

Contact Officer: Jodie Harris

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

ECONOMY AND NEIGHBOURHOODS SCRUTINY PANEL

Thursday 7th April 2022

Present: Councillor Harpreet Uppal (Chair)
Councillor Martyn Bolt
Councillor Robert Iredale

Co-optees Chris Friend
Andrew Bird

In attendance: Councillor Elizabeth Smaje
Edward Highfield, Service Director of Skills and
Regeneration, Growth and Regeneration
Richard Hollinson, Head of Major Projects
Robert Stanley, Project Officer
Armin Alisic, Project Officer
Andrew Brookfield, Project Officer
Timothy Fawcett, Project Officer
Will Acornley, Head Operational Services
Catherine Little, Programme Manager, Environment
Services

Apologies: Councillor Gwen Lowe
Councillor Yusra Hussain
Councillor John Taylor

1 Membership of the Committee

Apologies were received from Councillor John Taylor, Councillor Yusra Hussain and Councillor Gwen Lowe.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Panel considered the Minutes of the meeting held on the 3rd March 2022. It was highlighted that on page 5 of the Minutes that the date 16 November 2022 should be amended to 16 November 2021. The Panel also raised an issue in relation to changes to car parking in the town centre not being communicated with members.

RESOLVED: It was agreed that:

1. The Minutes of the meeting held on 3rd March 2022 be approved subject to the above amendment.
2. The issue of communication with Members be flagged with the appropriate officer and an update would be provided to scrutiny during the next municipal year.

Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel - 7 April 2022

3 Interests

Councillor Bolt declared an interest in relation to Item 6 in respect to his position as the member of the West Yorkshire Combined Authority Transport Committee.

4 Admission of the Public

All items were considered in the public session.

5 Deputations/Petitions

No deputation or petitions were received.

6 Update on Huddersfield, Heckmondwike and Dewsbury Bus Station Projects (Transforming Cities Fund programme)

The Panel considered a report giving an update on the Huddersfield, Heckmondwike and Dewsbury Bus Station Projects (Transforming Cities Fund programme) presented by Richard Hollinson, Head of Major Projects. Edward Highfield, Service Director of Skills and Regeneration, Growth and Regeneration and Project Officers Robert Stanley, Armin Alisic, Andrew Brookfield and Timothy Fawcett were also in attendance.

It was highlighted that:

- The purpose of the report was to provide the Panel with an early update on the position of the Huddersfield, Dewsbury, and Heckmondwike Bus Station projects.
- All three projects were currently in very early project development stages, and no decisions were being submitted for approval at this time.
- Some initial timelines for the project had been set out, but these were indicative and subject to change at this early stage.
- This was to be the first not the last opportunity for scrutiny and further detailed updates would be submitted to the Panel as the projects progressed.
- The Transforming Cities Fund (TCF) was a national sustainable transport fund administered by the Department for Transport (DfT) for delivery of sustainable transport projects.
- Kirklees Council worked with West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) and other partners to develop a TCF Bid for the Leeds City Region.
- The original bid was submitted to government in November 2019 by WYCA and Kirklees projects amounted to approximately £66 million of investment in sustainable transport initiatives including bus station improvements and active travel schemes.
- From 22/23 the Transforming Cities Fund had been incorporated into the Government's City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement.
- This meant that the timescales for delivery of the projects had been eased from the original deadline of March 2023.
- There was still an expectation, however, that the TCF projects would be delivered early in the 5-year settlement to demonstrate effective and efficient delivery to Government.
- Responsibility for the bus station projects was split between WYCA and Kirklees Council. WYCA were leading on Huddersfield Bus Station (internal transformation) and Dewsbury Bus Station.

Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel - 7 April 2022

- Kirklees Council was leading on Heckmondwike Bus Station and the external works and car park access to Huddersfield Bus Station
- The split in responsibilities was primarily due to asset ownership and ongoing operational responsibilities for the bus stations.
- All the projects were governed and appraised by WYCA using the local assurance framework.
- As the projects progressed there would be further consultations and engagements held with key stakeholders.
- There were also plans to provide more detailed updates to the Panel on each individual project at the appropriate moment in time.
- Officers welcomed any suggestions from the Panel to help shape the projects going forwards.

