

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORTATION
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON
TUESDAY 18 JANUARY 2011**

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs Blackmore (Chairman)
Councillors Beerling, Ross, Verrall, Vizzard and Yates

61. The Committee to consider whether all items on the agenda should be web-cast

The decision to web-cast the Meeting provoked discussion with some Members. They were concerned that it was not timely to comment on the overarching Local Transport Plan for Kent 2011-2016 (LTP3) which was included in the report for the meeting. The report provided background to Maidstone Borough Council's response to the consultation on LTP3.. Maidstone's decision was to respond to in the form of a letter so the County Council could receive their views on their priorities with particular reference to the specific transport issues faced by the borough. The Plan would be looked to put in place measures to remedy these issues. These issues could therefore be explicitly used to question the witness with the details from Maidstone's response most relevant to the recent work of the Committee highlighted in the item's covering report.

Members concerns lay primarily with the issue that the Core Strategy which was still under discussion and that their comments could be misconstrued via the web-cast if the document to be discussed was not relevant to current developments. Members also queried whether recommendations made would be carried forward.

The Chairman resolved with Members agreement that they should glean as much information as they could from Mr Crick on the relevant issues that they had been exploring such as the principle of Park and Ride and how Kent County Council can help make it work. Members suggested and the Committee as a whole agreed that the meeting should be conducted in the normal manner with exploratory questions, a discussion and recommendations if appropriate.

62. Apologies for Absence

An Apology for absence was received from Councillor Sharp.

63. Notification of Substitute Members

There were none.

64. Notification of Visiting Members

There were none.

65. Disclosures by Members and Officers:

There were none.

66. To consider whether any items should be taken in private because of the possible disclosure of exempt information

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

67. Minutes of the Meeting held on 16 November 2010

Resolved: That the minutes of the Environment and Transportation Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting of 16 November be agreed as a correct record and duly signed by the Chairman.

68. Local Transport Plan for Kent 2011-16 (LTP3)

The Chairman welcomed Paul Crick, KCC Director of Integrated Transport Strategy to the meeting.

Mr Crick began with a presentation on Local Transport Plan 3 (LTP 3) and explained that the guidance from the Department for Transport states that a good LTP will contain evidence of a long term strategy within which the 5 year implementation plan was set. Mr Crick explained the requirements of LTP3 which were: a statutory duty to have an LTP in place on 1 April 2011; statutory & implementation plans; no reward funding linked to LTP3; to have regard to the needs of the disabled; and to carry out a Strategic Environmental Assessment. He explained the importance of having a robust transport strategy to determine: the direction of the next 5 years; the issues; what they want to achieve; and identifying alternative funding sources. The officer made reference to Growth without Gridlock, a transport delivery plan for Kent which was described as a 20 year aspirational document which includes a funding plan for key transport infrastructure. This Document was said to be overarching to the LTP3, providing the long term strategy previously mentioned with district strategies then sitting below the LTP3 in terms of the overall structure. Mr Crick spoke about cutbacks that would be faced in terms of funding and emphasised that money needed to be spent in the right places with the maximum impact. Mr Crick went on to explain the Budget Allocation Methodology which would be distributed across 5 categories: Growth Without Gridlock 45%; A safer & healthier county 15%; supporting independence 15%; tackling climate change 15%; and enjoying life in Kent 10%. Mr Crick confirmed that with Maidstone maintaining Growth Point Status, Maidstone should be eligible for 4 out of 5 of the areas of funding.

The officer explained the consultation process that had taken place which ended on 31 December 2010. The Committee made the point that growth without gridlock would be hard to achieve making reference to the traffic

congestion on Maidstone's roads. The officer responded by explaining that they would be looking at Maidstone and the roads that feed into routes to and from the town. Rail travel was raised and discussed regarding its present and future relevance to development. Mr Crick explained that KCC were consulting on a Rail Action Plan until 28 February 2010 and the final document would be launched at the 3rd Kent Rail Summit in April 2011. The Officer explained that it was important to inform rail users and that rail was being tackled and did form part of the Integrated Transport Strategy.

Members raised the issue of bidding for funding and queried how this would be dealt with. Mr Crick explained it would be done via a Liaison Officer at MBC and with Kent Highways. He explained that whilst next year's schemes were agreed, the schemes for 2012/2013 were available for bids. With the Joint Transportation Board taking place the following evening Members were keen to focus on the issue of funding availability. Mr Crick explained that this was now public information available from the Department for Transport as Kent had now been given its allocation. The Officer agreed to provide Members with the relevant information for the following evening's meeting.

Members queried how they could tackle the issues with greatest relevance to Maidstone in relation to the 6 options specified in the earlier presentation. Members were concerned that increase in car travel could bring congestion to the point of gridlock which would impact on the economic growth by deterring businesses and employers from coming to the borough. Mr Crick alleviated the fears of some Members by explaining that transport modelling would be completed as part of the Local Development Framework (LDF). Park and Ride he advised would need to become a cheaper alternative to long stay car parking with clean, modern vehicles in use. Members looked to Mr Crick for his perspective on Bus Lanes in relation to this. He explained that he felt that they had a time and place. He expressed he was not a big fan on the basis of air quality problems being increased with cars queuing for longer. He resolved it to be something of a dichotomy. Members suggested that a county approach to Park and Ride would be a better way forward. The Bluebell Hill site on the A229 was raised in relation to this proposition and a larger site was suggested for the existing London Road Park and Ride. The Committee also discussed with the Officer the housing expansion in Tonbridge and Malling and the further impact this would have on Maidstone with approximately 6,000 more homes just outside the borough. Mr Crick agreed that an Integrated Transport Strategy needed to look at these boundaries as well as areas like Ashford and that it was about working with each other to find the best solutions and the shortage of funding gave that impetus. Other issues that were highlighted as having a specific impact on Maidstone included Operation Stack and the health issues that would have to be dealt with as result of traffic congestion and pollution. Mr Crick guided Members to the Growth Without Gridlock Executive Summary which he explained considered everything that had been raised.

The Committee moved on to discuss specific traffic management methods such as gating. The Officer explained that he had experience of this being used in Norfolk. It was something that needed support locally and could be considered under Crime and Disorder reduction legislation; like bus lanes it worked in the right places.. It was something that needed to be thought about carefully because of the issues with air quality; gating would result in this being moved to another area which could be more detrimental than before. A different approach to traffic light management was proposed by Members with observations regarding traffic at night being held up unnecessarily by traffic lights and the negative impact this then had with increased carbon emissions. A new model could be created but there would be a cost in implementing it but the reduction of emissions remained the goal so the proposal was considered positive by all.

Members wanted to gain the benefit of the Officer's opinion of Maidstone's problems with congestion at an opportune moment when he was new to the area. Mr Crick explained that Maidstone was not unique and that it was quite common for all roads to lead to a gyratory. Alternative modes of transport, and car sharing were suggested as solutions to the Committee. In relation to air quality Members highlighted the issue of channelling to the Officer and the poor relationship between KCC Highways and Planning that exasperated the problem. This point was taken on board by the Officer who referred to joined up working and organisations working together as being the way forward. Economic growth as well as the growth that would come from housing development would need to be tackled with a package of different measures which the Officer assured Members KCC would work with Maidstone on, once they had established their options as part of the Core Strategy. He said overall it was about giving people choice not stopping cars. Members asked for the Officer's views on specific issues relating to the Park and Ride. He felt that long stay car parking needed to be more expensive than Park and Ride and with short stay parking there would be a need for balance in terms of revenue and attracting people to the Town. Members surmised that this could also be of benefit to air quality. Mr Crick allayed the common belief that increasing car parking charges would encourage people to use Bluewater by highlighting the balance between rising petrol charges and the cost of travelling further a field and the cost of parking.

