



Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at The Guildhall, St Giles Street, Northampton, NN1 1DE on Wednesday 31 January 2024 at 6.00 pm.

Present:

Councillor André González De Savage (Chair)
Councillor Alison Eastwood (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Anthony S. Bagot-Webb
Councillor William Barter
Councillor Paul Joyce
Councillor Terrie Eales
Councillor Kevin Parker
Councillor Sue Sharps
Councillor Jake Roberts

Also Present:

Councillor Emma Roberts
Councillor Daniel Lister, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Town Centre Regeneration and Growth

Apologies for Absence:

Councillor Terry Gilford, Councillor Phil Larratt, Stuart Timmis Executive Director of Place, Economy & Environment, Kevin Langley Head of Major Projects and Regeneration

Officers:

Nick Henstock, Head of Highways and Transport
Richard Wood, Head of Planning Policy and Specialist Services
Alan Munn, Team Leader Planning Policy
Louise Seymour, Assistant Director Place Shaping
Deven Efde, Regeneration programme Manager
Tom Callaghan, Head of Transport Delivery
Tracy Tiff, Deputy Democratic Services Manager
Marina Watkins, Committee Officer
Ed Bostock, Democratic Services Officer

5. **Declarations of Interest**

None advised.

6. **Minutes**

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meetings of the Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 11th September 2023 and 4th December 2023 be approved and signed as a correct record.

7. **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chair advised that the order of the agenda would be amended, with the VOI scooters scrutiny Task and Finish Group report to be taken first.

The Chair had recently attended the O&S Triangulation meeting, along with Councillor Eastwood, which proved to be a useful source of information.

The Chair thanked all Councillors and officers involved in the VOI scooters scrutiny review, particularly Councillor Eastwood who chaired the review.

8. **Progress reports**

a) **Resources and Waste Strategy**

RESOLVED:

That the Committee notes the update provided with regards to the Resources and Waste Strategy

b) **Highways and Transport Oversight Group**

RESOLVED:

That the Committee notes the update provided with regards to the Highways and Transport Oversight Group

c) **Active Travel Oversight Group**

Councillor Bagot-Webb, Chair Active Travel Oversight Group, advised that following discussions with the Head of Highways and Transport, the decision had been taken that the work of the oversight group had been completed and that the group be disbanded with the Place Overview and Scrutiny committee putting the initiative back on its Work Programme. Councillor Bagot-Webb passed on his thanks to all those members who had contributed to the Group over the past two years and to the Officers for their support and guidance.

It was proposed by Councillor Bagot-Webb and seconded by Councillor Joyce that the recommendations in the report be accepted, and the oversight group be disbanded.

RESOLVED:

That the update on the Active Travel Oversight Group be noted and the Group be disbanded with the initiative remaining on the Place Scrutiny Committee work programme.

9. **Scrutiny review of the VOI Scooters Trial**

Councillor Alison Eastwood, Chair of the Task and Finish Group advised that the scrutiny review had been completed in a very short space of time, over the busy Christmas/New Year period, and had been well served by many parties. The recommendation was that the trial of the VOI scooters be allowed to continue but with strong recommendations regarding improvements required. A roadmap would be produced detailing proposed improvements and timelines, with progress to be reported back in 6 months. The key lines of enquiry had been met. Thanks were expressed to Stuart Timmis, Nick Henstock, Tracy Tiff and Marina Watkins for their work during the review.

Councillor Emma Roberts was a member of the Task and Finish group and addressed the Committee, thanking all involved in the review. At the meeting of the Task and Finish Group held on Monday, the view had been expressed that the report was not ready, and an additional single item meeting was suggested. The recommendations had been watered down, and the delayed Government legislation was not mentioned.

The Chair advised that the timescale had been imposed on the Group, and concessions had been made by moving the date of the Committee from 15th to 31st January, to allow for the lead in time before the report is submitted to Cabinet.

The Head of Highways and Transport advised that a new governance and project management group would be formed comprising of Officers and VOI representatives, which would be held accountable for the delivery of the roadmap of improvements. The Scrutiny Committee could also choose to invite officers back periodically to report on progress.

Points raised by the Committee:

- The contract would need to be checked as to whether it contained any termination clauses.
- WNC already had a role in the management of the contract but there was a need for this to increase.
- Councillors considered that more time to complete the review would have been preferable but was not possible. The remit of the review had been answered and the trial should continue on the basis that the recommended improvements/changes are met.
- VOI had invested £150m into the scheme and were willing to work together with the Council to make improvements.

The Chair thanked Councillor Alison Eastwood for Chairing the review. It was proposed by Councillor Alison Eastwood and seconded by Councillor William Barter that the report be accepted and recommended for submission to Cabinet. The Chair noted that members were able to attend the meeting of Cabinet if they so wished.

