention for the travel plan was for the dedicated officer to monitor the plans by the developer and ensure the travel plans were delivered as expected.

Councillor Gerrish queried the impact of the fees and charges on the Council's revenue and asked for a consolidated figure of the existing charges; the new charges and the difference between the figures along with a breakdown of the figures. In response, Leigh Nicholson said that the information would be circulated to the Committee as he did not have the information on hand.

The Committee discussed the recommendations and agreed that recommendation 1.2 be amended with the additional wording of, 'subject to consultations with the relevant Portfolio Holder and to be reported back to the Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee.'

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 That Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the revised fees, including those no longer applicable, and comment on the proposals currently being considered within the remit of this committee.**
- 1.2 That Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted that director delegated authority will be sought via Cabinet to allow Fees & Charges to be varied within a financial**

year in response to commercial requirements, subject to consultations with the relevant Portfolio Holder and to be reported back to the Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

15. A13 East Facing Access Scheme Update

Presented by Leigh Nicholson, the report detailed a funding bid for £48.5m that the Council had submitted to the Major Road Network (MRN) Funding Submission for an A13 East Facing Access (EFA). The benefits of the scheme were highlighted within the report in the agenda.

A presentation was provided by Colin Walker, Mott Macdonald Representative. The presentation outlined the options assessment cases that considered topics such as deliverability of the scheme and improvements to air quality. The proposal was to submit option 1A and 6B to the Department for Transport (DfT) for funding.

Noting that works were proposed to commence in autumn 2023 and the costs of the project, the Chair asked how confident the organisation was in achieving this start date and in completing the project. Colin Walker explained that the first bid of the project had been honed to achieve under the £50 million budget and costs were now forecasted at £70 million. He went on to say that it was important for the costs to be calculated right because the DfT would only fund what was asked for. The cost had changed to £70 million because of a parcel of land that had not been included in the first cost.

Referring to the deliverability of the scheme highlighted as 'neutral-good' on page 21 of the agenda, the Chair sought clarification on this. Colin Walker explained that the certainty of the scheme was analysed through investigations undertaken and that deliverability issues lay in the acceptance of the scheme from the public and support from the Council. The options of 1A and 6B had been considered and was what would be presented to the DfT.

The Chair asked if the 'neutral-good' rank given, on the deliverability of the scheme, was based on the support of the Council or if it was based on whether there were enough funds available to build the scheme. Colin Walker replied that the organisation was currently in discussions with the Council regarding the public aspects of the scheme.

Noting that the budget funding of the scheme had begun in 2018, the Vice-Chair questioned whether the costs would increase again as the scheme was not due to commence work until autumn 2023. Colin Walker answered that inflation and contingencies had been considered within the given figure of £70 million. Adding to this, Anna Eastgate, explained that the service had been undertaking a review of the transport projects which would go through the required checks and balances before a project could progress further.

Councillor Gerrish stated that the scheme fell within his ward and that the scheme was much needed. He went on to comment on the height of the railway line that was within the area of the scheme and asked if consideration had been given to moving the railway line or turning the railway into a two way railway track.

In response, Colin Walker said that the scheme had started out as £50 million but would not rise further. All costs had been considered within the £70 million. Regarding the railway line, he said that the organisation had met with Network Rail and although there was the land available for a twin track, it would be best to focus on the highways options.

Councillor Gerrish felt it was imperative to have all options open particularly for the railway lines as the growth of Thurrock continued into the future. He went on to ask what levels of traffic modelling had been undertaken around the options particularly those concerning Pilgrims Lane around Lakeside where congestions problems usually occurred. Colin Walker explained that data for one forecasted year had been used to compare to the five options of the scheme. Although traffic modelling had not been undertaken, but there had been an option to adjust the road to encourage more traffic to use the road out of Lakeside. The current choice was the free flowing option to ensure quicker access onto and from the A13 to encourage traffic to move off the local roads around Lakeside.

Noting the assessment rate of option 6B, Councillor Gerrish sought an explanation as to why this option had been chosen. He mentioned that there was a traveller community within the area with option 6B. Aware of this, Colin Walker noted that the outcome would not benefit the traveller community as much as it would for the wider public.

Councillor Jefferies sought more clarification on the deliverability of the scheme and questioned how it had been assessed as neutral-good deliverability. Colin Walker replied that there were difficulties in achieving a completion of a scheme and there had not been a successful engagement with the public with this scheme. The uncertainties of the scheme had to be captured and the options considered were what was proposed for the scheme. The next step would be to begin stakeholder engagement following approval of the options presented.

Referring to the proposed Lower Thames Crossing (LTC), Councillor Jefferies questioned whether the LTC would impact upon the A13 EFA Scheme. Anna Eastgate replied that the impact of the LTC had not been considered and that the service was considering how the A13 EFA would benefit Thurrock's road networks. The scheme would run parallel to the LTC and the service had a cordon plan of the LTC that was used for planning Thurrock's road schemes.

