

## **SCRUTINY FOR POLICIES AND PLACE COMMITTEE**

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee held in the Luttrell Room - County Hall, Taunton, on Tuesday 13 June 2017 at 11.00 am

**Present:** Cllr T Lock (Chairman), Cllr P Ham, Cllr T Napper, Cllr A Wedderkopp, Cllr B Filmer, Cllr John Hunt, Cllr D Ruddle and Cllr J Thorne

**Other Members present:** Cllr A Bown, Cllr S Coles, Cllr D Hall, Cllr J Lock, Cllr F Nicholson, Cllr H Prior-Sankey and Cllr J Woodman.

**Apologies for absence:** Cllr M Lewis

### **2 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 2**

Cllr A Bown, Cllr S Coles, Cllr B Filmer, Cllr P Ham, Cllr T Lock, Cllr T Napper, Cllr H Prior-Sankey, Cllr D Ruddle, Cllr J Thorne, Cllr A Wedderkopp and Cllr J Woodman all declared a personal interest as a District and/or City/Town, Parish Councillor.

### **3 Minutes from the previous meeting held on 21 March 2017 - Agenda Item 3**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 March 2017 were accepted as being accurate by the Committee and were signed by the Chairman.

### **4 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4**

The Chairman welcomed the following members of the public to the meeting and invited them to speak about agenda item 5: Mr Baddeley; Mr Farrell; Mr Power; Mrs Power; Mr Hossell; Mr Lodge. It was explained that statements received from those members of the public had also been circulated to the Committee in advance of the meeting along with a statement from Mr Orr, who was unable to attend the meeting. The statements submitted by those members of the public are attached to the minutes as an Appendix. The Chairman thanked the members of the public that had spoken and others who were in attendance to observe and listen and he noted that the concerns and opinions they had expressed were no doubt shared by many people in the local area.

The Chairman then invited Cllr Hall, Cabinet Member for Resources and Economic Development to respond and he began by thanking those present for attending the meeting and sharing their views. He noted that the Council along with other bodies had supported and lobbied the Government for improvements to the A303 and A358 however any improvements had to be right for and benefit local communities so the Council would not support a new road at any cost; with any proposed development there would be concerns raised and it would be important for all opinions and viewpoints to be taken in to account; and finally he reminded the meeting that the consultation was being undertaken by Highways England (HE) as it was a HE scheme and he urged everyone to also engage directly with HE so they were aware of all comments relating to the local perspective and points of view.

## 5 **A358 Update** - Agenda Item 5

The Committee received a presentation from the Strategic Commissioning Manager – Highways and Transport on the A358 Taunton to Southfields dualling scheme and the non-statutory consultation process by Highways England (HE). It was noted that the Council had campaigned to secure improvements to the whole of the A303/A30/A358 corridor and the economic benefits it would bring to the area if designed appropriately, and there was strong support for a dual carriageway improvement from the M5 at Taunton to Southfields as part of that programme.

It was explained that HE would be responsible for the design, delivery and operation of the route, and the Council was a consultee only and the scheme if progressed would be consented through the Development Consent Order mechanism used for nationally significant infrastructure projects. The role of the Council was explained as was the process of the current non-statutory stage of consultation by HE that would be used to help inform choice of a preferred route. It was highlighted that those wishing to make representations about the route were encouraged to contact HE directly.

Members heard that there had been 26 initial options (north and south) of the current road and those had been sifted down to 4 options for further assessment (diagrams/maps that highlighted the different route options were shown). HE had chosen to consult on a single option to inform development of the preferred route. The presentation focused on trying to ascertain the benefits of the proposed route and it was explained that without more information such as that relating to traffic flow analysis, journey times and congestion and links to other proposed developments within the area it made the task of trying to judge those benefits more difficult. More work and detail would be required as the scheme developed so that aspects such as: flood risk/drainage; rights of way; landscape and visual impacts; air quality and emissions; archaeology and cultural heritage; biodiversity and ecology; and noise and vibration could be better understood and addressed to minimise impacts to the local community whilst trying to maximise the benefit.

