

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 7 OCTOBER
2020**

Present: Councillors D Burton (Chairman), Clark, English, Garten, Mrs Grigg, McKay, Munford, Parfitt-Reid and Spooner

Also Present: Councillors Brindle and Perry

209. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

210. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no Substitute Members.

211. URGENT ITEMS

There were three urgent items that were published which included, Item 18 – Council Response to the Government’s Proposed Planning Reform: ‘White Paper: Planning for the Future’, Item 19 – A229 Bluebell Hill Junction Improvement Scheme and Item 20 – Local Plan Review Update.

Item 18 – Council Response to the Government’s Proposed Planning Reform would be taken with Item 14 – Reference from the Biodiversity and Climate Change Working Group – White Paper: Planning for the Future Consultation Response.

212. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

Councillor Brindle was present as a Visiting Member for Item 19 – A229 Blue Bell Hill Junction Improvement Scheme.

Councillor Perry was present as a Visiting Member for Item 20 – Local Plan Review Update.

213. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

214. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

All Members had been lobbied on:

Item 14 – Reference from the Biodiversity and Climate Change Working Group – White Paper: Planning for the Future Consultation Response; Item 18 – Council Response to the Government’s Proposed Planning Reform: ‘White Paper: Planning for the Future’; and Item 20 – Local Plan Review Update.

Councillor English had also been lobbied on Item 10 – Question and Answer Session from Members of the Public.

215. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That all items be taken in public as proposed.

216. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 22 SEPTEMBER 2020

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed at a later date.

217. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

218. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were two questions from Members of the Public.

Question from Ms Claudine Russell to the Chairman of the Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee

‘Having watched your lively debate at this committee and at full council last week and seen the importance that you have all given to a public consultation for the local plan review process, can I ask this committee why in your evidence pack documents from your previous meeting on the 22nd September, the Housing Spatial Topic Paper p.18 has altered the results of question TQ11 from the Scoping Themes and Issues Public Consultation 18a to ignore the fact that the overwhelming public response to this question was that respondents wanted a combination of Maidstone focus and dispersal as the development options?’

The Chairman responded to the question.

Ms Russell asked the following supplementary question:

‘How will Councillors make sure that all consultation responses are taken into consideration by officers throughout this Local Plan Review process as you make these critical decisions for our borough and its current residents?’

The Chairman responded to the question.

Question from Mrs Eileen Riden to the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee

The Democratic Services Officer read out the question on Mrs Riden's behalf.

'The new cycle lanes in King Street are causing havoc. Disability Bays removed, a new disability Bay in a traffic lane, bus stops removed, this is all causing traffic chaos and hold ups, we are fearful there will be accidents. Would you please let residents and the general public know the plans to redress this dangerous situation?'

The Chairman responded to the question.

The full responses were recorded on the webcast and were made available to view on the Maidstone Borough Council website.

To access the webcast recording, please use the link below:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C4lb42UBMw8>

219. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

220. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee were informed that the Anti-Idling Campaign Motion and the petition presented to Full Council on 30 September would be referred to the 18 November meeting of the Committee.

The Kent Rail Strategy Public Consultation Response would be undertaken through communication via email between Committee Members and the Head of Planning and Development.

Two Member requests were made to include a Parking Charges and Tariff Options update report for April 2021, and to temporarily add a report on the Active Travel Measures in force to the work programme. If the issue was dealt with by the Maidstone Joint Transportation Board at its next meeting, this would be removed.

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

221. REPORTS OF OUTSIDE BODIES

Councillor Garten presented his report as the Council's representative on the Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee.

RESOLVED: That the Reports of Outside Bodies be noted.

222. REFERENCE FROM THE BIODIVERSITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE WORKING GROUP - WHITE PAPER: PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE CONSULTATION RESPONSE AND COUNCIL RESPONSE TO THE GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSED PLANNING REFORM: 'WHITE PAPER: PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE'

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager introduced the reference that had been agreed by the Biodiversity and Climate Change Working Group (BDCCWG).

