

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE REGENERATION & ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 27 SEPTEMBER 2011**

PRESENT: Councillor Burton (Chairman)
Councillors Cuming, Paterson, Black, English, Mrs Joy,
Ross, Springett and Newton

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

Resolved: That all items on the agenda be web-cast.

58. Apologies.

Councillor Beerling sent his apologies.

59. Notification of Substitute Members.

Councillor Paterson was a Substitute Member for Councillor Beerling.

60. Notification of Visiting Members.

There were no Visiting Members.

61. Disclosures by Members and Officers:

It was noted that for agenda Item 8, Traffic Congestion Councillor Cuming declared a personal interest by virtue of having contracted work with Spot Hire Travel company.

62. 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.

63. Minutes of the meeting held on 23 August & 5 September 2011

Resolved: That the minutes of the meetings held on 23 August and 5 September 2011 be agreed as a correct record and duly signed by the Chairman.

64. Traffic Congestion

The Chairman welcomed Robert Patterson, Business Development Manager of Arriva, Norman Kemp, Co-owner (Director & Company Secretary) of Nu-Venture Coaches Ltd, Dan Johns, Duty Manager of Streamline Taxis who was a substitute for Stewart Smith, Dan Pigot,

Corporate Sales Manager and Alistair Rhead, Manager for Electric Vehicles for the UK and Ireland both of Mitsubishi to the meeting.

Mr Pigot and Mr Rhead gave a presentation on the Mitsubishi i-MiEV, attached at Appendix A, which the Committee were interested in as it was a zero-emission vehicle and would contribute to reducing traffic pollution.

In answer to a question, Mr Rhead explained that the figure illustrating 114g/km was from the 2007 petrol model of the i-MiEV, not the electric version. As a normal three pin socket was required for charging the vehicle, their studies found that people adapted quickly to the habit of charging their car primarily every night, and then as they grew accustomed to their driving styles and fuel usage, every two or three nights. They were aware that the future may require them to change to the European Union standard plug, but did not foresee that being for another 10 years or so. Mr Pigot stated that the maximum range was 93miles (150km), and insurance band 29 out of 50.

The Committee enquired about the safety for pedestrians, as the vehicle was renowned for being quiet and asked if any accidents had been recorded. Mr Rhead confirmed that there were currently no legal restrictions concerning the volume of noise required from vehicles, although in time that may change and to date no accidents concerning pedestrians had been recorded.

The Committee asked if Mitsubishi had been working with various breakdown recovery agencies to equip them both with knowledge and tools should an electric car break down. Mr Rhead confirmed that as part of their sales package, the client received free Pan European Breakdown Assistance cover, and had been working with the Fire and Rescue services to get them trained. They appreciated that some clients may wish to remain with their breakdown assistance providers, and therefore were working with various agencies to ensure that they could deal with said incidents.

It was noted that many residents do not have a garage or driveway to park the car and therefore ran the risk of a cable crossing a public pathway for charging the car. With this in mind, the Committee asked about the security factors as it was promoted to charge the car over night, when vandalism and theft could be invited. Mr Rhead reassured the Committee that security had been addressed, as a lock-in pin had been placed on the socket of the car, enabling the client to add a padlock if desired.

The Committee asked about the UK charging points, and whether Councils had adopted a metered approach. Mr Pigot informed the Committee that there were several Councils which had adopted the ability to share the costs of charging between the local and county authorities, enabling free parking and charging in those areas. However, where this had not been the case, other authorities had chosen to provide metered charging points using card payments, not cash, allowing them to monitor the frequency of regular car chargers.

The Chairman noted the offer of 3 years servicing for £300, and questioned if this could be cheaper, as there were various parts of a petrol engine that were not in the electric engine, such as a cambelt. Mr Rhead confirmed that this was the cheapest service they could provide, and stated that the battery life was about 10 years which would cost 1/3 of the price of the car to replace.

The Chairman thanked the gentlemen for their presentation, and invited Mr Johns, Patterson and Kemp to introduce themselves.

Mr Patterson explained to the Committee the bus company Arriva tried to ensure that their customers receive a reliable service, and in answer to a question stated that although it may seem that recent cuts were a discouragement to passengers, some were necessary due to the financial changes that the government was imposing, such as the decreased reimbursement of Tax Fuel in April 2012.

Mr Kemp stressed that in previous years, a Transport User Group run by Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) had enabled a forum for passengers, employees and agencies including all road and rail companies to discuss potential changes, however, this had lapsed in recent times. The Committee agreed that this was vital for keeping people informed of what changes were happening within the borough, and it was suggested that although they work closely with Kent County Council (KCC), a weekly planning list from Maidstone Borough Council would assist them with any major developments that could potentially cause road delays. It was noted that there was a Maidstone Joint Transportation Board which was run by KCC and MBC collectively, with some parish and borough councils contributing. However, this was not a public forum discussion board unlike the previous Transport User Group, which the Committee requested be reinstated.