It was stated that of the 4 options that had been considered in more detail in the Technical Appraisal Report (TAR) an early cost/benefit assessment indicated that option '2A/2B' (link to Junction 25 and M5 south facing slips only) appeared to demonstrate the greatest quantified benefits. Although option '2A/2B' was the most expensive option (costing an extra £40m approx.) it had an estimated present value of benefits of £529m compared to a figure of £351 for the preferred option.

The Strategic Commissioning Manager in summary noted that although the Council was supportive of the proposal for a new/improved route along the A358 there were numerous key issues that required more detail and exploration those were: the need for more information overall; the link road between the new expressway and Junction 25; the principle of a new 'all-movement' junction on the M5; strong community concern about the potential impact of J25a at proposed location; concern about any connection between J25a and the local road network; how to attract a greater proportion of traffic to

use 'section 1'; limited junctions on 'section 2'. In closing he noted that the Council would seek assurances that HE would further consider the matters raised before finalising the preferred route, rather than discounting design solutions at this stage. He reflected that key concerns raised appear to be about a limited number of important issues rather than HE's choice of route as a whole.

The Chairman invited comments from Committee Members and in the ensuing discussion the following points were made, issues raised and/or questions asked/answered including:

- The proposals were not acceptable to the people of Taunton generally and in the affected areas specifically, why cut a swathe through pleasant countryside and ruin productive farm land, any new route should link up properly to the M5 and the park and ride at Cambria Farm, discussing the proposed route was a waste of time as it was the wrong route;
- There was a question about the development consent order process and projected timeline and it was noted that this would most likely be delayed somewhat due to the June General Election, and it was noted that it was important for the Council to respond to this stage of consultation to set out support for the improvements whilst also highlighting issues that should be considered by HE to assist the Secretary of State in identifying a preferred route for the scheme;
- The proposed route was described as being more of a Taunton by-pass rather than a by-pass for Henlade and it didn't seem to achieve the stated aim of having 2 strategic routes in to the Southwest in order to improve infrastructure resilience;
- It was suggested that the most beneficial route (bearing in mind the limited information available) appeared to be the '2A/2B' route and the Council was encouraged to work with the District Councils and Somerset MP's to secure the best outcome for Somerset and its residents and the Committee heard that the Council was already engaged with other bodies and this included meetings of a steering group of Cabinet Members from local Councils;
- The proposed route seemed to provide a by-pass Henlade and it was noted that not all those travelling would want to go in to Taunton, many using the route would be going on to Devon and Cornwall;
- Concerns from local residents in the Killams Green area were raised by a Member in respect of protecting the Vivary Wedge and ensuring any new proposed Junction on the M5 were appropriately located and would not have an adverse effect on local communities;
- It was noted that it was important to ensure, in an area dependent on tourism and suffering from poor social mobility, that good transport links were maintained and improved however it was just as important to remember the area and accessibility for people and businesses to the west of Taunton, and it was noted that all of the proposed routes had indicated an improvement in journey times.

The Chairman thanked all those for attending and contributing to agenda item 5 and sharing their views on this important project and he reminded the Committee that Highways England were consulting on this scheme, not the Council, and therefore that all consultation responses should go to Highways England. The Chairman also reminded those present that the Cabinet Member

for Resources and Economic Development, who had spoken on agenda item 5, would be taking a non-key decision (scheduled for 22 June) and comments on the proposed scheme could also be submitted to him to help inform the Council's response on the options consultation. The update was accepted.

## 6 **Flood and Water Management** - Agenda Item 6

The Committee received a presentation from the Strategic Commissioning Manager – Community Infrastructure and the Service Manager – Flood Risk Management who together provided an overview and an update on the role and work of SCC as the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA). It was noted at the outset that the structure of Flood and Water Management in England was complicated and a diagram was shown of the various local agencies and the roles they each played.

In its role as LLFA, the Council has a key statutory role to play in Flood and Water Management. The formation of the Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) has helped facilitate collaboration between the various agencies and offers additional funding. The Council has been a key facilitator in progressing the SRA's work and the Flood Action Plan.

