

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Planning, Transport and Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 30 SEPTEMBER 2014

Present: Councillor Springett (Chairman), and
Councillors Chittenden, English, Hogg, Munford,
Powell, Ross and Willis

Also Present: Councillors Ash, Burton and Perry

61. THE COMMITTEE TO CONSIDER WHETHER ALL ITEMS ON THE AGENDA SHOULD BE WEBCAST

RESOLVED: That all items on the agenda be webcast.

62. APOLOGIES

It was noted that apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Round.

63. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The following substitute member was noted:

Councillor Hogg for Councillor Round.

64. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

Councillors Ash and Perry were in attendance to make representations on item 9 of the agenda.

Councillor Burton, Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport and Development was in attendance for items 8, 9 and 10 of the agenda.

65. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

During discussion under agenda item 9, Review of Transport in Maidstone – alternatives to using a car – Bus Services, Councillor Chittenden, by virtue of being a member of the Quality Bus Partnership, disclosed an Other Significant Interest. Having disclosed the interest Councillor Chittenden left the meeting room until conclusion of the item.

66. TO CONSIDER WHETHER ANY ITEMS SHOULD BE TAKEN IN PRIVATE BECAUSE OF THE POSSIBLE DISCLOSURE OF EXEMPT INFORMATION

RESOLVED: That the items on the agenda be taken in public as proposed.

67. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 SEPTEMBER 2014

The Committee highlighted an amendment to the minutes, under minute 55, Cabinet Member Priorities for 2014-2015. It was agreed that the following wording should be included:

"That the Head of Planning and Development provide the Planning, Transport and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a full verbal update on the position with Planning Officer staffing. Also the progress being made towards providing the evidence needed to reduce the housing target figure to a lower figure than the objectively assessed housing need of 18,600."

RESOLVED: That, subject to the amendment highlighted, the minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 2014 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

68. AMENDMENT TO THE ORDER OF BUSINESS

RESOLVED: That item 9, Review of Transport in Maidstone – alternatives to using a car – bus services, be taken before item 8, Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy Update Report.

69. REVIEW OF TRANSPORT IN MAIDSTONE - ALTERNATIVES TO USING A CAR - BUS SERVICES

The Chairman welcomed Mathew Arnold, Commercial Director, Arriva Buses; Norman Kemp, Nu Venture Coaches Ltd; Mike Fitzgerald, Chair East of Maidstone Bus Group; and Cllr Peter Spearink, Staplehurst Parish Council, and Vice-Chair of Hawkhurst Local Transport Accessibility Group; to the meeting.

During the discussion Councillor Chittenden, by virtue of being a member of the Quality Bus Partnership, disclosed an Other Significant Interest. Having disclosed the interest Councillor Chittenden left the meeting room until conclusion of the item.

The Chairman explained the Review of Transport in Maidstone had been set up in response to concerns about congestion in the borough. It was noted that the review had previously looked at cycling and walking while rail services would be considered in November 2014. As a result, the focus of the committee meeting would be bus services.

Mike Fitzgerald, Chair East of Maidstone Bus Group, informed the committee that the East of Maidstone Bus Group existed to consider and address issues raised by both members and operators to help improve and safeguard services across East Maidstone.

During discussion a number of issues were raised, including:

- Supported Routes and Commercial Routes. Mr Fitzgerald suggested that it would be helpful for the review to identify the number of commercial routes and the number of supported routes across the borough. In addition, it was suggested that areas/routes without evening/Sunday services should be mapped.
- Journey times and their impact on people deciding to travel by bus (or not). It was suggested that new routes should be considered side by side with the Local Plan.
- Community Bus Services. Mr Fitzgerald suggested that it would be unrealistic for local authorities to expect voluntary/community projects to compensate for decreased bus services.
- 106 agreements. It was agreed that where possible 106 agreements should be used to support new/revised routes especially those supporting the Rural Service Centres.
- It was agreed that consideration should be given to putting cycle shelters at key locations (bus connecting points) across the borough so people could leave bikes locked in the same way as at railway stations. In addition, it was suggested buses themselves should have facilities for carrying bicycles.
- Total Transport. It was noted that the Department of Transport had been doing work to support the integration of all services commissioned by central and local government and provided by different operators. Mr Fitzgerald suggested that Maidstone/Kent could be used by Government as a pilot for Total Transport.

In addition, issues in relation to the Quality Bus Partnership, the Punctuality and Improvement Partnership, the No59 bus route, Bus Shelters, Safe Journey and Better Journey Cards and Concession Passes (Start Times) were raised by Mr Fitzgerald. It was agreed that these issues should be considered in more detail by the Review Working Group outside of the meeting.

