

Minutes of the Economy and Environment Overview and

Scrutiny Panel

County Hall, Worcester

Friday, 13 May 2022, 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr Alastair Adams (Chairman), Cllr Karen Hanks (Vice Chairman),
Cllr Bob Brookes, Cllr Allah Ditta, Cllr Tony Muir and Cllr Emma Stokes

Also attended:

Cllr Alan Amos, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport
Rachel Hill, Assistant Director for Economy, Major Projects and Waste.
Paul Smith, Assistant Director for Highways & Transport Operations
Emily Barker, Planning Services Manager
Nick Churchill, Congestion Traffic Manager, Transport Planning,
Sarah Gilmour, Intelligent Transport Systems Manager
Samantha Morris, Overview and Scrutiny Manager
Alyson Grice, Overview and Scrutiny Officer

Available Papers

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 1 March 2022 (previously circulated).

(A copy of document A will be attached to the signed Minutes.)

443 Apologies and Welcome

Apologies were received from Councillors Beverley Nielsen and Craig Warhurst.

444 Declarations of Interest and of any Party Whip

None.

445 Public Participation

None.

446 Confirmation of the Minutes of the previous meeting

The Minutes of the meeting on 1 March 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

It was confirmed that the graph breaking down the percentage of each category of domestic waste (as requested at the previous meeting) would be included in the Performance Information provided for the July meeting.

The Chairman noted that the visit to the Highways Depot at Lydiate Ash had now taken place and had proved very useful.

447 Refresh of the Scrutiny Work Programme 2022-23

The Panel was asked to consider suggestions for its 2022/23 work programme prior to it being submitted to Council for approval.

It was agreed that the Annual Update on Broadband would be expanded to include updates on mobile and 5G coverage.

The Panel agreed that, with this addition, it was happy for the work programme to be forwarded for consideration by OSPB.

448 Update on Walking and Cycling in Worcestershire

The Panel received an update on developments relating to walking and cycling schemes in Worcestershire.

In the course of the discussion, the following main points were raised:

- The Panel had last received an update in November 2020. The overarching Government policy remained the same as in 2020 and was set out in the document 'Gear Change: A Bold Vision for Walking and Cycling'. This was supported by a Local Transport Note (LTN) which provided guidance on delivering high quality infrastructure.
- One change since the last update had been the creation of a national agency (Active Travel England) which would commence its work in the summer. It was agreed that the location of the headquarters of the new agency would be confirmed following the meeting.
- Concern was expressed about debris on cycle ways which may pose a danger to cyclists. It was confirmed that the County Council worked with District Councils to ensure that a cleaning and sweeping regime was maintained. If a Councillor or a member of the public was made aware of any debris, they should report it via the Council's website ('Report It') and it would be followed up in the usual way.

- It was confirmed that any newly developed shared use spaces (ie for walking and cycling) would now have to be 3 metres wide.
- It was confirmed that the Bikeability scheme was primarily aimed at schools, although some events had recently taken place in Wychavon to encourage adults and families to cycle safely.
- 'Share with care' signage was used on shared routes, although it was confirmed that this did not include specific advice on keeping a safe distance. In Bromsgrove, work had been carried out with school children who had designed their own signage to raise awareness of safe sharing.
- The Panel had been provided with a summary of the key schemes that were in development, delivery or complete. With reference to Hampton Bridge, Evesham it was confirmed that the planning application was due to be determined by the end of this year with delivery set for next year. Early works in relation to Kepax Bridge Worcester had now commenced. Members were informed that there had been a significant investment of £10-20 million in the two schemes.
- The Chairman asked that a map be provided showing the location of the schemes described, together with photos or sketches of what has been or will be achieved.
- It was confirmed that a programme of monitoring, including before and after data where available, would be put in place for each scheme. Monitoring data would be included in any future Panel updates.
- It was confirmed that, when an issue was reported to the County Council, it would be followed up with the relevant body, whether or not it was a function of the County Council.
- In addition to schemes carried out by the County Council, developers may include walking and cycling provision when delivering housing development.
- With reference to the Levelling Up Fund, although the round 1 submission had been unsuccessful, feedback had been positive and officers were encouraged for round 2, although there could be no certainty at this stage.
- Members were reminded that Section 106 money could only be used to offset a development's impact on the local area. For some developments, the infrastructure may be built before the development, for example the Broomhall Way Footbridge. It was confirmed that there was no standard amount for Section 106 money with each development being assessed on a case-by-case basis, based on the impact for each site. It was agreed that the amount of funding identified for cycling infrastructure as part of Section 106 funding would be confirmed following the meeting.
- With reference to Public Rights of Way, it was agreed that consideration would be given to including contact details for reporting any issues on signage on the routes. Members were reminded that issues could be reported via the County Council's website and Members could inform Highways Liaison Officers. It was also agreed that consideration would be given to additional signage on the Shakespeare right of way to indicate its historical significance.
- It was confirmed that the schemes listed in the agenda report related to the 2021/22 financial year.

