



Place Overview
Committee

12 July 2018

10.00 am

Item

3

Public

**MINUTES OF THE PLACE OVERVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 12 JULY
2018
10.00 AM - 12.00 PM**

Responsible Officer: Julie Fildes

Email: julie.fildes@shropshire.gov.uk Tel: 01743 257723

Present

Councillor Gwilym Butler (Chairman)

Councillors Andy Boddington, Julian Dean, Rob Gittins, Simon Harris, Paul Milner (Vice Chairman), Dan Morris, William Parr and Harry Taylor

5 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence or substitutions.

6 Discloseable Pecuniary Interests

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest.

7 Minutes of the meetings held on 10th and 17th May

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meetings held on 10th and 17th May 2018 be approved as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

8 Public Question Time

There were no questions from members of the public.

9 Member Question Time

There were no questions from Members.

10 Shrewsbury Big Town Plan

The Economic Growth Key Account and Investment Senior Officer gave a presentation on the progress of the Shrewsbury Big Town Plan and the development and delivery of growth strategies for the key market towns [copy attached to the signed minutes]. Members noted that the work was being undertaken jointly and funded in partnership with Shrewsbury Town Council and Shrewsbury Business

Improvement District [BID]. It was anticipated that the draft plan would go the Shrewsbury BID Board on the 19th July 2018, then be considered by Cabinet on 25th July 2018 and by Shrewsbury Town Council on 30th July 2018. Further consultation would be undertaken before the final draft of the report was prepared with the identification of priority projects and initiatives with associated action and delivery plans.

The Economic Growth Key Account and Investment Senior Officer advised that extensive consultation following the launch of the project had identified the four key themes of the work:

- Movement and Place
- A Place for Enterprise
- Vitality, Life and Mix
- Nurturing Natural Shrewsbury

Members noted that the proposed North West Relief Road [NWRR] was not shown on any of the maps in the presentation, the Economic Growth Key Account and Investment Senior Officer explained that should permission for the road be given by Central Government it would alleviate many of the problems identified in the report, but until a decision was made the project would only incorporate the existing infrastructure. She continued that movement around the town centre could be improved through the rationalisation and improvement of car parks, improving access points and public transport hubs and instigating cycle routes. It was not considered necessary to completely pedestrianize the town centre but priority would be given to pedestrians and cyclists.

Members heard that a better balance would be achieved in future between the growth at the edge of the town and that located in and around the town centre. This would allow a greater choice and diversity for housing and workspace. Public open spaces and access to green space would also be improved. Smarter working and better networks, both physical and virtual, between important sectors such as education, healthcare, sports and leisure as well as industry and business would be developed. New technologies could be harnessed to connect people and businesses. Work had been undertaken to identify where the new technologies were located and how they disrupted existing ways of working and land use. It was recognised that the new technology users could bring vitality to the town centre and deliver better outcomes for communities.

The Economic Growth Key Account and Investment Senior Officer explained that it was intended to raise the standards of all new development within the town through the implementation of a design charter which would embed the 'Shrewsbury Test' in the development planning process through the Local Plan Review. The intention would then be to consider this on a Shropshire wide basis.

Referring Members to the slide showing the Big Connection, the Economic Growth Key Account and Investment Senior Officer, explained that it illustrated how all the principles of the Big Town Plan came together and formed the biggest regeneration opportunity in Shrewsbury. Each area shown had its own individual character and when viewed together formed a large corridor of opportunity running from the West End to the Flaxmill. She outlined the proposals for each area:

- **Westend:** this would be a balance of new mixed use and high quality public realm development. There would be improved access to the river, including works at Victoria Quay.
- **Riverside:** key development opportunity, access to the river would be opened up.
- **Norther Corridor and Station:** Development would be undertaken on both sides of the station and through traffic could be removed to create a better environment. Lighting around the station and under the railway bridge would be improved, and workspace and housing developed on the underused sites.
- **Flaxmill:** there was an intention to enhance and improve accessibility to the Flaxmill scheme and enhance the northern gateway into and out of Shrewsbury.