The Head of Planning and Development introduced the report on the Council's Response that had been amended to include the Committee's comments on the draft responses from the 22 September 2020 meeting and the draft consultation responses as agreed by the BDCCWG.

RESOLVED: That the content of the national Government consultation: 'White Paper: Planning for the Future' be noted and the Council's response be agreed for submission.

223. UPPER STONE STREET AIR QUALITY UPDATE REPORT

The Director of Regeneration and Place introduced the report and noted that the Committee had previously considered options to improve air quality in Upper Stone Street in July 2019. In early 2020, a working group of officers from both Kent County Council (KCC) as the highways authority, and the Council was created to explore further enforcement options. Data on the incidents of congestion had been provided that demonstrated an average of four incidents per week, with the second most common cause having been obstruction or lane closure.

Specialist legal advice had been taken which confirmed that whilst a red route was legally possible to install, it would not be the most appropriate option for KCC as a significant level of investment would be required. This would take the form of increased CCTV powers and additional manpower, which would need to be balanced by the likely penalty income to be generated. It was felt that strengthening the existing traffic regulation orders, with collaboration through enforcement to be provided by the Council was the most suitable option. The Council had commissioned a specialist environmental consultancy to discern the benefits of introducing new green infrastructure measures to improve air quality, which was shown in Appendix 1 to the report.

The Parking Services Manager confirmed that double yellow lines do not prevent a vehicle from stopping, loading or unloading, which had contributed to the proposal of introducing loading restrictions.

RESOLVED:

1. That the following recommendations for implementation be referred to the Maidstone Joint Transportation Board on 14 October 2020:
 - a. Controls to restrict waiting, loading, and unloading in Upper Stone Street be extended by increasing the current restricted

period to apply on all days Monday to Sunday Double Yellow Lines and 'no waiting at any time'. The waiting restrictions will be supported by a loading restriction to protect the peak traffic periods on all days from 7am to 8pm. The impact will then be monitored for a period of 12-months post implementation and the findings presented to the MJTB, and that if unsuccessful, the Board then be asked to pursue the Red Route;

- b. Contraventions can be monitored more closely through the KCC traffic control room, who will install an additional camera/s and will provide direct and real-time communication to the MBC parking enforcement agent. Enforcement officers will then be deployed rapidly to deal with any contravention observed through the issues of Penalty Charge Notices;
 - c. Some of the RSK Environment Ltd recommendations for green infrastructure enhancements be incorporated into a new scheme agreed with KCC involving the removal of one existing tree, and the planting of six new upright growing trees of native species, which are known to be especially beneficial for air quality;
 - d. One-way designations for some side streets to Upper Stone Street be explored; and
2. Post-implementation, the committee will review the success of the scheme and consider its extension to include Palace Avenue and Lower Stone Street.

224. PARKING SERVICES UPDATE

The Parking Services Manager introduced the report which highlighted the actions taken in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Parking restrictions were relaxed until 1 July 2020, as many residents did not have parking permits, as they would usually be out of the area during the restricted parking period. There were cases of overcrowding, restricted traffic flow and dangerously parked vehicles.

To reduce the on-street parking demand, car park facilities were extended to permit holders. The restrictions and tariffs remained in place for normal users during this time period. Incidents of dangerous parking were dealt with by the enforcement team through an initial advisory notice placed on the car and then through a Penalty Notice Charge (PNC). Enforcement teams were deployed alongside refuse collectors to target areas of consistent difficulty, with 1500 letter hand-delivered to residents on the worst affected roads. Specific advice had been given to the Council's enforcement team.

The Department for Transport (DFT) had an ongoing consultation on pavement parking enforcement proposals. If approved, these measures

would allow civil enforcement officers to act against pavement obstructions and could be introduced in 2021. The Committee would be kept updated of any changes made.