- With reference to the canal towpath scheme between Stourport and Kidderminster, it was confirmed that construction had started and would continue throughout the summer.
- It was confirmed that the recruitment of a Sustainable Transport Officer had now commenced. This role would focus on the development of Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LWCIPs). The Department for Transport had requested that these documents were in place as part of the funding mechanism.
- It was confirmed that minor improvement work had been carried out on Old Road in Worcester. However, this was not flood mitigation and it was acknowledged that some parts of the path would continue to flood.
- The outcome of the bid in relation to Westlands Roundabout, Droitwich was still awaited.
- The Chairman welcomed the work done in relation to the extension of NCN 442 but reminded the Panel that only half of the route had been resurfaced, leaving cyclists to cross a muddy field.
- It was confirmed that information would be given to local Members as a scheme moved towards the delivery stage. For smaller schemes, information would come via the Liaison Officer whereas for larger schemes, information may come from the Project Manager.
- The Chairman asked about progress in resolving issues on the A46 where the crossing refuge in the middle of the road was too narrow for cycles to stop safely. It was confirmed that this had been raised with National Highways and an update was expected imminently. It was suggested that any update should also be shared with Councillor Eyre.
- Concern was expressed about the data included in Appendix 2. It was suggested that, for the data to be of value, it would need to include figures from 2018 to give a comparison with the situation pre-covid. A comparison with vehicle data would also be helpful. It was confirmed that this data would be shared with the Panel.

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport told Members that he was genuinely committed to improving the infrastructure for walking and cycling, as evidenced by the number of schemes listed in the agenda report. He noted the importance of changing people's behaviour and encouraging people to get out of their cars where possible in order to also reduce levels of congestion. He felt it was important to cater for choice and reduce conflict between road users, for example between cyclists and motorists. Investment in railways was also important in reducing car usage and the County Council had invested in an extensive programme of building station car parks. He reminded the Panel that car usage had now returned to pre-covid levels. The school run could increase traffic levels by as much as 20% and he would welcome a debate on the school run to encourage residents out of cars at an early age.

The Panel agreed that a further update would be requested in 12 to 18 months' time, to include:

- what had been achieved/completed, including the cost
- a map showing the location of schemes described and images of completed schemes
- details of future projects.

449 Cutting Congestion Programme

The Panel received an update on the Cutting Congestion Programme focusing on schemes that had been delivered or were in the feasibility, design or construction stages and highlighting what had been achieved since the Panel's last discussion in May 2019.

In the course of the discussion, the following main points were raised:

- It was confirmed that a total of £15m had been invested by the County Council in schemes to cut congestion, with an additional £6.7m in the form of grants. Section 106 monies had also been used.
- In response to a question about how improvements were measured, the Panel was told that this was on the basis of analysing before and after data, in a similar way to improvements in walking and cycling infrastructure. It was acknowledged that this measurement had been affected by the pandemic and the consequent changes in people's travel habits. Improvements in congestion could also be measure via improved journey times and officers worked with the bus companies who were able to provide live data on this. It was suggested that refuse collectors may also be able to provide feedback on improvements to journey times. It was confirmed that this had been touched on in Worcester City but could be looked at in other areas.
- In response to a question about the number of locations experiencing congestion in the County, it was agreed that an up-to-date list of locations would be shared with the Panel.
- The Chairman suggested that a map of schemes and images of completed work would be helpful for future updates.
- A Member of the Panel welcomed the improvements that had been made to Port Street, Evesham.
- Another Panel Member commended the scheme at Hoobrook, Kidderminster but asked that trees which had been removed at the start of the project were replaced. It was confirmed that the replacement of trees was one of the last snagging issues at the Hoobrook scheme, and a minimum of five trees would be planted in the autumn (during planting season).
- The Chairman noted that congestion was always in the top three issues of concern when residents were surveyed and asked whether enough was being done. In response, Members were reminded that improvements came about not only as a result of the big schemes described, but also through more minor changes such as improvements in signals, including the use of intelligent technology.
- When considering future schemes, it would be important to take into account the impact of the pandemic and increased levels of working from home.
- The Assistant Director for Economy, Major Projects and Waste reminded the Panel that other bigger road schemes also contained a large element of congestion reduction, such as the Southern Link Road and the Pershore Link Road schemes.