Mr Johns informed the Committee that their main problem was the unpredictability of the gyratory system. With their 'Home to School' journeys between 7-9am and 2.30-5pm being their busiest periods, Streamline had noticed it was the same hotspots that ceased to move when under pressure. The hotspots were the White Rabbit roundabout, Palace Avenue, Lower and Upper Stone Street. It was suggested that traffic lights at the White Rabbit roundabout would aid the congestion. The Committee noted this, and suggested that stronger parking enforcement should be placed in the streets mentioned and popular school sites to discourage people temporarily parking on the highway.

A member of the public, Mr Gall asked to direct a question to Mr Patterson, and the Chairman invited him to join the table. Mr Gall stated that he had written to Mr Patterson, and suggested that a circular route be devised to join up the various supermarkets, as he would like to shop using the bus, but as there were no services that went in that direction he had to resolve to using the car. Mr Patterson stated that this had not been commercially viable for Arriva. Mr Johns confirmed that Streamline had once advertised a supermarket run, however out of 400 distributed leaflets, only 1 person had responded. Mr Kemp encouraged Mr Gall to

approach all bus companies within the borough, as it may be that what was not viable for one company, may be for another.

In answer to a question Mr Patterson and Mr Kemp confirmed that KCC are working on improving the 'real time' digital updates that are provided in the bus stops, as it was currently in its infancy and it was foreseen that delays would be displayed on this in the future. In the meantime, should delays mean that buses are late, and other services can assist, it was suggested that the bus drivers and posters could assist passengers with detailing the route to inform passengers of other alternative bus routes. It was noted that these digital displays were not in the bus station on King Street, however Mr Kemp highlighted that this was a temporary one that had over the years, become a permanent fixture. He informed the Committee that a suggestion had been put forward for a new bus station to be situated alongside Maidstone East Train Station, however nothing had materialised. The Committee agreed this would be the best venue for a new bus station as it would incorporate the three main public transports being trains, buses and taxis and would attract people to use these methods of transport. The Committee agreed that this should be brought to the Cabinet Member's attention in his next meeting.

The Committee also highlighted that Arriva, Nu-Venture and Streamline could make representation on the Core Strategy, Transport Strategy and Area Action Plan. The Overview and Scrutiny Officer would circulate further information on how to do this as part of the consultation currently underway.

The Committee noted that the bus stop on Earl Street would often accommodate buses parked there for longer than normal, and enquired if this was necessary. Mr Kemp explained that the only toilet facilities that were close to the bus stops for bus drivers to use were those in Fremains Walk. The Committee acknowledged this, and suggested that hazard lights were used to indicate that the bus was parked there.

The Committee enquired with Mr Pigot and Rhead if there were any electric commercial vehicles that Mitsubishi was focussing on. Mr Rhead stated that at present there were none on the market, though it may be possible for small vans to be devised should the demand present itself. Mr Kemp informed the Committee that Rochester were developing Hybrid Buses, and would pass on the contact details to the Overview and Scrutiny Officer if this was of interest for the review. The Chairman thanked both gentlemen, and welcomed the contact details from Mr Kemp.

Resolved: That Mr Pigot, Rhead, Johns, Patterson and Kemp be thanked for the information and that:

- a) The Traffic Congestion review recommends that the Transport User Group be reinstated;
- b) The MBC parking team provide stronger parking enforcement in Palace Avenue, Lower and Upper Stone Street and around schools during peak times;

- c) Arriva and Nu-Venture bus drivers and posters should assist passengers with detailing the route to inform passengers of other alternative bus routes;
- d) The Committee supports the 'real time' digital updates currently provided in the bus stops show delays in the future;
- e) The Cabinet Member be informed of the previous proposal of a new bus station adjacent to Maidstone East Train Station in his next meeting;
- f) The Overview and Scrutiny Officer circulates further information to Arriva, Nu-Venture and Streamline on how to make representation on the Core Strategy, Transport Strategy and the Area Action Plan as part of the consultation currently underway;
- g) Both Arriva and Nu-Venture encourage their drivers that hazard lights be used to indicate to other road users that the buses have stopped on Earl Street to use the nearest toilet facilities; and
- h) Mr Kemp be asked to pass the contact details to the Overview and Scrutiny Officer with regards to the Hybrid buses at Rochester.

65. Future Work Programme

The Committee enquired if the petition that took place at Full Council on 21 September 2011, with regards to development policy issues would be addressed in the next Regeneration & Economic Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee, or at the Local Development Document Task & Finish Scrutiny Panel meeting. The Overview and Scrutiny Officer will investigate and act accordingly.

Resolved: That the future work programme be noted.

66. Duration of Meeting

6.30pm to 8.34pm.