

Contact Officer: Jodie Harris

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

ECONOMY AND NEIGHBOURHOOD'S SCRUTINY PANEL

Thursday 4th March 2021

Present: Councillor Harpreet Uppal (Chair)
Councillor Martyn Bolt
Councillor John Taylor
Councillor Richard Eastwood
Councillor Yusra Hussain

Co-optees
Chris Friend
Andrew Bird

In attendance
Councillor Donald Firth
Councillor Peter McBride
Councillor Nigel Patrick
Councillor Cathy Scott

Joanne Bartholomew, Chief Operating Officer, KNH
Helen Geldart, Head of Housing Services
Stephen Cale, Operations Manager (Quality Homes)
Growth and Housing, Housing Services
Richard Hollinson, Head of Major Projects, Economy and
Skills
Keith Bloomfield, Programme Manager, Major Projects,
Economy and Skills
Tim Lawrence, Transport Strategy and Policy Manager
Andrew Higson, Transforming Cities Fund Programme
Lead

Observers:
Yolande Myers, Principal Governance and Democratic
Engagement Officer
Sheila Dykes, Principal Governance and Democratic
Engagement Officer

Apologies: Councillor Gwen Lowe and Eilidh Ogden, Co-optee

1 Membership of the Committee

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Gwen Lowe and Eilidh Ogden.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on the 21st January 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

3 Interests

No interests were declared.

4 Admission of the Public

All items were considered in public session.

5 Deputations/Petitions

No deputations or petitions were received, but several submissions from members of the public were received in respect of agenda Item 8 Major Transport Schemes.

6 Public Question Time

Two questions were submitted by member of the public, Sarah Newton, in respect of the 'A629 Halifax Road Phase 5 Scheme' included under Item 8.

Sarah Newton asked how the alterations at the Blacker Road Junction will contribute to the overall objectives of the Phase 5 scheme? She also raised concerns in respect of damage to the conservation area and it was asked why the Council would risk the loss of mature trees and the architectural heritage at the Blacker Road junction?

The Chair requested that Richard Hollinson, Head of Major Projects, Economy and Skills, responded.

In his response, Richard Hollinson advised that it was the view of officers that the improvements will bring benefits to air quality, congestion, provide noise relief, would leave the area in a better state of repair as well as providing journey time savings along the corridor and wider network improvements.

Regarding the public consultation of 2018, Richard Hollinson informed the panel that most of the objections related to the removal of a right turn between Edgerton Road into Edgerton Grove Road. In response to the objections, the proposal to remove the right turn had been removed in designs to limit the impact on land take from adjacent properties and consequently there was a reduction in harm to the conservation area. He advised that many of the walls and heritage features needed maintaining in this area, and that a benefit of the scheme was that it will leave these features in better condition. The scheme was also to be subject to a full planning application through the Local Planning Authority where such issues would be given full consideration.

The Chair also invited Cllr Peter McBride, who was in attendance as the responsible Cabinet Member for Regeneration, to respond to the questions. He explained how the scheme would improve the area visually as well as making small travel time savings per vehicle travelling on the road, which accumulatively would lead to a significant improvement in terms of carbon admissions.

7 Private Rented Housing Sector (Support as a result of Covid-19)

8 The Panel considered the Private Rented Housing Sector (Support as a result of Covid-19) report which was presented by Helen Geldart, Head of Housing Services.

The report set out the ways in which Councils Housing Solutions Service supported and continued to support, the private rented sector during the Covid-19 pandemic. Helen Geldart summarised the information in the report and highlighted the following key points:

- In response to the Covid-19 pandemic most staff worked from home and services were adapted to be delivered either online or over the phone.
- During the national lockdown in March, all non-essential home visits/inspections in the private rented sector were suspended.
- This was except any emergency visits which were carried out in accordance with safe working guidelines and bespoke Covid-19 risk assessments.
- Throughout the pandemic new and safe ways of working continued to be developed within the Housing Solutions Service and the approach to complaints and queries had been revised in line with national and Corporate guidance.
- There had been a reduction in the number of 'disrepair enquires' and enquires related to tenancy issues received from the preceding 12-month period.
- The ban on evictions, which was implemented during the pandemic, had been extended to the 31st of March.
- It was predicated that once the ban was lifted that there may be an increase in the number of residents and landlords from the private rented sector who would approach Housing Solutions due to difficulties in paying rent and the risk of repossession.
- Targeted bespoke communications were used to make sure that messages around Covid-19 and keeping safe were being heard, understood and to support residents to access the national Covid-19 vaccination programme.
- Private rented sector turnover had been a lot lower than in the social rented sector, but Housing Solutions expected to receive more enquires as Covid -19 restrictions begin to lift.

