

## **Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

### **Wednesday, 7 March 2018, County Hall, Worcester – 10am**

#### **Present:**

#### **Minutes**

Mr A A J Adams (Chairman), Mr G R Brookes,  
Mr B Clayton, Mr M E Jenkins, Mr A D Kent,  
Ms C M Stalker and Ms R Vale

Mr R W Banks, Mrs E A Eyre, Mr P Middlebrough  
Mr A P Miller, Dr K A Pollock and Mr P A Tuthill

#### **Also attended:**

Catherine Brookes, Highways England  
Victoria Lazenby, Highways England  
Andy Baker (Transport Planning and Commissioning  
Manager), Ed Dursley (Event and Open Highway  
Network Manager), Rachel Hill (Strategic Commissioner,  
Major Projects), Nick Twaite (Infrastructure Asset  
Manager), Trevor McGill (Lighting Engineer),  
Sheena Jones (Democratic Governance and Scrutiny  
Manager) and Jo Weston (Overview and Scrutiny Officer)

#### **Available Papers**

The Members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. Presentation handouts for Item 5 (circulated at the Meeting)
- C. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 12 January 2018 (previously circulated).

(Copies of documents A and B will be attached to the signed Minutes).

#### **293 Apologies and Welcome**

Apologies had been received from Mr P Denham and Mr J A D O'Donnell.

#### **294 Declarations of Interest and of any Party Whip**

None.

#### **295 Public Participation**

None.

#### **296 Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 12 January 2018 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**297 Highways  
England**

Attending for this Item were:

Highways England

Catherine Brookes, Midlands Regional Director  
Tori Lazenby, Asset Development Team Leader

Worcestershire County Council

Andy Baker, Transport Planning and Commissioning  
Manager

Ed Dursley, Event and Open Highway Network Manager

By way of presentation, Highways England Representatives provided an introduction to the organisation, highlighted the process for the Government's Road Investment Strategy, reported on development management and operational issues in Worcestershire and beyond.

Questions were asked and answered throughout the presentation and during the discussion the following key points were made:

- Highways England is responsible for around 4,300 miles of motorways and major A Roads, however, for clarity, in Worcestershire the A38 south of Birmingham is de-trunked, as is the A449 and therefore are the responsibility of Worcestershire County Council
- The road network is constantly open and is used by around 4 million people every day. Around 1 billion tonnes of freight is transported each year and it is estimated that around 7.4 million people are employed by strategic road network reliant sectors
- The West Midlands region is the most challenging of all the networks in the Country and with the upcoming HS2 project, although it would provide growth and opportunity, the impact on the network and local roads was expected to be huge
- The Government's Road Investment Strategy (RIS) provides overview and strategic vision, whereas the Highways England Strategic Business Plan is a response document, leading to a Delivery Plan which outlines very specific strategic outcomes, enhancement projects, performance indicators and operational detail
- Highways England was formed in 2015 from the Highways Agency and has been given some very challenging efficiency savings targets. However, it does have a proven track record of delivery and half way through the RIS 2015-2020 (RIS1) has

achieved £4billion value of road improvements, achieved efficiency savings of £169million which is 21% ahead of target and delivered road schemes, cycle paths and footways amongst other projects

- Nationally RIS2 (2020-2025) is being developed with the Highways England Strategic Business Plan expected to be published in early 2019. It will focus on three key areas – Safety, Customer and Delivery, ensuring that they are doing what is best for the customer. Although the Secretary of State for Transport will make the decision, Highways England make recommendations and early announcements may take place in the Autumn Statement
- When developing schemes, Highways England reported that there is a really successful working relationship between the Local Authority, Local Planning Authorities and developers. Examples across Worcestershire were given where positive joint working had been successful. Highways England reported that this is not replicated across the Country
- Large scale developments in the County included the completed M5 (Junctions 4 to 7), M5 (Junctions 4a to 6 Smart Motorway) and planned for 2018/19, the M42 Junction 3 Congestion Relief Scheme. These amount to £160m investment over 5 years
- The Panel asked to what extent Local Members were utilised for their local knowledge when schemes were developed. It was suggested by Members that a clear mechanism may assist those involved. Operationally, there was increased engagement with Stakeholders across the area.

Although outside of Worcestershire, the Oldbury Viaduct (M5 Junctions 1 to 2) work was discussed at length, alongside the impact on roads in the County.

It was built in 1970 and accommodates 60,000 journeys per day, each way. Vital repair to the sum of £100m is needed to ensure continued safety and due to the raised structure and location, it is a challenging project. The programme of works was timed from Summer 2017 to Autumn 2018 and traffic management is in force to minimise congestion.

Members raised the following key points:

- It was felt that Worcestershire and its local roads

- were paying the price for the traffic management
- The Panel did not understand the model currently in place and questioned whether alternative measures had been considered. Drivers with satellite navigation, were offered alternative routes on local roads, which was also causing disruption
  - In response, Highways England stated that two independent reviews had taken place to inform the current model. They fully appreciated that drivers were frustrated and that some drivers were making a different journey choice, however, it was also reported that the broader network had to be considered. In addition, it had been noted that some drivers were working differently, whether travelling by rail, or working more flexibly which was helping
  - If the work was carried out just on overnight road closures, it would take twenty times as long, so was never a viable option
  - In response to feedback, Highways England had installed additional signage, however, also reported that there was a fine balance between that and sign clutter
  - A Facebook page had also been set up to keep drivers informed and the use of social media was increasing across the organisation
  - It was agreed that the results of the independent reviews would be shared with the Panel and Highways England were always willing to consider alternative options or ideas
  - In response to a direct question, it was reported that it would need five overnight road closures to change the traffic management in place, however, if it were felt that a better solution would be achieved, it would be considered, even on a trial basis.