Councillor Van Day sought clarification on whether the costs of the scheme had considered inflation and if the costs were capped. Colin Walker confirmed that the scheme had taken inflation costs into consideration and the costs were not capped but estimates.

Noting that option 6B was deemed to have less impact, the Vice-Chair questioned if this was in comparison to option 1A which had ancient woodlands. He also asked the location of the ancient woodlands and whether this was Davy Down. Colin Walker confirmed that option 6B had been compared against 1A and that the ancient woodland was Brick Down Wood. Option 1A would remove a significant amount of the ancient woodland whereas option 6B would have a minimal impact. The ancient woodland was privately owned and the organisation had been in contact with the owner to undertake the necessary investigations to confirm that the woodland was ancient and results showed that the woodland was indeed ancient and had been around since the 16th century.

The Vice-Chair mentioned that Pilgrims Lane was a travellers' site and asked whether this had been taken into account in the proposed option 6B. Colin Walker answered that the organisation were aware and that it had been a difficult step in choosing option 6B but this would be explained and outlined in the option submission to the DfT along with the impacts of the other options.

Referring to paragraph 2.2 on page 16 of the agenda, he commented on the wording of 'the Council's ambition to deliver 32,000 new homes' and said that the figure had come from national government as a recommended figure. He questioned if this was now the Council's ambition as worded in the report. Officers noted the wording and the concern raised and would be more attentive in wording for future reports.

The Committee discussed the wording of the recommendations and agreed that where it was worded 'endorse', this would be changed to 'comment'. The Committee also wished to see updates of the scheme brought back to Committee on a regular basis and agreed on adding a recommendation (1.4) for this.

Colin Walker thanked the Committee for their comments which was important to progressing the scheme in the right direction.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 That the Committee noted and commented on the work undertaken to develop the A13 East Facing Access scheme to date.**
- 1.2 That the Committee noted and commented on the Options Assessment process identifying the sifting process and prioritisation of schemes for submission to the Department for Transport.**
- 1.3 That the Committee noted the funding implications associated with the A13 East Facing Access scheme options, as set out in Section 7.**

1.4 That the Committee requested the A13 EFA Scheme to be brought back as and when the scheme progressed to future stages.

16. Stanford Le Hope Interchange Update

Presented by Anna Eastgate, Assistant Director of Lower Thames Crossing and Transport Infrastructure Projects, the report gave an update on the progress of the Stanford-le-Hope Interchange project in that:

- Required works had been undertaken in March 2019 to demolish the existing station building in order to secure funding from the National Stations Improvement Programme (NSIP) fund.
- Steel beams were removed over the site's café building in August 2019.
- Between 21 October and 20 December 2019, station security and operations were improved.
- Temporary station arrangements included: temporary ticket stations; car park layout changed to improve pick up and drop off; and the station power supply and new platform 1 access has re-introduced the ticket gate line.

The scheme was currently on pause for review. The next steps of the project was outlined in that:

- The site activities may potentially resume in early 2020;
- Platform 1 may be widened at the furthest end from London Road;
- The aim was to complete the project by August 2021 and updates would be provided via an eNewsletter that the service was working on with c2c.

The Chair welcomed the pause and review of the project and referring to paragraphs 3.1 to 3.6 of the report, he questioned why those proposed works had not been undertaken. He voiced his concerns in that the project had gotten so far and whether there had been mitigation strategies in place. Anna Eastgate answered that a 'post-mortem' had to be undertaken to assess what had happened with the proposed works. However, there were measures in place now to improve the project and the service was confident that the project would be completed.

The Chair questioned how long the 'post-mortem' would take and when the information would be made publicly available. Noting that works were proposed to begin in August 2021, he also questioned if the scheme would be deliverable by then. In response, Anna Eastgate said that the design had been simplified to reflect what could be delivered without the need for additional land. However, the existing planning application would require amendment and the service would be in discussions with designers to look at a high level design that was deliverable. The aim was to make savings and efficiencies where possible and to deliver the maximum benefits of the scheme. The service was undertaking workshops in lessons learned from projects and to instil confidence in officers involved in project work.

With the planning application, the Vice-Chair queried the timeframe for his amendment to be made. Leigh Nicholson explained that once the revised plans were received, the service would then analyse the next steps to be taken. If the amended plan was new, then it would need to go through the planning application process and 21 days would be required for the consultation period before the application could be submitted. From there, the application would go onto Planning Committee to be considered. The aim now was to get the project back on the right track.