Members noted that in addition to the Big Town Plan, Local Economic Growth Strategies were being developed for the key market towns to encourage growth and business development and to promote the ambition for each area. These strategies would be aligned with all other planning policy documents. Members welcomed the Local Economic Growth Strategies and the recognition that each town had its individual characteristics which precluded a one size fits all approach.

The Head of Economic Growth confirmed that the Shrewsbury BID was reaching the end of its first 5 year term and businesses would be re-balloted in October about continuing the project. Members observed that Oswestry had established a BID in April 2018 and some of the other towns had indicated interest in BIDs.

In response to a Member's request for more information about the status of the Shrewsbury Test, the Head of Economic Growth explained that the intention was that Cabinet would be asked to endorse the Big Town Plan which included this test, more work would then need to be done to develop it further. The final BTP document would be presented to Cabinet, with the intention of it being approved as a material consideration as part of the planning process. Members suggested that it should be widened to become a Shropshire Test and it was confirmed that that would be the intention.

The Economic Growth Key Account and Investment Senior Officer confirmed that discussions had been held with Network Rail, the owner of the station and surrounding land, regarding its redevelopment. She observed that both Network Rail and the Royal Mail were open to early engagement.

RESOLVED:

- To continue to support the Economic Growth function of Shropshire Council as it remains an active, lead partner in the Big Town Plan alongside Shrewsbury Town Council and Shrewsbury BID to coordinate the action planning and implementation of the development opportunities detailed within the Big Town Plan.**
- To endorse the approach adopted to produce the key market town growth strategies and the timescales in place for their delivery.**

- iii. That the project be added to the Committee's Work Programme for review every 6 to 9 months.**

11 Highways Winter Maintenance Plan

The Highways, Transport and Environment Commissioning Manager introduced his report on Winter Service, Review and Preparation for the New National Code of Practice. He explained that the Council had a duty under the Highways Act 1980, Section 41 (1A) to provide a winter service for the road network in the County. The revised Code of Practice [Well Managed Highway Infrastructure] required the review of operational preparedness for the winter service season of 2018/19. As a result, the Council had refreshed and improved its Winter Service Policy and its Winter Service Operational Plan.

Members noted that the severe winter of 2017/18 had tested the service and had seen drivers working almost to the limit of their legally permitted hours, for which an exemption from the Department of Transport would have had to be obtained. It was anticipated that winter weather as severe as the previous season would only be expected every 7 to 8 years and the service had coped well. Each depot was provided with weather station data and a protocol to deliver the required service. All decisions made were recorded with the reasons and evidence, and could be made available to the courts if a dispute arose.

Members noted that the policy had been refreshed and not rewritten. The policy and plan would be considered by Cabinet in September 2018 and if approved would be implemented on the 1st October 2018 for the 2018/19 winter season.

The Highways, Transport and Environment Commissioning Manager explained that the purpose of the Winter Service Plan was to deliver a resilient road network and keep key highways operational, maintaining access to businesses and hospitals during poor weather. He outlined a number of new initiatives set out in the report, such as use of the internet and social media to provide improved guidance to householders and shop owners the appropriate action to remove snow and ice from frontages. Also, pilot schemes working with Town and Parish Councils establishing snow volunteers and pot hole wardens were proposed.

In answer to a Member's question, the Highways, Transport and Environment Commissioning Manager explained that it was necessary to identify the road network which would be treated if required to avoid litigation. He continued that the identified network was shown on the website. A Member observed that pavements should be included in the policy.

The Highways, Transport and Environment Commissioning Manager responded to a Member's enquiry about the discrepancy between other counties treating 54% of their road network compared to Shropshire's 28%, by explaining that it was due to the nature of the roads in Shropshire with 65-70% of roads being unclassified. He continued that the counties which treated greater numbers of their roads were the ones with urban conurbations. The resources available also impacted on the number of roads that the Council was able to treat.

Members noted that the range of equipment held in depots across the county differed due to the situations it would be used in. The majority of the equipment was held in the South of the County due to the nature of its landscape. The Highways, Transport and Environment Commissioning Manager added that all equipment was owned by the Highways Department and personnel were trained to use it.