The Panel thanked officers for the update and expressed their appreciation for involving scrutiny at an early stage. In the discussion to follow, the Panel asked a number of questions in relation to:

- The key benefits of the scheme; particularly around how cosmetic improvements to the bus stations would increase uptake in sustainable travel.
- The business case, highlighting that it was important to understand clearly how the schemes will lead to monetizable benefit.
- The number of responses to the consultation, the Panel expressed a view that at this stage the number of number of consultees seemed too low to draw any conclusions and highlighted that it was important to ensure that a wider set of views, from diverse users was obtained.
- The interpretation of the consultation responses, highlighting that it was difficult to interpret the success of the consultation as there was no consistent template showing the number of users per bus station, and the percentage of those users who had given feedback.
- The addition of a large canopy (to serve as an outdoor waiting area), which the Panel commented may risk becoming a large smoking area/meeting point.

In response to the question about the benefits of the scheme and uptake in sustainable travel, Richard Hollinson advised that at present all the schemes had been through the strategic outline business case stage, which involved early consideration of what the benefits might be, such as value for money and transportation improvements. These factors were then taken into account by the Combined Authority and district partners at the time when the bid for funding was made. There was a clear business case for the improvements and uplifting bus travel, and similar investments in bus stations were also being made by other West Yorkshire Authority's such as Leeds and Calderdale. As a part of preparing the next business case, the benefits of the scheme would be set out, scrutinised, and assessed by the Combined Authority and other partners. All the schemes were also subject to monitoring and evaluation criteria, which will required to be measurable.

In response to the questions about the consultation/engagement, Richard explained that the consultation was carried out in conjunction with the Combined Authority,

Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel - 7 April 2022

and that a wide range of measures had been used to consult with the public on an ongoing basis. So far there had been some useful feedback particularly around user experience of the bus stations and all the schemes were to be subject to further consultation and community engagement as they developed. Richard further reassured the Panel that their comments had been listened to and that work would be undertaken to continue to improve consultation/engagement and to obtain a high number of meaningful responses from a diverse range of users.

In response to the question on the business case, Richard advised that all the schemes were subject to an economic appraisal which considered the benefits of the scheme vs the costs. This information could be provided in the more detailed update to scrutiny in the new municipal year.

Responding to a question about assessment, Robert Stanley, Project Officer advised that Kirklees were operating within the Combined Authority Assurance Framework, which was informed by the mandatory elements from the Department for Transport's Appraisals Guidance (TAG). In terms of wider case development, it was important to look at the strategic alignment of the schemes alongside key objectives set out corporately and with those set by the TCF, such as sustainable and inclusive growth and carbon mitigation. Robert also acknowledged that the appraisal system aimed to forecast the benefits of the scheme but there were external factors, such as bus fares, that would influence uptake in bus travel. The appraisal system did however consider the benefits to existing users that could be quantified and monetised in terms of the quality of their experience as well as increasing uptake in bus travel from new users.

The Panel requested that information be provided showing a clear layout of the process and the assessment criteria that needed to be followed in the development of the projects. Richard Hollinson responded to agree and added that a meeting to focus on raising awareness of the process for the schemes would be beneficial.

In relation to carbon savings, increasing uptake in bus travel and reducing car use the Panel requested to see clear, consistent, and measurable metrics that show the current area demographic, the number of current bus users and the number of bus users anticipated as result of the scheme.

Responding to points raised during the discussion, Edward Highfield suggested that the WYCA assurance framework be added to the Panel's work programme for 2022/23 and that a consistent appendix be added onto to all future reports. Edward also acknowledged that it was important to consider the wider strategy for buses and suggested that bus service improvement plans and the future of bus patronage as an item to be added to the work programme for 2022/23.

The Panel raised further points in relation to:

- Improving active travel access to and from the bus stations, highlighting that improving cycle connectivity was essential to increase uptake in both bus and cycle travel.
- The plans for the Mass Rapid Transit System and the distance between the transport interchanges and the proposed mass transit corridor.

Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel - 7 April 2022

- Ensuring that gender neutral facilities were considered in the plans at an early stage.
- Consideration of project budgets against escalating costs.
- Maximising the use of space in the bus stations, and the importance of identifying spaces for community usage as well as retail opportunity.