Other discussion points included:

- Following the introduction of Smart Motorways, drivers were given time to understand the law behind the new signage, for example where a 'red x' means lane closed. At present, drivers caught are given a written warning but no penalty, however it was felt the time is probably right to enforce
- The Panel was disappointed to learn that Police enforcement was not always applied and agreed to follow this up with the Police and Crime Commissioner
- In addition, Highways England pay the Police to

enforce offences, including speed cameras, however, if enforced, no revenue is received by Highways England

- Despite recent changes locally, there was no greater incident of accidents or speeding
- In response to a query, smart motorways are monitored for safety and are at least as safe as normal motorways. However, a recent Transport Select Committee learned that although people are safer, they do not feel safer. Highways England are learning from other European Countries where roads are perceived to be safer, yet faster
- Members learned about the upcoming M5 (Junction 6) improvements and asked about the contract, which was awarded with due diligence to Interserve. Traffic management was to be in place by the end of April with completion set for Winter 2018/19
- A Member asked about lighting on Motorways and who residents should contact to report an issue. In response, residents and parishes can contact Highways England directly and Councillors could publicise details through their individual networks and parish communications
- It was stated that every road is driven by Officers at least every 7 days and if an issue is reported, it is categorised to establish whether any other work could be undertaken at the same time, for example, replacing a light could coincide with line marking, clearing shrubbery or drains. This was particularly important if traffic management was required
- One Member asked whether local residents could be informed when a diversion route was in place, similar to the communication issued in relation to expected flooding. It was reported that Highways England had recently introduced regional twitter accounts and was increasingly wanting to improve the information provided
- A Member asked specifically about help available for drivers with livestock, stuck on the motorway, to be informed that the West Midlands continues to have a policy where welfare was available
- In response to a query about motorway central barriers being large and concrete, it was stated that although they are and that crossovers are further apart, the new concrete barriers are much safer and a key feature of a smart motorway. The impact on the network of incidents crossing the carriageway was massive

- and these barriers reduced that impact
- When asked about the policy on strips of land owned by Highways England, it was clarified that queries were dealt with on a case by case basis
  - Concern was raised about cross boundary issues, such as in the case of the change to the A417 impacting on Thames Valley traffic entering the region. It was noted that no specific schemes have been identified as part of the Road Investment Strategy 2, rather, emerging themes which may have been reported
  - Designated Funds for delivery of small projects, such as cycleways, safety and environmental enhancements, has been under utilised, but has achieved legacy schemes, such as a charity garden project in Oldbury
  - In response to a query, it was clarified that data on assets was gained nationally and specifically, drainage was inspected and maintained as part of a programme.

The Chairman thanked those present for a useful discussion and looked forward to receiving an update in due course. In addition, the Panel requested the following information from Highways England:

- Research documents in relation to the development of RIS2
- Results of the independent reviews in relation to Oldbury Viaduct
- A brief summary of the Oldbury Viaduct scheme in order to share that with residents
- Further information on accidents and speeding on the network
- Details on the discretionary fund for small local projects.

In addition, it was agreed to investigate enforcement policies with the Police.

## **298 Street Lighting**

County Council Officers responsible for Street Lighting talked through the Agenda Report. In the ensuing discussion, the following main points were made:

- The Council has a duty of care to maintain street lights and this is done through a maintenance contractor
- A number of the original concrete columns still exist, despite being given a 30 year life when installed in the 1960's. A survey of all of these is currently being undertaken. The Panel asked for

the results of this survey once complete

- Until the extent of the need to replace concrete columns is known, it was difficult to prioritise other works, however, there was £4m budget for the next 3 years, but original sodium lights could no longer be sourced, meaning once the light had gone, it could not be replaced
- The cost to replace a concrete column was around £1,000
- Not all lights are owned by the Council, with some owned by Parishes. The maintenance of these varied but some had agreements with the Council
- In response to a query about mapping, it was clarified that all columns are mapped and should be easily identifiable, especially as all should have a unique number visible to the public. Queries relating to specific cases, could be discussed directly with Officers at any time
- One Member suggested an improvement to the way in which residents reported an issue by introducing some feedback to report the issue had been resolved. Officers suggested they could investigate as technology was becoming smarter
- When asked whether the concept of electric charging points had been considered, as other Councils were doing, it was noted that this could be followed up with Officers
- The part night switch off was an initiative agreed in 2014 where on average one in three less efficient sodium lights were switched off, achieving required savings. It was noted that LED lights would not be switched off, so in time, all lights would be constantly on at night
- One Member asked whether information was available relating to the level of crime due to the initiative and asked for further information to be provided
- Performance to replace a light was good, with 98% achieved within the 7 day expectation and monitoring was undertaken by the Council to ensure this was the case
- In response to a question, Members learned that the cost of LED lights was reducing and the Council was now sourcing stock from a local company who also provided a 15 year guarantee. Developments meant that different options for LEDs was also possible, including minimising the impact of lights close to a residential window for example
- The Panel however was disappointed to hear that

- only around 10% of columns were LED lit
- One Member believed that new housing developments were being established with less columns, to be informed that this was not the case.

It was agreed to invite Officers back in twelve months to review the work undertaken. In the meantime, Members looked forward to receiving the results of the concrete column survey being undertaken and further detail on crime rates during the part night switch off.

**299 Work Plan**

No further Items were added to the work programme, however, it was agreed to hold a workshop with Members to discuss the programme going forward.

The meeting ended at 12.45 pm

Chairman .....