Members requested more information on how the roads around schools and school bus routes were prioritised for treatment. It was explained that schools did receive a greater priority but where they were in isolated areas it was often too difficult or dangerous for clearance vehicles to attempt access and it was expected that in severe weather the schools would close. Member noted that the majority of schools in these inaccessible areas were primary schools.

It was suggested that a Members' Briefing on the Winter Service Programme could be held in the autumn.

Members recognised the work of local farmers who contributed to the road clearance efforts. It was observed many of the farmers contracted by the Council to clear roads with their own equipment were near retirement age and it was important that younger farmers were recruited and trained to replace them at the appropriate time. The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Highways confirmed that there were sufficient farmers and equipment contracted to clear roads in a winter with average weather conditions.

In response to a Member's query about increased expenditure caused by the severe weather in the winter 2017/18, the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport explained that there was a contingency fund which could be accessed in severe winters to ensure that the service was maintained. He continued that it was not possible to provide grit and salt to Town Councils or members of the public as supplies needed to be conserved for Council use and in the event of other Councils having insufficient supplies the Government could requisition supplies for other authorities.

RESOLVED

- i. That the report, including the defined network (28% of the network), be noted;**
- ii. that the Winter Service Programme be added to the Work Programme for reconsideration in Spring 2019; and**
- iii. That a Members Briefing be held in Autumn 2018 on the Winter Service Programme.**

12 Managing Highways Customer Service and Complaints

The Highways, Transport and Environment Commissioning Manager gave an overview of the Council's management of customer service requests and complaints relating to Highways. He observed that the severe winter of 2017/18 had put additional strains on the service and it had been recognised that improvement was needed within the constraints of available finance. The Highways Department was a partner in the Digital Transformation Programme and the Technicians role would be reviewed as part of the programme.

In response to a query from a Member regarding contacts being lost in the system, the Highways, Transport and Environment Commissioning Manager responded that the department received 2,000 contacts a month and each electronic contact was trackable through the Customer Service System. When received each contact was given an individual ID number and assigned to the appropriate Officer. The new computer system would improve the handling of traditional correspondence and not allow contacts to be lost in the system. He added that an improvement in local management and administration was anticipated with the new systems. Members commented on parallel systems with one dedicated for Town and Parish Councils and the second for members of the public. Members noted that the new approach encouraged the use of generic mailbox which would be accessed by the divisional offices, although improvements to the process were still being refined.

Members discussed the lead times for responses to complaints and service requests. The Highways, Transport and Environment Commissioning Manager advised that a restructure of the department would split Highways Officers into the roles of Technicians and Inspectors. He observed that modern technology had improved access to Officers and increased the volume of contacts, with January to March 2018 receiving more contacts from members of the public than had been received in the whole of the previous three years. He welcomed investment in IT systems to assist with the increased number of contacts.

The Highways, Transport and Environment Commissioning Manager advised that the department employed twenty-five technicians who dealt with an increasing number of issues and expectations. He continued that issues were not always straightforward and there was constant liaison with the Council's insurers. The available resources did not always align with the greater demand and expectations.

In response to a Members query, the Highways, Transport and Environment Commissioning Manager agreed that it was sometimes difficult to differentiate between a service request and a complaint and a protocol had been developed to identify which category the contact belonged to. He confirmed that the service was on call twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

The Highways, Transport and Environment Commissioning Manager confirmed that all staff received appropriate training to undertake their role and undertook the National Code of Practice Accredited Course and were on the National Highways Register which classed them as competent inspectors. He noted that this required a week of dedicated training which impacted on workloads.

RESOLVED:

- i. **That the report be noted; and**
- ii. **that once in place a Member Town and Parish Council Logging Briefing be communicated.**

13 Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2018 - 2019

Members discussed the Committee's work programme.

A vote taken on the establishment of a 20's Plenty Task and Finish Group was lost. It was suggested that the Committee would review the matter in the autumn and this would be added to the Work Programme.

Resolved:

That items to be considered at the next meeting of the Committee include apprenticeships, T'Level qualifications and transport issues.

14 Date/Time of the Next Meeting of the Committee

Members noted that the next meeting of the Place Overview Committee was scheduled for 10.00am on Thursday 6th September 2018.

Signed (Chairman)

Date: