

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 29 JUNE 2023

Present: Councillor Cross (Chair);

Councillors Hornsby-Smith (Vice-Chair), Ballsdon, Ennis, Griffith, Juthani, Keeping, Lanzoni, Leng, Magon, McElroy, Moore, Page and Terry

Apologies: Councillors R Singh

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings held on 23 March and 24 May 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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

The Minutes of the meeting of Traffic Management Sub-Committee held on 2 March 2023 were received.

4. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES

The Minutes of the following meetings were received:

- Joint Waste Disposal Board – 2 March 2023
- AWE Local Liaison Committee – 25 April 2023
- Reading Climate Change Partnership - 19 January 2023

5. READING TRANSPORT STRATEGY 2040 - DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report that provided the Committee with an overview of the work that had been carried out to prepare the draft Reading Transport Strategy 2040, the new Local Transport Plan (LTP) for the Borough and sought approval to carry out a twelve week statutory public consultation on the draft Strategy. A copy of the draft Strategy was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report stated that the draft Reading Transport Strategy 2040 set out an ambitious vision to create healthier, greener and more equal communities through the future provision of travel options in Reading. The Strategy was focused on promoting sustainable transport options as a realistic alternative to the private car, setting out how transport facilities and services in Reading would be developed to 2040 to help achieve the Council's wider objectives for the town, including the Reading 2050 Vision and the new zero carbon ambition by 2030. It had been acknowledged that it would not be possible for every car journey to be replaced by a more sustainable mode as people might need to drive on certain occasions, therefore the Strategy included the objective of a transition to electric

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vehicles which had a reduced impact on carbon emissions compared to diesel and petrol equivalents. However, it was clear that this transition alone would not achieve the overall objectives of the Strategy as electric vehicles still produced particulates which led to poor local air quality, did not reduce traffic congestion or encourage more active travel with the associated health and wellbeing benefits.

A key focus of the Strategy was tackling social inequalities in the Borough through the provision of affordable transport solutions to enable access to education, training, employment and leisure opportunities for everyone. Further important themes of the Strategy related to carbon reduction and improved air quality, health and wellbeing, economic growth and making use of the latest technologies to be at the forefront of innovation. The Covid pandemic had had a significant impact on travel behaviours in the Borough and the draft Strategy had been updated with a view to longer-term behavioural changes which had resulted from the pandemic. The report included the latest analysis of travel behavioural changes that had resulted from the pandemic which had been reflected in the updated draft Strategy. The report also included details of the key content of the Strategy, key updates and information on the statutory consultation.

Finally, the report explained that following the statutory consultation the feedback would be reviewed and the draft Strategy would be updated accordingly, alongside any updates required by the new LTP guidance when this was published by the Department for Transport, the updated Strategy would then be submitted to a future meeting for adoption.

Chris Maddocks, Strategic Transport Manager, informed the Committee that there had been an error in the appendix of the LTP with the London Road and Oxford Road schemes having been mixed up. The version of the SEPT Committee papers on the website contained the correct version of the appendix.

The Committee discussed the report and the draft Reading Transport Strategy 2040, asked a number of questions and raised a number of points including the following:

- The Committee thanked officers for producing a very comprehensive Strategy, the aim now was to get the people of the Borough to engage with it;
- It was acknowledged that the car provided people with a very flexible means of transport, but people needed to be asked if they really needed to make the journey in their car;
- There was a need to work with neighbouring authorities with the aim of achieving a shift in transport away from Reading;
- The Strategy provided an opportunity to accelerate the work on climate change and it was recognised that the status quo was not an option and that inter connectivity was vital;
- Post pandemic people were traveling to local destinations rather than into the town centre which meant that the way thought was given to the transport network would need to change;
- The current Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) would include evidence of bus lane use and, with regard to Demand Management, a range of options would be investigated in greater detail;

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- The aim was to provide separate paths for pedestrians and cyclists on more routes in the Borough, however there were often restrictions on space and therefore shared paths could provide an alternative as the only possible option;
- Dropping kerbs to road level and providing raised tables over side roads would be investigated as part of the scheme to help those who used wheelchairs or had mobility issues;
- Early evidence had suggested that a significant proportion of traffic passing through the town had nowhere in the Borough as its final destination and therefore levying a charge on vehicles that used the town as a short cut would be investigated.

Resolved –

- (1) That the work which had been undertaken to date to prepare the draft Reading Transport Strategy 2040 be noted;
- (2) That approval to undertake a 12-week statutory public consultation on the draft Strategy be granted.

6. ELECTRIC VEHICLE INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY - DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report providing the Committee with an overview of the work that had been carried out to prepare a draft Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Strategy for Reading and sought approval to carry out a public consultation on the draft Strategy as part of the proposed statutory consultation on the new LTP. A copy of the draft Strategy was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report explained that the Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Strategy would become a sub-strategy to the LTP, with the aim of accelerating the transition to electric vehicles for necessary travel in the Borough. The Strategy set out the current position of electric vehicle take-up in Reading as well as settling the future pathway to support increased uptake of electric vehicles for residents, visitors and local businesses and included reference to the charging infrastructure needs of all electric vehicles, including electric buses, car clubs, e-bikes and e-scooters. The key elements of the draft Strategy were set out in the report.