Richard Hollinson responded to agree that maximising the use of space in the bus stations and creating safe spaces was a key priority. He advised that consideration had been given to possible community welfare opportunities through reaching out to local Clinic Commissioning Groups.

In respect of project budgets and escalating costs, Richard advised that the recent announcement in respect of the region sustainable transport settlement was expected to help with some of the challenges around scheme costs increases, but it was important to continue to keep costs under control whilst balancing value for money and the need to achieve the schemes benefits. It was agreed that more information on budgets for the schemes and increasing costs be added to the Panels work programme for 22/23.

Responding to the comments on active travel, Richard advised that further information could be provided to later meeting of the Panel regarding plans for wider connectivity. In respect of the mass transit corridor, Richard advised that the proposals were in the very early stages of development and were being put together by the WYCA, but he agreed with the Panel on the importance of future proofing the scheme.

The Panel asked for clarity in respect of the plans for the location of the proposed cycle lanes in Huddersfield Town centre. Robert Stanley replied to describe the current plans for cycle lanes and agreed to make a response to the Panel member to clarify any misleading information.

Cllr Elizabeth Smaje highlighted that it was important to consider estimated increase in bus users alongside the current bus reduction in services, as well as asking about the plans to increase capacity and improve safety at Heckmondwike Bus Station.

Timothy Fawcett responded to advise that the proposals for Heckmondwike Bus Station included 6 stands and a layover bay on site. In terms of undercover areas, there were plans to include a pod with an indoor waiting area, as well as a canopy outside with seating underneath at each stand to add significant coverage for all weather. In terms of highways improvements, the temporary guard railing safety mitigation had now been made permanent. There were also plans to add further safety measures at the bus station itself. It was also envisaged that all buses in Heckmondwike would pass through this hub, and the Panels concerns about changing services to the hospital were noted.

RESOLVED: The Panel noted the update and thanked officers highlighting the value in involving scrutiny at an early stage in the process. It was agreed that:

Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel - 7 April 2022

1. A more detailed update be provided to the Panel in the new municipal year which included the details of the scheme's economic appraisals and demonstrated the benefits of the scheme's vs the costs.
2. Project processes and the assessment criteria be added to the Panel's work programme for 2022/23.
3. Work be undertaken to continue to improve consultation/engagement and to obtain a high number of meaningful responses from a diverse range of users.
4. The West Yorkshire Assurance Framework be added to the Panel's work programme for 2022/23 and that a consistent appendix be attached to all future reports.
5. Bus Service Improvement Plans and future Bus patronage be added to the Panel's Work programme for 2022/23.
6. More information on budgets for the schemes and increasing costs be added to the Panels work programme for 2022/23.
7. Understanding and demonstrating the key benefits of the scheme was important, particularly in relation to encouraging uptake in active travel and climate change initiatives.
8. Clear, consistent, and measurable metrics that show the current area demographic (number of current bus users/ number of anticipated users) and which demonstrate the benefits of the scheme (i.e.- carbon savings, increased uptake in bus travel) should be provided to a future meeting of the Panel.
9. Accessibility, future proofing the interchanges, safety and gender neutrality were all also key priorities to be considered during the development of each scheme.
10. Improving connectivity of active travel routes to the bus stations was important, and the details of plans relating to wider connectivity should be provided to a future meeting of the Panel.
11. It was important to focus on maximizing Community benefit in the development of the scheme as well as retail opportunities.
12. A response be made to Cllr Bolt to clarify information about the locations of the proposed bus lanes in Huddersfield Town Centre.

7 Playable Spaces Strategy Update

The Panel considered the Playable Spaces Strategy Update which was presented by Will Acornley, Head of Operational Services and Catherine Little, Programme Manager, Environment Services. It was highlighted that:

- Many play areas in Kirklees had been built up over several years and had now reached the end of their economic life.
- In recognising the value in play, the Playable Spaces Strategy included significant investment in refurbishing play areas in Kirklees.
- The strategy was designed to move away from traditional mechanical play areas to play facilities that sat more naturally in the local environment.
- A key focus of the strategy was to build play spaces around the needs of communities to design inclusive play areas for all ages and abilities.
- The initial draft policy was introduced in 2019 and was reviewed following feedback from Councillors towards the end of that year.

Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel - 7 April 2022

- Development of the strategy was then delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic which started in March 2020. Delivery of the strategy recommenced mid-2020.
- Understanding what communities wanted was central to the strategy and the delay in implementation allowed more time to create recognisable branding for the project and to set up the website to drive engagement.
- The level of public engagement had been very successful, and the variety in the designs of each play area was reflective of responding to the needs of each individual different community.
- To date, 14 sites had been delivered including Beaumont Park which had received very positive feedback and Westerly Way, which included a mix of old and new style play equipment.
- The delay in delivery caused by the pandemic also created time to incorporate delivery lessons learned into future plans.
- Lessons learned included using the Section 106 programme, which ran alongside the Playable Spaces Strategy, to ensure resources were managed effectively and to enhance the work undertaken.
- The need for robust governance and reporting processes to support the delivery of the sites was also recognised and implemented.
- There had been some criticism in respect of communication with Councillors.
- To improve this, monthly updates sent by email were introduced to provide Councillors with regular progress updates and explain any delays effecting play space refurbishments in their wards. These updates were being received positively.
- The relevant Cabinet Member Portfolio Holder also received a full update on all ongoing projects regularly.
- There were some challenges around manufacture and delivery timelines due to raw material availability and longer delivery times from Europe.
- Delays were managed by ensuring this was factored into the lead-in time to ensure accurate start-on-site dates.
- There were also some challenges in respect of team capacity.
- To mitigate this a more focused approach was introduced to allow Parks Development Offices, the Programme Manager, the Parks Services Manager, and the Project Support Officer to concentrate on where their skill set was best used.
- In summer 2021 2 new Landscape Architects were also recruited whose primary focus was Playable Spaces to help work through the backlog of phase 1 designs.
- A further 2 new Landscape Architects were to be recruited this year as more Phase 2 and Phase 3 sites came on board.
- Some of the site-specific budgets were tight and this needed to be balanced against designing to meet expectations.
- The strategy encouraged nature and more natural elements to be incorporated into outdoor play spaces.
- This was a new and different ask in terms of long-term maintenance.
- To mitigate this a dedicated Grounds Maintenance Team would be appointed whose focus was to maintain the more natural-style play areas.
- Feedback from communities regularly highlighted the need to incorporate better accessible play equipment into the new designs.

Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel - 7 April 2022

- Feedback from public engagement identified that people would be willing to travel for accessible play and there was scope to explore the option of implementing a flagship accessible play area at a destination park.
- External influences such as inflation were also being taken into account when considering the long-term delivery of the strategy.
- Inflated costs across the industry led to higher tender returns which exceed site budgets .
- This had been highlighted through the Governance process and senior managers were in agreement that the Council would absorb inflated costs in the short term and then report on Phase 1 overspend to analyse future requirements.

Responding to a question from the Panel about finding out about developments in their ward and the plans for Crow Lane and Two Furrows parks. Will Acornley suggested that a briefing be arranged with that Panel Member where an update could be provided.

The Panel raised a concern about young children being intimidated by older children exhibiting anti-social behaviour in parks and asked about plans to separate older children's activities from the younger children's play equipment in play areas. In response, Will Acornley advised that it was important to take a holistic approach when designing play areas which considered play through age and ensured that investment was made into equipment that was suitable for all ages. Community engagement was also essential to understanding who was using the play space, who wanted to use it and how communities' priorities could be accommodated this through the design of the play space.

The Panel asked a question about what selection criteria was used when choosing which play areas to invest in, and whether these were all council owned play areas or private? In response, Will Acornley explained that during the early phases of the development of the strategy various aspects were considered such as age range of the facilities, when those facilities would be reaching the end of their life, and when the facilities were last refurbished. Prioritisation of which spaces would be refurbished in the first phase of the strategies delivery was also heavily influenced by ward councillors through engagement with members. Future phases of the strategies delivery would also be led by engagement with ward councillors. Will also confirmed that all the play areas being refurbished were council owned.

In response to a question from the Panel about community opportunities, Will Acornley advised that the implementation of the strategy was fully community led and there was a well-established network of community groups that were engaged with regularly, including friends of parks, third sector leaders and volunteer co-ordinators who worked in parks with local communities. Strong, recognisable branding and the website was the main vehicle for community engagement and was effective.

