

## **STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 27 JUNE 2024**

**Present:** Councillors Hornsby-Smith (Vice-Chair in the Chair), Ennis, Goss, Griffith, Juthani, Keeping, Lanzoni, Leng, Magon, McCann, O'Connell, Rowland and Stevens.

**Apologies:** Councillors Cross, Ballsdon, McElroy and McGrother

### **2. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meetings held on 13 March 2024 and 22 May 2024 were confirmed as correct records and were signed by the Chair.

### **3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE**

The Minutes of the Traffic Management Sub-Committee held on 6 March 2024 were received.

### **4. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES**

The Minutes of the following meetings were received:

- Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) Local Liaison Committee on 29 April 2024; and
- Joint Waste Disposal Board on 7 March 2024.

### **5. LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME**

The Committee considered a report that proposed changes be made to the Council's Local Development Scheme (LDS). A copy of the amended LDS document containing the proposed changes was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report stated that the Local Development Scheme (LDS) contained the programme for the production of planning policy documents that included the Local Plan. The most recent version of the Council's LDS had been approved by the Committee at the meeting held on 15 November 2023 (Minute 20 refers) at which approval had also been granted to conduct the first consultation on the Local Plan Partial Update.

The report explained that the LDS needed to be amended to adjust the programme to account for the Local Plan Partial Update. The main change to the Local Development Scheme was a four-month delay in consulting on the next stage (Regulation 19) of the Local Plan Partial Update, which had resulted in the later stages being pushed back by a corresponding amount of time. In general each milestone was expected to be delayed by three to four months. The report set out the reasons for the proposed changes, these included that:

- there had been changes made to national planning policy that needed to be taken into account concerning policy development, in particular a ministerial

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statement around sustainable design policy that had been published in December that would have implications for the policy approach contained in Council's Regulation 18 consultation that had been published in November 2023;

- there were key pieces of evidence that still needed to be obtained, including around the levels of need for commercial development, flood risk and development viability;
- the recent consultation had resulted in a number of requests, including some from statutory consultees such as Natural England and the Environment Agency, to bring other policies into the scope of the update, which would have further time and resource implications;
- there had been other priorities that had reduced the capacity of the Planning Policy team to progress the Local Plan Partial Update, including the introduction of statutory Biodiversity Net Gain for major developments and minor developments.

The report set out the main risks involved in delaying the production of the Local Plan Partial Update including that the period for which the Local Plan would be older than five years old would be extended further and that this could potentially have an impact on the outcome of development management decisions and appeals. There was also a risk that any changes made to national planning policy could have implications for the development of the Council's own policies.

The report summarised the revised timetable for the production of the Local Plan Partial Update. The revised timetable was included in full within the proposed amended LDS document attached to the report at Appendix 1. The report also explained that the timetable for the production of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) had needed to be adjusted to ensure that there were adequate resources available to progress the production of the Local Plan Partial Update.

**Resolved - That the proposed amendments to the Local Development Scheme, as set out in Appendix 1, be approved.**

### **6. UPDATE ON THE COUNCIL'S LOW CARBON CAPITAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered a report that provided an update on the Council's Low Carbon Capital Investment Programme. The report explained that the 2022/23 Budget approved by Council on 28 February 2023 (Minute 35 refers) had confirmed the Council's commitment to a circa £7.1m programme of low carbon investment (energy efficiency and renewable energy installations) over the three years to 2024/25 to help achieve the corporate Carbon Plan target of an 85% reduction in the Council's carbon emissions by 2025. The 2023/24 budget had also committed an additional £2.17m for a new corporate solar energy programme, underlining the Council's commitment to meeting Climate Strategy and Carbon Plan commitments.

The report explained that the Low Carbon Capital Investment Programme related specifically to the decarbonisation of key corporate assets and the installation of renewable

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energy generation assets but that there were also a number of other projects within the Capital Programme, in areas such as transport, fleet, waste, housing and schools, that also contributed to the Council's climate goals.

The report stated that, of the circa £7.1 programme, almost 90% had been spent or committed to projects. Of the £7.1m, approximately £2.567m had been spent on low carbon Leisure Centre investments and Electric Vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure at Bennet Road and a further £3.048m had been committed to decarbonisation projects for delivery by 2026 (including heat pump and energy efficiency projects at the Hexagon and Civic Offices) with the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) programme. The remainder of the money had, subject to business case approval, been earmarked for projects that were in development such as the Smallmead solar farm, LED lighting as well as other energy efficiency projects.

The report explained that over £2m had been secured in external grants to supplement the Council's low carbon investments, this exceeded the income target of £450k when the budget had first been set back in 2021. The report also explained that the £2.17m committed to the corporate solar programme had not been mobilised as there were dependencies with asset strategy and car parking reviews which would influence the potential locations for deployment of additional solar capacity.