The Parking Services Manager highlighted that as the necessary changes to software and signage production had not taken place prior to 1 April 2020, the increased parking tariffs had not been implemented. This was due to the contractors and supplier's employees being furloughed.

In response to queries, it was confirmed that emissions-based charges would not be implemented as the technology required to make a real-time link between a vehicle and the DVLA Databases did not exist. It was expected that this technology would be achieved in the near future. The Committee expressed thanks to the team for their hard work during the lockdown period.

RESOLVED: That

1. The update and information relating to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on parking operations, including the financial implications, be noted; and
2. The planned parking tariff increase be deferred until the annual fees and charges review in January 2021.

225. 1ST QUARTER FINANCIAL UPDATE & PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT 2020/21

The Head of Finance introduced the report and highlighted that the Committee's budget had been agreed prior to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. The shortfall was £1.6million. It was hoped this would be partially mitigated by the Council's claim against the income lost under the Sales, Fees and Charges scheme.

Particular attention was drawn to the loss of income from parking tariffs and the reduced demand for planning services. There had been an overspend to the Local Plan Review (LPR) budget due to unforeseen areas of spending. The Committee's two capital schemes were to be completed by the end of the year.

The Policy and Information Manager noted that one of the five targetable indicators had missed the quarter one target; number of affordable homes built, by 12 homes. This was a direct result of the lockdown period. Construction had re-started but would take longer due to the Covid-19 secure measures enforced.

The additional key performance indicator that concerned the number of open enforcement cases would be reported to the Committee from the second quarter. An interactive dashboard had been created with the planning enforcement team, with the relevant data to be collected at the beginning of each month.

RESOLVED: That

1. The Revenue position as at the end of Quarter 1 for 2020/21, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant variances have been identified, be noted;
2. The Capital position as at the end of Quarter 1 be noted; and
3. The Performance positions as at Quarter 1 for 2020/21, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant issues have been identified, be noted.

226. A229 BLUE BELL HILL JUNCTION IMPROVEMENT SCHEME

The Principal Planning Officer introduced the report which set out the Council's draft response to the consultation that Kent County Council (KCC) had launched from 15 September 2020 to 19 October 2020. The consultation was on the proposed highway improvement works to the Bluebell Hill section of the A229, including Junction 3 of the M2 and Junction 6 of the M20.

The Bluebell Hill section of the A229 was key in local and strategic journeys, with an estimated 68,000 vehicle movements per day. Options one and two would involve the same improvement works; widening of the south-bound carriageway of the A229 to three lanes, enlarging the Running Horse Roundabout to the West and the improvement of the slip road onto the M20 Eastbound from the Cobtree roundabout. Option three would produce further changes, whereby Junction 6 of the M20 would be redesigned to provide a new grade separate junction. It was expected that a preferred option would be announced by KCC in Spring 2021 and cost £142million. Completion of any work would coincide with the opening of the Lower Thames Crossing in 2027.

The Committee supported the draft responses attached and it was noted that the Boxley Ward Members supported option 3.

RESOLVED: That the content of the Kent County Council 'A229 Blue Bell Hill Junction Improvement Scheme' consultation be noted, and the Council's response as set out in Appendix 1 to the report be approved for submission.

227. LOCAL PLAN REVIEW UPDATE

The Strategic Planning Manager introduced the report following the agreement of Full Council on 30 September 2020, to the previous recommendations of the Committee regarding the Local Development Scheme (LDS) and Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). A minimum 3-week Regulation 18 public consultation process would begin in early December and the Council's website had been updated to reflect the recent changes made.

The Strategic Planning Manager highlighted that work would be undertaken with the Parish Councils and key stakeholders to maximise the effectiveness of the consultation. The draft consultation document would be presented to the Committee during the 9 November 2020 meeting.

RESOLVED: That the contents of the report be noted.

228. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 7.54 p.m.