In response to a question about alignment with the Cultural Heart regeneration strategy, Will Acornley reassured the Panel that his teams were informed on the development of the Cultural Heart, involved in some aspects of delivery, and were taking a co-ordinated approach.

Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel - 7 April 2022

The Panel highlighted that it was important to engage with pre-schools in relation to play areas. Will Acornley responded to highlight that in delivery the playable spaces strategy that the objective was to engage with all key stakeholders, and it was important to continue to develop and improve the approach. Will agreed that engaging with schools was important and would be incorporated into engagement plans going forwards.

The Panel raised a concern where some residents were upset when a fence was removed from a local play area for young children, as this allowed dogs into the play area. Will Acornley responded to advise that park fencing, and gates were a relatively new feature in parks, and when the initial strategy was developed it was identified that a large portion of the maintenance budget was spent on gates and fencing to reduce liabilities rather than the play equipment. Therefore, it was decided to phase out fencing and gates where it was safe to do so. Will also highlighted that in the delivery of the strategy the aim was to engage and communicate with residents as much as possible, but this in some circumstances led to mixed feedback and the need to compromise on some decisions.

The Panel commented on the importance of distance to play areas for young people, adding that where there were not effective pedestrian links that parents would need to drive their children to play areas, which went against Climate Change priorities and also that local play areas were important to building community ethos. Will Acornley responded to agree with the Panel's comments and highlighted that through the planning regime and policies some parks had been placed in communities that did not want or need them, and left others needing to travel to a place space. Creating a Master Plan for wards was one possibility that might help address this. This idea was still in a conceptual phase but would aim to take a holistic view of play spaces within a ward, understand what the local community needed and where, and then considering how this influences planning for play areas going forwards.

Responding to a question from the Panel about the maintenance of the play areas, Will Acornley confirmed that the establishment of the dedicated grounds maintenance team was quality driven. In the short-term, section 106 funding would be used for maintenance, but work was to be undertaken to assess how this would be brought back into budget in the long term and the play areas were brought back into their economic life. Though the report referred to citizen opportunities in maintenance, Will confirmed that maintenance was the responsibility of the council and that there would be no expectation for citizens to take on maintenance responsibilities. There were plans to engage with friends of parks and other community groups to identify where there was an appetite to help and to provide opportunities for those groups.

The Panel questioned dedicating current destination parks as accessible play spaces where parking was already at a premium during peak times and may cause difficulties for users with mobility problems. Knowl Park was suggested as a good central location for a new destination park to be developed as an alternative. Will Acornley responded to agree with Panel members' comments, adding that the

Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel - 7 April 2022

approach to accessible play was still being developed taking learning from other local authorities.

Responding to a question about what the criteria was for creating new play spaces and the funding for these, Will Acornley advised that there was £9.5 million of capital investment in the Playable Spaces Strategy which would begin to be used in the next significant phase of development due to start in May 2022. If through master planning, it was identified that it made sense to create new play areas for community benefit it may be that capital funding was diverted or enhanced to do this. This was still conceptual and would involve further engagement with administration and ward Councillors.

The Panel noted the Playable Spaces Strategy and thanked officers for their contributions. The Panel also expressed their congratulations in relation to the positive outcomes already achieved through the delivery of the Strategy. It was agreed that:

1. A briefing be arranged with Cllr Iredale in relation to plans for Crow Lane and Two Furrows Parks.
2. The Panel welcomed approach taken to engagement but added that engagement with pre-schools should be undertaken as a part of this in the future.
3. Continued engagement with the Cultural Heart was important to make sure the strategies were aligned.
4. It was important to continue to investigate ward master planning in the development of play areas.

8 Work Programme 2021/22

The Panel considered the work programme for 2021/22 municipal year.

RESOLVED: The Panel noted the work programme for the 2021/22 municipal year, and it was agreed that:

1. The Air Quality Action Plan standing item be reviewed by the Panel as priority for the next municipal year.
2. In relation to the Highways capital programme, that regular updates be provided on the development of major schemes to enable the Panel to monitor the delivery of those schemes.
3. Skills and Apprenticeships be added to the work programme for 22/23 as a key part of economic development.