The Panel requested to understand the property inspection process during the pandemic, and the subsequent action taken in instances where disrepair was found.

In response Stephen Cale, Operations Manager (Quality Homes), provided the panel with an overview of the process and advised that:

- During the pandemic any home visits were carried out following a risk-based assessment.
- All inspections were carried out in accordance with the Housing Health and Safety Rating System.
- The inspection usually facilitated the action required to rectify any hazards or disrepair identified.

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- In cases where the responsible party, usually the landlord, failed to rectify any issues following inspection, a notice would be issued, under the relevant legislation which would stipulate a timescale for the hazard/disrepair to be rectified.
- Failure to rectify hazards within the issued timeframe would result in the issue of a Fixed Penalty Notice or possible prosecution in court.
- Where hazards were not rectified by the responsible party Housing Solutions would commission Property Services to carry out the relevant repairs to keep residents safe.

A question was asked by the Panel in relation to a particular issue within the Newsome Ward, where the Landlord of a privately rented property had passed away, but the property required repair work. The Panel wanted to know what the process was to keep residents safe under such circumstances.

Stephen Cale advised that in such circumstances there is usually an executor or solicitor involved who would be responsible for any repairs. He explained he was aware of the case described by the Panel and offered to inform the Panel of the outcome.

The issue of the Selective Licencing Scheme was raised by the Panel. Helen Geldart explained that there were strict criteria that Local Authority's must meet to qualify application for the scheme. During the discussion, the Panel identified that it would be useful for Kirklees current position to be reviewed against the qualifying criteria for the scheme.

RESOLVED –

- 1- The Panel noted the Private Rented Housing Sector (Support as a result of Covid-19) report.
- 2- The Panel thanked Joanne Bartholomew, Chief Operating Officer, Helen Geldart and Stephen Cale for attending the meeting and for their work during the pandemic.
- 3- It was agreed that the Panel would be informed of the outcome of the situation with the property in Newsome Ward.
- 4- It was agreed that Kirklees current position would be reviewed against the required criteria to qualify application for the Selective Licencing Scheme.

8 Major Transport Schemes – Update

Richard Hollinson, Head of Major Projects, Keith Bloomfield, Programme Manager, Major Projects, Tim Lawrence, Transport Strategy and Policy Manager and Andrew Higson, Transforming Cities Fund Programme Lead were in attendance to present a report in respect of the major transport schemes being developed in Kirklees.

Also in attendance was Councillor Peter McBride, the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration as well as Councillor Nigel Patrick and Councillor Donald Firth who were in attendance to speak under the item in respect of the Holmfirth Town Centre Access Plan on behalf of local shop keepers.

Several representations and submissions were received under the item which the Chair read out on behalf of Kirklees Cycling Campaign, Huddersfield Civic Society, Richard Stow, Sarah Newton, and the Friends of Earth as well summarising the content of a video which was submitted by Hannah Longbottom. All submissions, including a link to the YouTube video, were circulated in full to the Members of the Panel prior to the meeting.

To follow, Richard Hollinson presented the report on the Major Transport Schemes being developed by Kirklees Council which set out an update on the overall aims and objectives of the schemes, the different transportation programmes and their funding sources, the processes to develop the schemes and a position statement on each transportation project. He also welcomed all the comments made in the submissions and addressed the questions and concerns raised throughout the presentation.

Questions and comments were invited from Panel Members. In relation to the Holmfirth Access Plan, the Panel noted that:

- It was important that the location of the Loading Bay did not affect trade to businesses.
- The Panel wanted to know if the position of the Loading Bay had been considered from a health and safety point of view after hearing shop keepers concerns about carrying heavy deliveries across two lanes of traffic.
- The opportunity for businesses to have their say was important, and the Panel wanted to know what had been done in terms of holding consultation on the scheme.