CLlr Peter Spearink, Staplehurst Parish Council and Vice-Chair of Hawkhurst Local Transport Accessibility Group, informed the committee that the group represented a very rural area, an area that relied on bus services due to limited rail services.

During discussion a number of issues were raised, including:

- The performance/reliability of the No5 bus route.
- The provision of school bus services. It was noted that many parents would not risk their children going to/from school via bus due to reliability/capacity issues. It was noted that better, more timely, information from Kent County Council, in relation to the issuing of bus passes for young people and those in school, college or training, would help bus operators to plan more effectively,

especially at the start of the academic year when passes were (re) issued.

- Apps for mobile phones in relation to providing real time information and the location of buses. Mathew Arnold, Commercial Director, Arriva Buses noted that the recently launched Arriva App had been a significant development but concerns were raised that many older bus users did not have smart phones/tablets. It was noted that Arriva would be happy to supply real time information to anyone willing to display it. In view of this, it was agreed that the Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport and Development should be asked to provide the Review Working Group with further information about the re-tendering exercise for the provision and maintenance of bus shelters, and the selling of advertising at bus shelters, to enable consideration of how information about buses, including real time information and contact numbers for buses, could be displayed at bus shelters across the borough.

During the discussion the committee made reference to the report of the Overview and Scrutiny Officer which provided further information on the work of the review working group. It was noted the group had received feedback on bus services from borough and parish councillors and had met with Shane Hymers, Public Transport and Strategy Manager, Kent County Council, and Dan Bruce, Local Transport Planner (Mid Kent), Kent County Council. It was noted that these discussions had raised a number of issues and would be considered in more detail by the review working group outside of the meeting.

Key issues raised by Mathew Arnold, Commercial Director, Arriva Buses, and Norman Kemp, Nu Venture Coaches Ltd, related to bus reliability, punctuality and sustainability. The importance of having availability to the road network was noted in order for bus operators to deliver their services. The following points were raised:

- The impact of road closures on bus services, especially when timely information, about closures, was not received from Kent Highways.
- The fact that bus operators had limited opportunities to speak to local decision makers to discuss and resolve issues such as parking enforcement issues on bus routes and at bus stops. It was noted that, unlike Arriva, Nu Venture were not members of the Quality Bus Partnership. Norman Kemp informed the committee that he would welcome the opportunity for Nu Venture to attend such meetings.
- The impact of cuts to the bus service operators' grant (BSOG) and evidence from a House of Commons Select Committee that had raised concerns about supported services and the ability for local authorities to respond to transport isolation.
- The ability for residents living in rural areas, such as Boughton Monchelsea, to use bus services to access the night time economy

during the week or the town on a Sunday. Mathew Arnold agreed that it would be useful for bus operators to work together with local residents and their elected representatives to look at options in relation to twilight and Sunday services. It was agreed that funding streams, including European Funding, should be looked at closely to see whether such money could be used to support bus operators provide additional services in Maidstone, especially in the rural service centres.

Other issues discussed included looking at ways to ensure ideas for enhancements to services were communicated and dealt with effectively. For example:

- Regular integrated bus links from rural villages to train stations in Maidstone.
- Introducing a radial bus service for Maidstone.
- Routes convenient for local shops and doctors.
- Interchangeable tickets and ways to reduce costs for users
- Ways to provide money for infrastructure.

In summary, the Chairman noted that the review working group would continue to meet outside of the meeting and that a draft report would be presented to committee on 18 November 2014.

RESOLVED: That:

1. The evidence submitted to Committee, on 30 September 2014, be used by the Review of Transport in Maidstone Working Group to develop draft recommendations for consideration by Committee on 18 November 2014 as part of the draft report for stages one (Walking and Cycling) and two (Buses) of the review.
2. The Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport and Development be asked to provide the Review Working Group with further information about the re-tendering exercise for the provision and maintenance of bus shelters, and the selling of advertising at bus shelters, to enable consideration of how information about buses, including real time information and contact numbers for buses, could be displayed at bus shelters across the borough.
3. The membership of the Review of Transport in Maidstone Working Group be updated to include Cllr Willis.

70. GREEN AND BLUE INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY UPDATE REPORT

Councillor Chittenden returned to the meeting for consideration of this item.

Rob Jarman, Head of Planning and Development, explained the Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) Strategy was a corporate strategy that covered the borough's open spaces and water bodies. The committee noted that the strategy had been prepared for a number of reasons:

- To bring increased certainty about the importance of this part of the borough's environment.
- To maximise the number of overlapping benefits of green and blue infrastructure by looking holistically at each area.
- To act as a basis for attracting resources including grant funding and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).
- To form the basis for GBI delivery.