A table in the report provided an overview of the status of the various projects contained within the programme and set out the changes and significant variances that had been agreed since approval to spend against the programme had been approved by the Committee on 30 June 2021 (Minute 13 refers).

**Resolved - That that delivery of the Council's Low Carbon Investment Programme as summarised pursuant to the recommendations agreed at SEPT Committee on 30 June 2021 be noted.**

### **7. READING TRANSPORT STRATEGY 2040**

The Committee considered a report that provided an overview of the work that had been carried out to prepare the Reading Transport Strategy 2040. The report set out the results of the latest statutory consultation and summarised the changes that had been made to the Strategy taking into account feedback that had been received during the consultation process. The report recommended that the Committee recommend to Council that it adopt a final version of the Strategy as the new statutory Local Transport Plan (LTP) for the Borough. A summary of the consultation responses was attached to the report at Appendix A and a final version of the Reading Transport Strategy 2040 was attached at Appendix B.

The report explained that there was statutory duty for all Local Transport Authorities to produce a Local Transport Plan (LTP). Reading's current LTP for the period 2011 to 2026 had been adopted by the Council in March 2011 and significant progress had been made with the majority of schemes within it being delivered. Work to prepare the new LTP, the Reading Transport Strategy 2040, had commenced in 2019 when an initial visioning consultation had been conducted. This was followed by a first statutory consultation conducted in 2020 on a draft version of the Strategy. The consultation in 2020 had provided useful feedback but uncertainties relating to the implications of the pandemic on future

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travel behaviour led to the development of the Strategy being paused. In June 2023 the Committee gave approval for a second statutory consultation to be undertaken on the draft Strategy due to the significant period of time that had passed since the previous consultation (Minute 5 refers).

The report set out and summarised the main sections within the Reading Transport Strategy 2040. The Strategy set out an ambitious vision to create healthier, greener and more equal communities through the provision of travel options in Reading. The Strategy focused on promoting sustainable travel options as a realistic alternative to the private car and set out how transport facilities and services in Reading would be developed up to 2040 to help achieve the Council's wider objectives for the town, including the Reading 2050 vision and the objectives of the Climate Emergency Strategy.

The Strategy acknowledged that it was not possible for every car journey to be replaced by a more sustainably mode of transport and took account of the fact that people needed to drive on occasions for reasons relating to work, family, safety, gender differences or equality issues. The Strategy therefore included an objective to transition to electric vehicles, which would have a significantly reduced impact on carbon emissions compared to diesel and petrol equivalents. The Strategy recognised that this alone would not achieve the overall objectives of the Strategy as electric vehicles still produced particulates that led to poor air quality, did not reduce congestion levels and did not encourage active travel with the associated health and wellbeing benefits.

The report explained that a key focus of the Strategy was to tackle social inequalities through the provision of affordable transport solutions that would enable everyone in the town to access education, training, employment and leisure opportunities. Further key themes of the Strategy related to carbon reduction, improved air quality, health and wellbeing, economic growth and the utilisation of latest technologies to be at the forefront of innovation.

A fundamental element of the Strategy's development had been engagement and consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, local interest groups and residents. In 2023 the Committee had granted approval to conduct a second statutory consultation on the Draft Strategy. The consultation had taken place between 18 September 2023 and 11 December 2023 and had provided an opportunity for residents and key stakeholders to review the updated document and provide feedback. The report summarised the main themes of the responses that had been received and a detailed analysis of the consultation results was attached to the report at Appendix A. The report set out the key updates made to the Strategy following the consultation feedback that had been received.

The report explained that the Council's Constitution listed the Local Transport Plan as being a matter reserved for Council and that the approval of Council was ultimately required for the Reading Transport Strategy 2040 to be formally adopted. The report therefore recommended that the Committee submit a recommendation to Council that it adopt the Reading Transport Strategy 2040 as the Local Transport Plan for the Borough for the period 2024 to 2040.

**Resolved –**

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- (1) That the feedback received following the statutory consultation on the Reading Transport Strategy 2040, as attached at Appendix A, and the subsequent amendments made to the Strategy following the consultation be noted;

That the following be recommended to Council:

- (2) That the Reading Transport Strategy 2040, as attached at Appendix B, be adopted as the new statutory Local Transport Plan (LTP) for the Borough for the period 2024 to 2040.

## **8. ZERO EMISSION BUS REGIONAL AREA (ZEBRA) - FUNDING AWARD**

The Committee considered a report on funding that the Council had secured from the Department for Transport (DfT), through the Zero Emission Bus Regional Area (ZEBRA) fund, for the provision of 24 electric buses in Reading. The report also sought scheme and spend approval from the Committee to implement the scheme.

