

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE
13 JULY 2016

Present: Councillors D Absolom (Chair), Ayub, Ballsdon, Chrisp, Duveen, Khan, Maskell, Page, Rodda and Singh.

Apologies: Councillors Hopper, McDonald and McGonigle.

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings held on 5 April and 25 May 2016 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. MINUTES OF TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

The Minutes of the meeting of the Traffic Management Sub-Committee held on 15 June 2016 were received.

4. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES

The Minutes of the meetings of the Joint Waste Disposal Board of 15 January and 8 April 2016, and the Minutes of the meeting of the AWE Local Liaison Committee of 23 March 2016 were submitted.

Resolved: That the Minutes be noted.

5. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS AND MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

A question on the following matter was asked in accordance with Standing Order 36.

Questioner	Subject
Councillor Rodda	Potential job losses arising from employers moving out of the area and the Council's work with partners to create and protect jobs and promote Reading as a business location.

(The full text of the question and reply was made available on the Reading Borough Council website).

6. NATIONAL AIR QUALITY PLAN

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report on changes to the National Air Quality Plan resulting from legal action against the UK for breaches of the EU Directive for Air Quality. The report explained that consultation had been carried out on proposed changes and officers had presented a paper to the Committee on 24 November 2015 outlining the Council's response (Minute 27 refers). The report recommended that the Council remained committed to delivering the Air Quality Plan, as updated in 2015, and continued to explore, with partners, innovative ways to improve Air Quality for residents and visitors of Reading.

The update of the Air Quality Action Plan was appended to the report.

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The report detailed the local context, explaining how measures within the Council's revised Air Quality Action Plan would improve air quality across Reading, specifically targeting action on key pollutants of concern. The report explained that modelling indicated that Reading would be compliant with national Nitrogen Dioxide targets by 2020 and this meant that a Clean Air Zone would not be compulsory for Reading. However it would be open to local authorities to adopt Clean Air Zones on a voluntary basis and a national framework for Clean Air Zones was to be published to enable a consistent approach to be adopted across participating areas.

The report stated that in addition to the detailed Air Quality Action plan, officers continued to work with partners to explore options to improve reading's Air Quality, which included reviewing an approach to vehicle idling across the Borough and reviewing the Hackney Carriage Vehicle Emissions Policy.

Resolved:

- (1) That the current National Air Quality Plan be noted;**
- (2) That the Council's ongoing commitment to delivery of the local Air Quality Action Plan and work with partners to explore innovative solutions to improve Air Quality in Reading be noted.**

7. DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT VS WEST BERKSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL AND READING BOROUGH COUNCIL: REPORT OF THE JUDGMENT OF THE COURT OF APPEAL AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE OPERATION OF THE COUNCIL'S AFFORDABLE HOUSING POLICIES

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report advising the Committee of a recent Court of Appeal judgment in a case where the Secretary of State had challenged a High Court judgment regarding the Secretary of State's Written Ministerial Statement (WMS) to Parliament.

The report explained that West Berkshire Council and Reading Borough Council had applied for judicial review of the Secretary of State's WMS to Parliament on changes to national planning policy. The changes had sought to exempt developments of 10 or fewer dwellings from planning obligations for affordable housing and social infrastructure contributions and to introduce a new measure known as Vacant Building Credit. The policy changes set out in the WMS had been accompanied by amendments to the section on Section 106 agreements in the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG).

The report stated that the High Court had found in favour of the challenge on 31 July 2015 and quashed the amendments to the NPPG. However, the Secretary of State had appealed the judgement and the Court of Appeal had now quashed the decision of the High Court.

The report explained the implications for the Council of the reinstated amendments to the NPPG and proposed how the Council would implement its policies, in particular Policy DM6 of its Sites and Detailed Policies Document, in relation to this new national guidance.

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The report explained that there were currently about 60 planning applications to which policy DM6 on affordable housing applied and that many of these had been held in abeyance at the applicants' request pending the decision of the Court of Appeal. The Council would now need to make decisions on those applications and the WMS would be a material consideration in their determination.

The report provided a detailed interpretation of the Council's affordable housing policies in light of the new government guidance and described a number of options for the future interpretation of Policy DM6.

The report concluded that the Council should continue to implement Policy DM6 as indicated in the Sites and Detailed Policies Document and as interpreted in the Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document but excluding proposals that solely involved the conversion on an existing property, where the conversion involved the provision of 10 or fewer dwelling units (i.e. not HMOs), or the replacement of dwellings by the same number of replacement dwellings where there was no net increase.

In discussion the Committee was mindful of the overall estimated level of Affordable Housing Need set out in the Berkshire Strategic Market Housing Assessment, which provided an Objectively Assessed Need in Reading for 406 dwellings per annum, representing 58% of the overall housing need of 699 dwellings per annum.

Resolved:

- (1) That the judgment of the Court of Appeal be noted;
- (2) That the interpretation, set out in paragraphs 4.12-4.25 of the report, of the Committee's adopted policies on the provision of affordable housing in the future determination of planning applications where Policy DM6, in particular is relevant, be approved;
- (3) That Option 2, as set out in paragraph 4.21 of the report, be applied as the basis for determining planning applications where Policy DM6 is relevant;
- (4) That any application involving the application of the vacant building credit be considered on its own merits to assess whether local circumstances in a particular case justify not applying the vacant building credit as an exception to the national policy as indicated in paragraph 4.26 of the report;
- (5) That a review of the Council's Community Infrastructure Levy Charging Schedule be undertaken in due course in the light of the significant impact that these changes were likely to have on the viability of development.

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8. EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS PLANS - ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report informing the Committee of progress on implementing Employment and Skills Plans, which were required for all major developments within the Borough under the Employment, Skills and Training Supplementary Planning Document adopted by Cabinet in April 2013.

The report provided details of the good ongoing process that had been made securing a variety of plans with both developers and end users. This was leading to very positive outcomes on the ground, during construction phase and in the end use of a development.

Resolved: That the progress in drawing up and implementing Employment and Skills Plans for major developments be noted.

9. SOLAR COMMUNITY SCHEME - SHARE PURCHASE

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report seeking delegated authority to officers to purchase shares in the Solar Community project being developed by Reading Community Energy Society (RCES).

The report explained that RCES had been formed to install solar panels on to a number of community buildings in Reading and was seeking to raise up to £450,000 of equity financing through a share issue to cover the costs of installation of the systems. This amount would be dependent on the number of systems RCES was able to progress and was likely to be a lower figure.

The report proposed that the Council purchase £10,000 of shares but in the event that the full quota of shares was not purchased by the public, that the Council purchase the remaining shares up to a total of £100,000.

The following appendices were attached to the report:

Appendix 1 - Share offer

Appendix 2 - Risk Table

Appendix 3 - Performance of Other Schemes

Resolved:

- (1) That the Head of Finance in consultation with the Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services and the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport be granted delegated authority to purchase up to 100,000 (value £100,000) shares in Reading Community Energy Society according to the terms laid out in the share offer.**

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10. MAJOR TRANSPORT & HIGHWAYS PROJECTS: UPDATE

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report providing an update on the current major transport and highways projects in Reading, namely:

- Reading Station Area Redevelopment and associated highway works at Cow Lane Bridges
- Thames Valley Berkshire Growth Deal Schemes: Green Park Station, Reading West Station upgrade, Southern and Eastern Mass Rapid Transit, Eastern park and Ride, national Cycle Network Route 422, and Third Thames Bridge.

The report provided details of progress and key programme dates associated with each of these schemes.

The report explained that Policy Committee on 11 April 2016 had given scheme and spend approval for Phase 1A of the South Reading Mass Rapid Transit (Minute 102 refers) and this work was due to commence on site in July 2016 for a period of three months. The initial phase of works would involve construction of a series of bus lanes between the A33 junction with Imperial Way and the existing bus priority provided through M4 Junction 11. Tenders had been returned for Phase 1A above the initial approved budget for this phase of the scheme and accordingly the Committee was invited to authorise a revised spend approval. The report stated that a review of Phases 1A, 1B and 2 of the Scheme had been undertaken, resulting in an adjusted budget profile.

Resolved:

- (1) That the report be noted;**
- (2) That spend approval be provided for the revised budget for Phase1A of the South Reading MRT scheme;**
- (3) That officers be granted delegated authority to enter into a contract based on this approval and in accordance with the Policy Committee decision of 11 April 2016.**

(Councillor Duveen declared an interest in the above item. Nature of Interest: Councillor Duveen's son was employed by Network Rail.)

11. APPOINTMENT OF DIRECTORS: READING TRANSPORT LTD.

The Interim Managing Director submitted a report requesting the Committee, acting as shareholder of Reading Transport Limited (RTL), to appoint directors to the RTL Board.

The report explained that there were vacancies arising from Mr D Sutton, Mr K Moffat and Mr F Connolly coming to the end of their four-year term and it was proposed to reappoint these three directors.

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Resolved: That Mr D Sutton, Mr K Moffat and Mr F Connolly be appointed as Directors of Reading Transport Ltd.

(The meeting started at 6.30pm and closed at 8.05pm).