Councillor Gerrish welcomed the idea of the lessons learnt from projects sessions. He thought it was important in helping the service to recover from projects quickly. Referring to the August 2021 start date, he questioned when the project would start again after the current pause and review. He thought it would be good to see the project plans and that projects had to be better reviewed. Anna Eastgate replied that the project gateway process would enable the Committee to feed into project plans.

The Chair and Councillor Gerrish felt democratic accountability had to be taken over the issues within the project and wished to see the project come back to Committee for an update. The Committee further discussed the importance of bringing schemes and projects to overview and scrutiny for review and to see which projects were and were not on track.

RESOLVED:

1.1 That the Planning Transport Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee commented on the progress on the Stanford le Hope Interchange project.

17. Integrated Transport Block Capital Programme 2020/2021, DfT Block Maintenance Capital Programme 2020/2021 and A126 Safer Roads Programme

Presented by Leigh Nicholson, the report set out the proposed expenditure for the programme of work that will utilise the funding allocations available to the Transport Development Service and Highways Infrastructure within the 2020/21 financial year. The report details the Integrated Transport Block (ITB) Capital allocation from the Department for Transport (DfT) and the DfT Block Allocation for Maintenance. The proposed works would implement improvement and enhance schemes in the strategic priority areas that were set out within the Council's Transport Strategy and Implementation Plan.

DfT has also confirmed that the Council would receive a further £2,488,792 to deliver safety improvements on the A126 section of the roadwork and this has been allocated through the Safer Roads Fund with further funds allocated to the 2020/21 financial year. The recommendations on page 50 of the agenda gave the list of approvals sought from the Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the details mentioned in the report.

Noting the conflict points within Thurrock where accidents were most likely to happen, the Chair sought clarification on how the scheme would improve these conflict points. Matthew Ford, Chief Engineer, directed the Committee's attention to paragraph 3.8 of the report. He went on to explain how the allocated funding would be set out over the next 3 years as highlighted on page 52 of the agenda. The service would be undertaking survey work this year to identify the root causes for accidents on the route and to identify remedial measures to mitigate those causes. The service was working with other teams on where these mitigation measures could be implemented to reduce the impact that would be caused to residents due to the current large infrastructure works that was being undertaken on London Road.

Councillor Jefferies sought more information on the list of roads to be resurfaced in appendix 1 of the report. Peter Wright, Strategic Lead of Highways and Infrastructure explained that the roads highlighted in orange were the roads in reserve as it enabled the service to move these schemes up if other road schemes had issues such as road space. The service were currently reviewing the schemes to confirm costs.

Councillor Jefferies mentioned that the roads on South Road in South Ockendon was regularly dug up and resurfaced and asked whether utility companies undertook works correctly before the road was resurfaced. Peter Wright explained that there were regular complaints regarding South Road and the service worked with the network management teams on forthcoming works. He went on to say that London Road had regular issues which was why major reworking of the road was currently being undertaken to prevent further issues. Some parts of South Road were in a bad state and works were often undertaken to minimise the impact.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 That the Planning Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny commented on the report and the following Cabinet recommendations:**
 - 1.1.1 Approve the Integrated Transport Block Capital Programme for 2020/21 (as detailed in Appendix 1) and notes the process by which the Safer Routes to School and Road Safety Engineering programme are assessed and prioritised for implementation.**
 - 1.1.2 Notes and approves the A126 Safer Roads fund programme for the next 3 years (as detailed in Appendix 2).**
 - 1.1.3 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 and Safer Roads programmes taking into account local views and priorities.**
 - 1.1.4 Approve the DfT Maintenance Block Allocation programme for 2020/21 (as detailed in Appendix 2).**

1.1.5 Delegates authority to the Director of Environment and Highways, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, to review and make local changes to the DfT Maintenance Block Allocation programme.

18. Grays Town Centre Update

Presented by Anna Eastgate, the report provided an update to Members about the changes to traffic management in Grays Town Centre and the reintroduction of two-way traffic in Orsett Road that was the final part of phase 2 of the Grays town centre traffic management improvements project. An enquiry inbox for the project had been set up and was monitored. Officers had walked around the temporary traffic diversions in place (whilst the project were underway) to ensure the signage was correct. There had been some miscommunication with residents on Bedford Road regarding resident parking which had been resolved.

The Chair questioned whether residents and businesses had been warned of the level of disruption from the forthcoming works. Anna Eastgate replied that residents had been warned in October 2019 with the two dates of the works due to take place which was initially 6 January 2020 but had been moved to the week after due to traffic management issues. There were not many complaints regarding the notice of works but complaints were focussed more on the congestion caused by the works and by people driving the wrong way on a one way signed road. The service was working with the police to enforce the signs in place. However, traffic flow usually settled after people became used to the signage.