Officers had engaged with suppliers of electric vehicle charge point infrastructure to ensure the Strategy was based on the latest available information and took into account the latest projections for electric vehicle uptake and for the different types of charging infrastructure to ensure that a lack of charge points was not a barrier to the future take-up of electric vehicles. The Strategy had acknowledged the role the Council had in providing local leadership in this area and highlighted the key areas that were outside the Council's control. External funding had been secured to implement a range of charging points and it had been considered that the future provision of charge points for residents living in streets without off-street parking was a particularly important role for the Council moving forward. Therefore, further installation of charge points in streets without off-street parking had been included as key action in the Strategy.

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The report stated that the Council was committed to ensuring its in-house vehicle fleet was fully electric by 2030 and officers were working with colleagues from the other Berkshire authorities to identify how delivery of charge points could be coordinated across the county. The report also noted that whilst there was currently no statutory guidance for local authorities for the development of electric vehicle strategies it was envisaged that further direction would be included within the Department for Transport's (DfT) new guidance for local authorities on the development of LTPs. Engagement on the development of the Strategy had been carried out with the Energy Savings Trust and feedback had been incorporated in the latest version of the Strategy.

The Committee discussed the report and a number of points were raised including the following:

- The capacity of electricity suppliers both locally and nationally was an issue and they needed to be asked how they would manage the increase in demand that was, and would, result from the increased use of electric vehicles;
- The increased weight of electric vehicles would have an impact on the road infrastructure and the road infrastructure might have to change as a result;
- EV charging points needed to be spread more evenly across the Borough;
- The aim was to increase the number of on-street charging points and the challenge was to keep pace with the uptake of electric vehicles;
- A balance had to be achieved between people being able to park on street and in parking bays and providing access to charging points, however more charging points would be installed in shared parking bays;
- With regard to e-scooters the government had provided an opportunity for local authorities to take part in a trial and although Reading had not done so, Slough had, and lessons would be learned from their experience and the experience of other authorities in the trial;
- As battery life increased it was more likely that people would charge their vehicles at home;
- Rapid chargers were being provided by the private sector and work was taking place across west Berkshire to identify gaps in the provision of charging points.

Resolved -

- (1) That the work which had been undertaken to prepare the draft Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Strategy for Reading be noted;**
- (2) That approval to undertake a public consultation on the draft Strategy, alongside the proposed statutory consultation on the new Local Transport Plan be granted.**

7. STRATEGIC TRANSPORT SCHEMES UPDATE

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report providing an update on the progress with delivery of the current programme of strategic transport schemes in Reading. This included major public transport

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enhancements for both bus and rail services, active travel improvement to enable more walking and cycling and associated incentivisation and communications initiatives to encourage more healthy lifestyles. Key milestones, set out in the report, included the launch of the Reading All-Bus ticket scheme which set a daily cap for bus travel in Reading, securing an additional £1m funding from the DfT for the Bath Road active travel scheme, and the significant milestone of the opening of Reading Green Park Railway Station to the public on 27 May 2023.

The report explained that the BSIP programme had included a range of capital and revenue measures to encourage greater bus usage in Reading, with one of the key revenue initiatives being the introduction of a multi-operator fares reduction ticketing scheme. The report also explained that the current contract for the operation of the BUZZ 42 service, which ran between Kenavon Drive, the town centre and Richfield Avenue, had commenced in November 2020 and was operated by Reading Transport Limited. The initial period for the contract was due to expire on 3 November 2023, however, the contract had included the option to extend for a period of 24 months until 3 November 2025. The bus services were proving popular with usage levels increasing steadily and were fully funded by private sector section 106 contributions that had been specifically fettered for the provision of the bus service to give new residents a new sustainable travel choice. The Assistant Director for Planning, Transport and Public Protection had therefore taken the decision to extend the service contract until November 2025.

An additional £1m grant funding had recently been secured from the DfT for the active travel scheme on Bath Road and the Assistant Director for Planning, Transport and Public Protection had agreed spend approval for this additional funding to be allocated to the scheme.

The report explained that the development and delivery of the programme of strategic transport schemes was lead and managed by officers, with external support from specialist transport planning and engineering consultants. Until August 2019 the Council had had a term contract with a single supplier for the provision of these transport consultancy services, however, since this time a number of different external procurement routes had been used to engage these services. Recent soft-market testing with a number of multi-disciplinary transport consultants had revealed interest in the establishment of a Reading focused transport consultancy framework, which would enable a more consistent approach to the delivery and development of transport schemes and associated funding proposals. The soft-market test had provided feedback on a number of different approaches which officers were reviewing to obtain best value from the market. It was likely this would involve establishing a framework with two multi-disciplinary suppliers with the ability to deliver a wide range of services, as required by the Transport and Highways teams. The scope could also be tailored to ensure that the transport related requirements of other areas of the Council could also be met. The report therefore sought approval for the progression of a procurement to establish a framework agreement for the provision of transport consultancy services and for authority to be granted to the Assistant Director for Planning, Transport and Public Protection, in consultation with the Assistant Directors of Legal and Democratic Services and Procurement, to approve the award of the resulting contracts.

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The authorisation process in respect of Reading Green Park Station had been completed in May 2023 and the station had transferred to Network Rail and Great Western Railway (GWR), who owned and operated the station, respectively. An event had been held to mark the formal opening of the station with all key partners and stakeholders on 25 May 2023 and the first public services calling at the station had commenced on 27 May 2023. With regard to Reading West Station, work was being managed by GWR, who the Council were in regular dialogue with. Currently, work was being carried out to fit out the building on Oxford Road, with the sign-off process being carried out with Network Rail, and the station opening at the end of summer 2023 at the latest.

Resolved:

- (1) That the progress made on the delivery of the current programme of strategic transport schemes as outlined in the report be noted;**
- (2) That the decision of the Assistant Director for Planning, Transport and Public Protection to extend the BUZZ 42 bus service contract, which ran between Kenavon Drive and Richfield Avenue, until November 2025 be noted;**
- (3) That the decision of the Assistant Director for Planning, Transport and Public Protection to agree spend approval for the additional £1m capital grant funding which had been secured from the Department for Transport for the Bath Road active travel scheme be noted;**
- (4) That the progression of a procurement to establish a framework agreement for the provision of transport consultancy services, and the provision of delegated authority to the Assistant Director for Planning, Transport and Public Protection, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy & Transport, and Assistant Directors of Legal & Democratic Services and Procurement, to approve the award of the resulting contracts be approved.**

8. BOROUGHWIDE SMOKE AREA CONTROL DECLARATION

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report that asked the Committee to revoke all the existing Smoke Control Areas (SCA) that were currently covering a large part of the Borough, and to replace them with a new single Order declaring the whole of the Borough a smoke control area. A map of the existing areas was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report explained that SCAs had first been introduced under the Clean Air Act 1956 to restrict coal burning following bad smog events and SCAs were still relevant today due to the rise in popularity of wood burning stoves. The current Clean Air Act 1993 had recently been updated by the Environment Act 2021 to provide a simpler regime for smoke control enforcement, allowing a possible decriminalised regime with a simplified structure for

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issuing penalty notices. There were currently 21 SCAs within the Borough that had been declared since 1959. However, these only covered around 62% of the Borough.

The report stated that the benefit of the proposal was to reduce the risk of harmful emissions of uncontrolled burning of solid fuels in open fireplaces in the 38% of Reading that was currently not covered by SCAs. The proposal would also ensure consistency and minimize confusion in relation to the controls in place for the burning of solid fuels across the Borough and to raise awareness of the health impacts of burning solid fuel on air pollution. Before the new SCA could be declared a statutory consultation process would need to be completed and a public awareness campaign would also be carried out alongside this process to ensure that residents were aware of any implications there might be on them.

Resolved -

- (1) That the existing Smoke Control Orders be revoked and replaced with a single Smoke Control Order across the whole Borough, subject to the outcome of consultations and confirmation by the Secretary of State;**
- (2) That subject to the outcome of the public consultation, the Assistant Director of Planning, Transport and Public Protection, in consultation with the Lead Councillor and the Assistant Director for Legal and Democratic Services be granted authority to exercise the delegation confirming the order.**

9. LOW CARBON ENERGY CAPITAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMME UPDATE (ANNUAL REPORT)

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report providing the Committee with an update on the progress that had been made with the implementation of the Council's Low Carbon Energy Investment Programme.

The report explained that the 2022/23 Budget, that had been 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 included an additional 32.2m for a new corporate solar energy programme, underlining the Council's commitment to meeting Climate Strategy and Carbon Plan commitments.

The report stated that it was important to note that there were a number of projects within the Capital Programme which contributed to the Council's climate goals, in transport, fleet, waste, housing and schools, and the low carbon investment programme was just one part of this, relating specifically to decarbonization of key corporate assets. Approval to spend against the programme had been secured at the meeting of SEPT Committee on 30 June 2021 (Minute 13 refers) and the report provided an update on the programme, reflecting changes and significant variances that had been agreed in the interim, this was set out in a

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table in the report. A similar update on the programme was submitted to the Committee annually.

Resolved - That the progress with the development and delivery of the Council's low carbon investment programme as summarised in the report, pursuant to the recommendations agreed at SEPT Committee on 30 June 2021 (Minute 13 refers) and the delegations therein be noted.

(The meeting closed at 8.10 pm)