The Committee were informed that the LLFA has set a number of strategic objectives including: maximising the benefit of spend in flood and water management, gaining as much funding as possible for schemes, ensuring maximum benefit of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) through the planning system, progressing with SRA work, working closely with other risk management authorities and increasing the profile of the LLFA.

The presentation highlighted that the LLFA faces a number of upcoming challenges and opportunities including: exploring income generation; maximising funding in Somerset through the Flood Defence Grant in Aid, Local levy and SRA as well as testing a web based system developed by Dorset County Council which allows anyone to report and record flooding incidents.

The Committee questioned whether SCC is advising planners and District Councils on SuDS. It was confirmed that there is an arrangement in place to provide advice to Taunton Deane and West Somerset, guidance has been sent and District councils have been asked to implement this. SCC aims to be engaged through the planning process and is working on improving this engagement. A Member expressed disappointment that the SuDS guidance is advisory only. It was also highlighted by the Committee that there is a need for developers to maintain the SuDS that they implement.

The Committee recognised the high level of funding provided through the EU and queried future funding provision following the EU referendum. It was confirmed that current funding seems assured until 2020 but is uncertain beyond that. It seems likely that additional funding through the EU may be lost but SCC is in constant dialogue about the importance of this funding.

A Member queried how the work of the Flood Action groups could be better co-ordinated and integrated. The Strategic Commissioning Manager confirmed that a consistent approach was needed and agreed to look into this and

respond directly to the Member. The Council was currently working to ascertain the below ground assets and the drainage network in Somerset

The Committee questioned who is responsible for making landowners aware of their riparian responsibilities. SCC was aware that there was a lack of awareness among landowners and produced a guidance document (Living on the Edge). It was highlighted that it can be beneficial to take landowners to areas where gullies are flooding to see the impact it has and further illustrate the importance of their role in fulfilling their riparian responsibilities. A Member asked if the Council was liaising with neighbouring authorities and in particular Gloucester and it was reported that Somerset did regularly work with other bodies to share best practice and ideas.

The overall aim of the presentation was to highlight the various on-going works undertaken by the Council and in collaboration with others to make a positive difference to Flood risk management in Somerset. It was suggested that the work of the SRA be discussed at a future meeting of the Committee. The Committee accepted the update.

## **7 ICT Update - Agenda Item 7**

The Committee received a PowerPoint presentation from the Commercial and Business Services Director on the Council's overall ICT strategy. The main focus of the improvements was to work across 3 themes to increase productivity; resilience and compliance.

Some members expressed concerns with IT issues since joining the Council and there were encouraged to contact the IT help desk directly so that they could provide assistance. The Council had spent time to ensure that its devices and systems were adequately protected against malware and hacking with adherence to security best practice and data safeguarding. There was a question about backup procedures and it was stated that the Council was utilising cloud storage and this was held in different locations. The update was accepted.

## **8 Appointments to Joint Scrutiny - Agenda Item 8**

The Chairman invited the Scrutiny Manager to explain that the Committee, in previous quadrenniums, had appointed 2 of its Members to sit on Joint Scrutiny bodies in Somerset. These Joint Scrutiny Bodies currently provided an overview and Scrutiny of the Somerset Waste Board and the Somerset Rivers Authority, and the Council nominated 2 representatives to sit on each joint body as did the 5 District Councils. The representatives would be reviewed each year.

In respect of the Joint Scrutiny of the Somerset Rivers Authority the Committee agreed to nominate Cllr Ham and Cllr Wedderkopp.  
In respect of the Joint Scrutiny of the Somerset Waste Board the Committee agreed to nominate Cllr Lock and Cllr Lewis.

9 **Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee Work Programme - Agenda Item 9**

The Committee considered and noted the Cabinet Forward Plan of proposed Key Decisions.

The Committee considered its own work programme and the future agenda items listed, and noted that the next meeting would take place in July.

It was suggested that an item on Road Safety Strategy be added to the 5 September meeting. Also the County Farms update report would be considered at 31 October meeting.

10 **Any other urgent items of business - Agenda Item 10**

The Chairman, after ascertaining there were no other matters arising, thanked all those present for attending the meeting.

**(The meeting ended at 1.37 pm)**

**Cllr Tony Lock  
CHAIRMAN**