The Chair said that Grays town centre could not afford to lose its economic activity and queried whether businesses had the opportunity to give their views on the project. Anna Eastgate answered that there had been a complaint from a business owner on Clarence Road in Grays which had been in regards to the owner finding difficulty in getting the vehicle out onto the road but the traffic diversion had not affected his business itself.

Councillor Gerrish questioned the target end date for the project and if the traffic diversion would be removed in parts or in its entirety. For completion of physical works, Anna Eastgate said that the aim was for the week commencing 30 March 2020. Once works were completed, the traffic diversion would be removed in its entirety. A SCOOT (Split Cycle Offset Optimisation Technique) traffic system would be implemented following on from this in April 2020.

Peter Wright explained that a SCOOT traffic system was generally used in London and one was in place at the Treacle Mine roundabout. The SCOOT traffic system analysed the traffic flow through loops installed underground and traffic lights were manipulated according to the traffic situation. For the system to work in Grays town centre, the traffic flow and patterns had to settle

before it could be implemented therefore traffic would run on fixed time traffic lights until the end of April 2020.

The Vice-Chair commented on the efficiency of the SCOOT traffic system on the Treacle Mine roundabout. In response, Peter Wright said that the system worked to the best of its ability but the Treacle Mine roundabout had become a series of junctions as opposed to being a roundabout. The issue was one of capacity rather than the system itself.

RESOLVED:

1.1 That Committee commented on the update of the project progress.

19. A13 Widening Update

The report was presented by Anna Eastgate and outlined the progress of the A13 Widening scheme. An update had been provided to the Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January 2019 and since then, a number of issues had arisen that had impacted upon the cost and schedule of the project which had a forecasted completion date of Autumn 2020. These were outlined in paragraphs 3.3 to 3.10 of the report on pages 74 to 75 of the agenda. As a result, works were being undertaken in parallel as opposed to sequentially to the project timeline and the rate of spend had increased with the project no longer being within its budget.

Mitigation measures were being undertaken for works to improve communications to ensure efficiency; collaborative planning; additional project management resources; and appointment of external auditors. With the funding gap, a number of options were being considered which included an increase in grant funding for the project and funding contributions from the private sector or from Thurrock Council. The project was undergoing a full review to determine the end date.

The Chair commented that the issues of the project was beyond officers' accountability and instead moved on to democratic accountability. He felt that the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration had to provide an explanation on the issues that had arose from this project.

The Vice-Chair sought clarification on the costs of the project and what the overspend would be. Anna Eastgate explained that the cost was originally valued at £70 million and the DfT had allocated £90 million of funds towards the project. However due to the unforeseen issues, the service had brought this to the SELEP (South East Local Enterprise Partnership) with a view to identify more funding from the DfT. An Agreement in Principle had been provided to allocate additional funding subject to a value for money exercise.

Regarding road projects, Councillor Allen asked if there was a contingency in place for overspend of the budget and unforeseen circumstances. Anna Eastgate confirmed that there were contingencies which could also be seen

on other schemes. A recent government document gave guidance on learning lessons for these types of road projects. She went on to say that work on existing assets usually brought up unfound issues.

Councillor Gerrish sought more information on the current process of the project and on the overspend. Anna Eastgate replied that the service was trying to identify a range of figures to allocate to the project which would be announced once the project was in a more robust position. This would be issued along with a communication plan and the next steps of the project, once internal processes had been followed.

Referring to the Chair's earlier comment on democratic accountability, Councillor Van Day commented that the issues that had arisen from the project were unforeseen circumstances that could not have been controlled. Agreeing to this, Councillor Jefferies said that checks were in place to ensure the project would get back on track. The Vice-Chair added that it could not have been foreseen what was underneath the A13.

The Chair commented that there were issues in other projects as well and not just the A13 which explained his reasons for suggesting that the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration to account for these as the Portfolio Holder managed the officers on these projects as well as the projects. The Vice-Chair did not feel that the accountability lay with the Portfolio Holder and instead looked to the Senior Officers.

Agreeing with the Chair, Councillor Gerrish questioned when the Committee would see an update to the project and lessons learned from the review. He felt a report should be provided back to the Committee as soon as possible given the gravity of the situation.

The Chair felt that an extra recommendation should be added to recommend 'that the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration considered his position in light of the recent project situations'. Councillor Gerrish agreed to this recommendation. The Vice-Chair, Councillor Jefferies and Councillor Van Day did not agree to this recommendation.

RESOLVED:

1.1 That the Planning Transport Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee commented on the progress on the A13 Widening scheme.

20. Work Programme

The Committee discussed the items that were allocated in the 'to be confirmed' section of the work programme and asked if these could be allocated to the next meeting on 17 March 2020. Officers would discuss with the Chair and Director following on from Committee.

The meeting finished at 9.16 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**