Members questioned who LTP3 was aimed at in terms of funding opportunities. The Officer explained that it was a document that all Councils had to create but in relation to earlier discussions it would help those wanting to bid to KCC. Members queried whether districts could bid with KCC. The Officer explained that successful bids would take a business lead and gave an example of the Thanet Parkway Station which supported economic growth in Thanet and the accelerated development of Kent International Airport at Manston. Members highlighted concerns about Maidstone's lack of economic infrastructure and whilst the Officer agreed that a big employer in Maidstone would be a benefit, working with the Local Chamber of Commerce (Invicta Kent) and local planning remained a way forward.

The Chairman thanked Mr Crick for attending the Meeting and for his guidance and expertise in deliberating the issues of concern.

Resolved : That

- a) The KCC Rail Action Plan would be made available to the Committee by the Scrutiny Officer; and
- b) The details of the spend profiles discussed by Paul Crick would be provided by the Scrutiny Officer by the following evening.

69. Carbon Management Plan

The Committee welcomed Jennifer Hunt, EMS Project Manager and David Tibbitt, Property and Procurement Manager to the Meeting to discuss the Draft Carbon Management Plan.

Ms Hunt explained that about a year ago the Council had signed up for a more formal approach to achieve their targets which had resulted in the Draft Carbon Management Plan presented. The plan referred to achieving targets via education and physical reductions as well as those that are more embedded. The Plan was being developed in conjunction with the Carbon Trust. Members clarified that the report was dealing with specifically reducing Council Emissions.

The Committee queried whether anything had been omitted from the plan due to cost implications. Ms Hunt brought to the attention of the Committee item 4.4 in the Draft Report: Long Term Projects where projects were detailed that were currently considered as aspirational and were in an early stage of consideration. The Officer explained that projects could have an initial capital cost but the plan sought to demonstrate, where possible, the recovery period and payback. Members queried how CO₂ emissions were measured by the Council. Mr Tibbitt explained that it was a calculation of the amount of energy used multiplied by the emission factor. Members highlighted the existing projects (4.1) and in particular those that formed a high percentage of the overall target. This included P11: Staff Awareness, Training and Energy Policy which was put at 7.2%. Ms Hunt explained that this would be achieved through better training and the fine tuning of the buildings through staff having a more conscious approach to the nature of their working environment. The table listing the projects gave the Committee a detailed breakdown which included the pay back time in years for each project which for P11 was immediate, the capital and operational costs as well as the annual financial and CO₂ savings. Members questioned the Crematorium Heat Recovery project which would involve using the heat from cremations to heat the building. It was established that this had not been viable when the Crematorium had been refurbished as it was not considered good payback at the time but that the Carbon Trust would look at this again and this would need to include Officer time. Ms Hunt concluded that the report was specifically looking at the Council's Operations; their buildings; their Fleet; and their Contractors. This would help to reduce costs, improve efficiency and reduce the impact on climate change.

The Committee moved on the wider aspirations for the borough and suggested that the onus would be on Planning and Building Control to create sustainable buildings that would improve on the statutory requirements. Members questioned the targets that had been set with regard to Carbon Emissions and whether or not there would be any penalties. The target of an 80% reduction of Carbon Emissions by 2050 was given to Officers. It was explained whilst the Government had not put in place any penalties there would be incentives to help speed up any gaps in progress. Part of the target which was greening our energy would be achieved in part by significant changes in technology over the next 30-40 years. Ms Hunt explained that the borough could become as efficient as possible to play our part.

The Chairman thanked the Officers for attending and asked that they come back so that the Committee could be involved in the development of the document when it is revisited on a 6 monthly basis.

It was resolved: That the Committee would remain involved with the development of the Carbon Management Plan.

70. Future Work Programme

The Committee discussed their Future Work Programme in some detail due to their decision to cancel the December Meeting. Members also considered the Forward Plan.

Resolved that:

- a) The Scrutiny Officer will request a written update from the LSP for the next Meeting;
- b) The Provision, Maintenance and Ownership of Communal Spaces should be moved to the March Meeting;
- c) The Security of Water Supplies would be the focus of the February Meeting; and
- d) The Chairman and Scrutiny Officer would have an informal meeting to discuss the Integrated Transport Strategy Consultation as a second topic for the February Meeting.

71. Duration of Meeting

6.30pm to 9.35pm.