Councillor Emma Roberts asked for it to be noted that she did not agree with the contents of the report.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee accepts the final report of the VOI scooters Task and Finish Group and recommends its conclusions and recommendations to Cabinet.

10. Home to School Transport - Post 16 Policy Changes

Tom Callaghan Head of Transport Delivery outlined the report regarding proposed changes to the Post 16 Home to School Transport policy, including an increase in the charge to more accurately reflect actual costs, offering a personal transport budget, and providing transport at standard start and finish times.

Six thousand students a day were transported to school/college by the Council, with 1290 being post 16 students, of which 360 were in further education and 930 attending colleges. 410 of the students were SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability).

The following points were raised:

- A discount was offered for low-income families.
- The service was experiencing a significant overspend, so increasing the charge would help to address this.
- There was no statutory duty to provide transport for post 16 students, but there was an obligation to encourage attendance.
- Benchmarking will be carried out again in March as a number of councils were due to review their policies.
- Consultation would begin on 1st February for 9 weeks, with the proposed policy changes being submitted to cabinet in May.
- Nonstandard transport would not be provided, such as for half days. It was expected that the education establishment would put support in place, and if not then responsibility would fall to the parent.
- Nonstandard hours – in exceptional circumstances such as a medical need, the Council would work with the family to address the issues.
- Apprenticeships on the transport policy only covered students with a EHCP. The provision was not expected to be widely used, but there was a desire to make the opportunity available.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee provided comment and notes the proposed changes to the Post 16 Home to School Transport Policy.

11. Greyfriars masterplan and the opportunity to enhance the towns creative and cultural offer

The Chair welcomed Councillor Daniel Lister, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Town Centre Regeneration and Growth to the Committee. The Greyfriars Masterplan was at an early stage which would benefit from scrutiny engagement.

Deven Efde, Regeneration Programme Manager outlined the development area which was the largest brownfield town centre site.

- The old bus station closed in 2014 when the new building opened.
- Previous schemes on the site had failed to materialise due to concerns regarding financial viability.
- Greyfriars had been identified as a key area in the Northampton Town Centre Masterplan
- Many historical north-south connections run through the site. The intention was to re-open those links.
- It was appreciated that there was a lack of nature, with limited open spaces in the town. The intention was to create a new park/green space.
- Housing of all types and tenures would be encouraged.
- A website-based survey had been carried out throughout December and identified a shared support for multi-generational living. There was a need to gather further responses from the student population, as the consultation took place during the Christmas break.
- Stage 2 engagement would take place in the spring.

Comments from the Committee:

- Sports use on the site should be encouraged, e.g. women's rugby in 2025
- The scheme needs to be viable and requires commercial input.
- Concerns regarding parking.
- There will be a Town Centre Parking Strategy.
- Louise Seymour, Assistant Director Place Shaping advised that the development would be carried out in phases over the next 10+ years.
- Business case development would take place to enable grant funding applications to be submitted.
- There was a great deal of congestion between the university and Greyfriars and it was important to try to mitigate this. Active travel needs to be central to the concept, allowing easy access to the town centre.
- Consideration should be given to forming very modern centres. A more traditional approach may be better. Contact could be made with Councils who have carried out similar schemes to ask whether they regretted the modernity.
- The scheme was a big, bold step that would evolve over time. Modern and old should be kept side-by-side.
- Consideration should be given to the use of Very Light Rail (VLR). Coventry City Council was currently progressing a scheme and contact details could be provided by Councillor Barter.
- The Roadmender building should be brought into the site.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee provided scrutiny comment and noted the Greyfriars masterplan and the opportunity to enhance the towns creative and cultural offer.

That further details be provided to the Committee at a future date for further scrutiny input.

12. **Local Plan for West Northamptonshire**

Richard Wood, Head of Planning Policy and Specialist Services introduced Alan Munn, Team Leader Planning Policy who provided an update on the Local Plan.

- Four member engagement workshops had been held covering areas such as housing, economy, and spatial options.
- Policy drafting session were on-going.
- Brownfield opportunities were being explored across the area.
- At Planning Policy Committee on 30th January, the Committee adopted the Statement of Community Involvement
- Councillors were positive about the way the engagement was being carried out, with sessions proving helpful and informative.
- A central area assessment had identified brownfield sites in Northampton and development opportunities would be promoted. Opportunities for such development were very limited in Towcester and Brackley.
- 1700 units had been identified above what was previously known.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee welcomed and noted the progress on the Local Plan for West Northamptonshire

13. **Review of Committee Work Plan**

The Chair advised that members could raise potential items for the work programme at the pre-meetings.

Councillor Bagot-Webb noted that Active Travel remains on the programme following the dissolution of the Oversight group.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be noted and Active Travel remains on the work programme.

14. **Urgent Business**

None advised.

15. **Exclusion of Press and Public**

The meeting closed at 7.45 pm

Chair: _____

Date: _____