The report stated that the transition to electric buses would help to achieve a range of Council strategies and objectives included within the Local Transport Plan (LTP), Climate Emergency Strategy and Air Quality Action Plan. To secure the funding award the Council had worked in partnership with Reading Buses to prepare and submit a bid in line with DfT guidance. The work around the bid had included obtaining quotes from electric bus suppliers, charging infrastructure providers and the electricity Distribution Network Operator (DNO). A comprehensive set of documentation had been prepared as part of the bidding process, including a full business case and evidence for the requested funding. In addition to this the Council had responded to queries from the DfT as part of the assessment process. The bid had sought funding for the following elements:

- Route 17 (purple route) – the provision of 17 double deck electric buses (15 and two spare);
- Route 21 (claret route) – the provision of seven double deck buses (six and one spare); and
- the provision of the required upgraded electricity supply and charging infrastructure at the Great Knollys Street depot.

The report explained that the total value of the bid was for £4.7m grant funding from Government. The requirements of the grant funding were that the Government would contribute up to 75% of the cost difference between an electric bus and a standard conventional diesel bus equivalent of the same total passenger capacity. For infrastructure, Government funding would contribute up to 75% of the total capital expenditure incurred as a result of its purchase and installation. The report explained that Reading Buses had committed to fund the difference between the grant funding and the costs to purchase the electric buses and charging infrastructure and therefore there was no funding commitment required from the Council other than for staff time. The funding would be provided to the Council by the DfT and that a legal agreement was being prepared to enable the Council to

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provide the funding to Reading Buses on receipt of evidence to spend in line with the grant conditions.

The report explained that the timetable for the delivery of the project was for all electric buses to be operational within the 2024/25 financial year and noted that this timescale was also a condition of the grant funding. The report also stated that if the project was delivered successfully and the electric buses performed as expected the Council and Reading Buses would look to continue to work in partnership to seek further funding opportunities to increase the number of electric buses operating in Reading.

### **Resolved –**

- (1) That the successful funding award of £4.7m secured for the provision of 24 electric buses and associated charging infrastructure in Reading be noted;**
- (2) That scheme and spend approval for the project be granted.**

### **9. READING BUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN (BSIP) 2024**

The Committee considered a report on the current Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and the work that had been undertaken by the Council to prepare an updated version of the BSIP in line with Department for Transport (DfT) requirements. A copy of the BSIP 2024 Executive Summary was attached at Appendix 1 and a copy of the full BSIP 2024 was attached at Appendix 2. The report explained that a draft version of Reading's BSIP for 2024 had been submitted to the DfT on 12 June 2024 and sought the Committee's approval to submit the final version to the DfT.

The report stated that Reading's first BSIP had been published in October 2021 in line with the objectives as set out in the National Bus Strategy that required Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) to produce a BSIP for their area. Reading's BSIP set out an ambitious programme of measures designed to improve bus services in the town and had been prepared in partnership with all local operators and neighbouring local authorities.

The report explained that, following the publication of Reading's first BSIP in 2021, the Council had developed Enhanced Partnership (EP) arrangements with local bus operators in line with relevant legislation. The resultant Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme came into effect on 1 April 2022. Following this the Government undertook a review of all BSIPs and EPs submitted by LTAs and discussions were held with selected authorities. On 4 April 2022 the DfT had announced indicative funding allocations for selected authorities, including up to £26.3m for Reading for the three-year period from 2022/23 to 2024/25.

In early 2024, the DfT had requested that all LTAs refresh and update their BSIPs and submit these to the DfT by June 2024. The report explained that, unlike previous versions, the latest BSIP 2024 would not function as a bidding document for specific DfT funds but was required as a condition for the release of the Council's BSIP funding envelope for the 2024/25 financial year.

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The report explained that the updated BSIP 2024 had been written to be comprehensive but also to be concise and accessible to the public, and so the document had been restructured and shortened when compared to the BSIP 2021. The report set out the key themes of Reading's BSIP 2024 that included an update on the achievements and progress made since 2021. The updated BSIP also set out the improvement programme for the 2024/25 financial year, including how BSIP and other related funding would be spent. The BSIP 2024 also outlined the Council's ambitions beyond 2025, including the prioritised proposals for the four years 2025/26 to 2028/29, longer-term ambitions and explained how the BSIP would align with the Reading Transport Strategy 2024.

The BSIP 2024 highlighted the significant progress that had been made since 2021 and recognised that many initiatives within the first BSIP had now been implemented. Given that much of the BSIP 2021 had been successfully delivered, the BSIP 2024 provided an opportunity to present a new set of plans for 2025 and allowed the Council to bring forward a number of new and enhanced measures under the following key themes:

- Service Level and Network Coverage;
- Bus Priority;
- Lower and Simpler Fares;
- Ticketing;
- Waiting and Interchange Facilities;
- Bus Information and Network Identity;
- Bus Passenger Experience;
- Bus Fleet;
- Accessibility and Inclusion; and
- Longer Term Transformation of the Network.

The measures listed above had been identified by transport officers and other members of the Enhanced Partnership and reflected the local priorities needed to improve the public transport network in Reading. The measures also supported the wider objectives of the Local Transport Plan (the Reading Transport Strategy 2040) as well as the Council's Corporate Plan and other Climate Strategy objectives.

The report explained that although the BSIP 2024 was not a bidding document but that it did report on what had already been achieved and so might be used a factor by Government when determining future levels of funding. The report stated the Council's positive track record of delivery made a strong case to support future investment and that any funding opportunities that resulted from the published BSIP 2024 would be submitted to the Committee at an appropriate time.

### **Resolved –**

- (1) That the content of the report be noted;**
- (2) That the content of the Bus Service Improvement Plan 2024 Executive Summary, as attached at Appendix 1, be noted;**

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- (3) That the Bus Service Improvement Plan 2024, as attached at Appendix B, be approved for submission to the Department for Transport;**
- (4) That the Assistant Director for Planning, Transport & Regulatory Services, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy & Transport, be authorised to make minor amendments to the Bus Service Improvement Plan 2024 before its submission to the Department for Transport by the Transport Programme Manager.**

**10. DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT (DfT) TRAFFIC SIGNAL OBSOLESCENCE GRANT AWARD - SCHEME APPROVAL**

The Committee considered a report that provided an update on the Department for Transport's Traffic Signals Obsolescence Grant (TSOG) award of circa £561k to the Council to replace aging and obsolete traffic signals in the town during 2024/25 and 2025/26. The report also sought scheme and spend approval to implement the scheme.

The report stated that there were 160 traffic signal sites within the Borough and that it was recognised the Council had an aging traffic signal asset portfolio that was nearing the end of its maintenance life. Approximately 60% of the Council's traffic signal assets needed to be modernised and replaced and many traffic signals in the Borough had become obsolete, which meant that it was becoming increasingly difficult to source and secure replacement parts. Furthermore, older assets were more prone to faults and breaking down which had a detrimental impact on pedestrian access and traffic flows. In turn, these caused unnecessary delays and contributed to congestion and higher pollution levels. Additionally, older assets using halogen type lamps were significantly less energy efficient compared to modern LED equivalents and so cost more to run.

In 2021 the Council had commissioned an asset condition survey to identify the current condition of its traffic signal assets. The survey assessment accurately recorded the locations of assets, inventoried the type of equipment in place at each location and identified and prioritised those assets that most needed to be replaced. The outcome of the condition assessment had identified a backlog of aging and obsolete traffic signal assets valued at that point in time at approximately £7.2m.

The report explained that funding was required to reduce the backlog of aging and obsolete equipment and to bring the town's traffic signal assets up to current standards. In November 2023 the DfT had announced £70m worth of funding to Local Transport Authorities for the period covering 2024/25 to 2025/26 of which £30m was allocated to the TSOG. The Council had made a successful bid for money from the TSOG fund and had been awarded a total of £561,230.58.

The report listed 12 pedestrian crossing sites had been selected for replacement and modernisation using the TSOG funds. The 12 sites were those that had been identified as having had the most faults and failures requiring the most reactive maintenance and so were the most in need of replacement. The report explained that designs for all 12 sites had already been completed and, should the Committee grant scheme approval, the necessary



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purchase orders would be raised and the works programmed to commence in January 2025 with an expected six month delivery programme.

The report also explained that there had been additional funding allocated from various other capital grant schemes that would see traffic signal assets upgraded and replaced at other sites and locations throughout the town. The various capital schemes, sites and projects were set out in the report and, in addition to the schemes funded by the TSOG, these would further assist the Council to reduce the catalogue of obsolete traffic signal assets, have a positive impact on traffic flows and help to reduce congestion and pollution. The report stated that the Council would also continue to actively bid for appropriate external funding to improve the condition of all traffic services assets.

**Resolved –**

- (1) That the Department for Transport's Capital Traffic Signal Obsolescence Grant award of £561k over 2-financial years 2024/25 & 2025/26 be noted;**
- (2) That scheme and spend approval for the Department of Transport's Capital Traffic Signal Obsolescence Grant award 2024/25 & 2025/26 be granted.**

(The meeting started at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.01 pm)