The committee was informed that a number of issues had been raised during a stakeholder engagement exercise, held during December 2013 – January 2014. Mr Jarman advised the committee that while the preparation of the Green and Blue Infrastructure was in itself supported, some concerns had been raised in relation to both process and content.

The committee was informed of developments in relation to an open space audit. The committee noted that this provided a key piece of evidence to underpin the GBI Strategy. Mr Jarman advised the committee that the audit allowed open spaces to be assessed by quantity, quality and accessibility.

It was noted that the last time a comprehensive audit had been conducted was in 2004. It was explained that the methodology for the 2014 audit had been amended to more accurately reflect the desired outcomes of local plan policy. Changes to the methodology included:

- The open space must be publicly accessible.
- The open space types must be quantifiable.
- The recording of open space types should accurately reflect fine grain differences within a given open space site.
- The open space type must be something that is appropriately delivered through/in connection to local plan policy.

Mr Jarman informed the committee that the Parks and Open Spaces team had completed the quantitative element of the open space audit in May 2014. This element of the audit had involved re-categorising open space sites subject to the revised methodology.

In terms of the qualitative element of the audit Mr Jarman explained the council had commissioned consultants to undertake this work, with initial results expected at the end of October 2014. It was noted that the

accessibility element of the audit, a desktop exercise, would be completed in house in line with the qualitative audit.

Mr Jarman concluded his presentation by explaining that both stakeholder comments and the results of the open space audit would be used to amend the GBI strategy and to develop an action plan for implementation.

During discussions the following points were explored:

- Previous national guidance notes in relation to Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation, including PPG17 published in 2002, and the impact of the National Planning Policy Framework in relation to the assessment of open spaces.
- The links between GBI delivery and policies in the Maidstone Borough Local Plan and supplementary planning documents.
- The Maidstone Landscape Character – a document used to identify landscape types and landscape character areas in the rural parts of the borough.
- The methodology used in the open space audit including the reasoning behind the 2014 methodology in relation to parks and gardens, green corridors, and cemeteries and graveyards.
- The use of accessibility information in relation to the open space audit including how this had been used in relation to concerns about biodiversity.
- The importance of corporate policy aligning to open space planning policy. For example, the provision of cemeteries and graveyards and the treatment of closed cemeteries.
- Ways to preserve wildlife population viability.

In terms of green corridors Mr Jarman explained that it would be difficult to deliver a green corridor through local plan policy intervention. The committee was informed that for the purposes of the audit and on-going strategy, green corridors were more accurately assessed as their component types. For example, natural and semi-natural green space or amenity green space. It was noted that these areas could still be identified on a strategic scale within the GBI strategy.

RESOLVED: That

1. The Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy Update Report be noted.
2. The Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport and Development be recommended, through emerging local plan policies and the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, to acknowledge the importance of migratory transport corridors to preserve wildlife population viability.

71. FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME AND SCRAIP UPDATE

At the request of the Committee, and to assist with the development of the future work programme, the Head of Planning and Development provided an update on staffing within his service area.

It was noted, following a successful recruitment campaign, that all vacancies within the Local Plan Team had been filled. In terms of Development Management the committee was informed that a new Development Manger would be in post by the end of November 2014. However, it was explained vacancies remained, including the Principal Planning Officer position, and that consultants were being used to cover these positions.

In terms of developing their work programme, in relation to the Local Plan, the Committee asked the Head of Planning and Development for an update to ensure all aspects were being investigated to provide the evidence needed to reduce the housing target figure to a lower figure than the objectively assessed housing need of 18,600. The following issues were discussed:

- The traffic modelling work being carried out by Kent County Council.
- The importance of the work being carried out in relation to landscape quality and in developing a GBI strategy.
- Using evidence provided by the public.
- Southern Water's position on flooding, drainage and sewage issues affecting the borough.

The Chairman informed the committee, following a request from officers, that an additional meeting, to look at Neighbourhood Plans, would take place on Monday 3 November 2014.

RESOLVED: That:

1. The future work programme, set out in Appendix A to the report of the Overview and Scrutiny Officer, be noted.
2. A special meeting be held on Monday 3 November 2014 to receive a report on Neighbourhood Plans.
3. The Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport and Development be asked to circulate a briefing note to update Committee on Southern Water's position on flooding, drainage and sewage issues affecting the borough.

72. LONG MEETING

Prior to 10:30pm, during consideration of the Future Work Programme and SCRAIP update item, the Committee considered whether to adjourn the meeting at 10:30pm or continue until 11:00pm if necessary.

RESOLVED: That the meeting continue until 11:00pm, if necessary.

73. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30pm to 10.33pm