- It was important to ensure that utility companies always went through the correct channels to plan their work as the impact of roadworks on congestion was a concern. It was suggested that the County Council should be stronger when dealing with the utility companies.

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport acknowledged the Panel's frustration. He suggested it was important to be realistic about congestion in the County as the problem was probably here to stay given the amount of housing development that was planned. He noted that the move to electric vehicles would not reduce congestion. Although electric vehicles would have an impact on pollution levels and air quality, they may actually result in more car use. He also suggested that there was a need for a more robust bus strategy to encourage more people out of their cars. With reference to the impact of utility companies' roadworks, the CMR informed the Panel that a report on 'lane rental' was due to come to Cabinet in the near future. Lane rental would mean charging the utility company for using the road with the aim of encouraging them to do the work more quickly.

It was agreed that a further update would be provided in 12 to 18 months' time, to include:

- What had been achieved/delivered
- Schemes still in the planning stage
- A map showing the location of schemes described and images of the schemes.

450 Road Safety and Reduction of Speeding by Use of Built Highways Infrastructure

The Panel was provided with an update on developments relating to road safety and reduction of speeding by the use of the built highways infrastructure.

In the course of the discussion, the following main points were made:

- Members were informed that recent years had seen a reduction in the number of police reported accidents. In terms of national comparisons, Worcestershire was a high performer having a comparatively low rate of accidents.
- It was agreed that Councillor Stokes would be provided with a breakdown of accident data to provide evidence to support promotion of Bikeability.
- Members were reminded that accident analysis focused on police reported accidents. A road safety audit was carried out on all highways improvement schemes. Paragraph 12 of the agenda report gave examples of recent schemes that had been identified through accident studies and progressed through the Casualty Reduction Capital Programme.
- In response to a question about planned improvements at Clows Top, the Panel was reminded that improvements had recently been

completed at that location, including upgrades to visibility, warning and skid resistance. If Panel Members had any further information or ideas for future work, they were asked to contact the Head of Traffic Management.

- With reference to Pulley Lane, Droitwich, it was acknowledged that there were some constraints in relation to highways limits. It was agreed that an update on this would be provided to Councillor Brookes after the meeting.
- The Chairman asked whether consideration could be given to the use of chicanes to reduce speeding as he believed these had been successfully used in neighbouring counties but not in Worcestershire.
- He also informed the Panel about the pilot scheme in Feckenham which used road narrowing to reduce drivers' speed, an approach which was relatively cheap. Feedback from the local Member suggested that residents were very positive about the scheme. The Panel was reminded that this was still at the pilot stage and assessing the scheme's effectiveness was a long-term process as it was necessary to collect sufficient data over a long period of time. Also, Feckenham was an unusual case in that it was a village with street lighting which ensured visibility of narrowed lanes. This was not the case for most villages in Worcestershire as many had no streetlights and no easily accessible electricity supply, something which was a significant constraint.
- It was suggested that, where a village had street lighting and an accessible electricity supply, the Feckenham scheme was one that should be considered. The Panel was reminded that speed reduction plans focused on casualty reduction. A site where there was evidence of speeding but no accidents causing injury would not be as high a priority. It was suggested that Members may be able to use their divisional highways funds to support schemes similar to the one in Feckenham.
- The photos of traffic calming features included in the agenda report were welcomed and it was suggested that the Assistant Director for Highways and Transport Operations may wish to consider including these photos in the Directorate of Economy and Infrastructure Councillor Handbook.
- It was agreed that the Head of Traffic Management would look into whether there were any conflicts between residential development design and planning guidance and inform the Panel in due course. It was confirmed that the Council's Streetscape Design Guide was based on national guidance. It was recognised that increased visibility led to increased speed.

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport reminded the Panel that enforcement of speed limits was a matter for the police and suggested that it was not getting the priority it deserved. It was an important issue for local residents and, as a local authority, the County Council needed to ensure there was pressure on the police to prioritise this issue. The County Council was doing what it could within the powers at its disposal. He reminded the Panel that many Councillors has chosen to use their Highways and Divisional funds to provide vehicle activated signs for

use in their local area. He noted that chicanes had been used successfully in Warndon, Worcester and suggested that it was important to consider all speed reduction methods.

It was agreed that a further update would be provided in 12 to 18 months' time including a map showing the location of schemes described and images of completed schemes.

The meeting ended at 12.26 pm

Chairman