In response, Keith Bloomfield, Programme Manager, Major Projects presented a plan showing the proposed changes to be made by the scheme. He advised that:

- Public consultations had taken place in March 2019 and September 2019 and consultation was held with the business forum in early 2020.
- The current plans, informed by the consultations and the business engagement forum, intended for the Loading Bay to be located on the South side of Victoria Street.
- The plans had been analysed from a health and safety point of view.
- Discussions with ward Councillors about the position of the Loading Bay had taken place recently.
- The information from these discussions, with the Loading Bay report and details of the travel time benefits, as declared in the Outlined Business Case (OBC), would be provided to Panel Members.

In the discussion to follow the Panel raised a range of issues relating to specific schemes as well as discussing matters in relation to the overarching approach to transport schemes, such as the issue of Active Travel, the impacts to the environment, and the importance of public engagement and consultation. The Officers responded as follows:

- Richard Hollinson confirmed that the Assurance Framework required public consultation at each stage of the process which would be delivered through the WYCA's communications and consultations teams.
- He also welcomed the Panels comments regarding Active Travel and advocated the importance of the integration of walking and cycling schemes with Major Transport Schemes.
- In respect of the guidance set out in the Department for Transport's (DfT) LTN1/20 Cycling Infrastructure Design Standard (which provides guidance for Local Authorities on designing high quality, safe cycle infrastructure), Richard advised that all Major Transport Schemes were to be reviewed to see where the schemes included in the report could adhere to the guidance.
- In relation to the Cooper Bridge area, Keith Bloomfield explained that the ancient woodland on Wakefield Road would not be affected by the scheme.
- Keith also advised that there were plans for public consultation on the preferred option for the scheme to take place in May.
- Responding to Panel members questions regarding Victoria street, Keith highlighted that through the Holmfirth Access Plan cycling facilities were to be provided and would be reviewed against the guidance set out in the LTN1/20.
- Tim Lawrence, Transport Strategy and Policy Manager, explained that Ward Councillors along the A641 corridor had been contacted regarding public consultation for the scheme and agreed to provide the details of the briefing note following the meeting.
- In respect of the A629 scheme and what plans were in place to mitigate the felling of mature trees, Richard Hollinson advised that a full tree mitigation plan had been prepared which outlined that around 700 new trees were to be planted, included some semi mature trees, along the A629 corridor.
- In response to questions about Junction 24A, Tim Lawrence advised currently this did not feature in Highways England's current five-year Road Investment Strategy (RIS), however Kirklees continued to raise the issue.
- On the issue of traffic growth and accommodating traffic in the future, Tim explained that all transport schemes were assessed in accordance with the DfT guidance and that calculations were applied at a Kirklees level taking into account key factors such as population size, housing growth and car ownership as stipulated in the guidance.

To follow Panel Members, raised some further key points and questions as below.

- The Panel felt that there needed to be more focus on improving transport links in South Kirklees and the valleys. The issue of the Penistone line and transport links out of Kirklees in all directions was also discussed.
- It was suggested that bus terminuses be located in the outskirts of the district to improve public transport frequency in rural areas.
- The question was raised about where elected members fit into the consultation process. The Panel felt that it was important to make sure Councillors are involved early on in the process and that more needed to be done to improve engagement with Ward Councillors outside of wider public consultation.
- There were concerns about the lack of information about schemes once they were submitted through the Assurance Framework.
- The Panel advocated the approach to integrate walking and cycling schemes with transport schemes.

Richard Hollinson and officers present welcomed the Panel comments and the following actions were agreed.

RESOLVED –

- 1 The Panel noted the report on the Major Transport Schemes being developed by Kirklees Council and thanked Richard Hollinson, Keith Bloomfield, Tim Lawrence and Andrew Higson for the update.
- 2 It was agreed that the report regarding the Loading Bay and information on travel time benefits in relation to the Holmfirth Access Plan would be provided to ward Councillors.
- 3 It was agreed that the briefing note regarding consultation with ward councillors on the A641 scheme be provided to the Panel.
- 4 It was agreed to make improvements to the process of engaging with ward Councillors in respect of transport schemes.
- 5 In relation to improving bus travel, it was agreed that the Panel's suggestions, including the introduction of bus terminuses in rural areas and access to funding be put forward through the West Yorkshire Consultation , and for the outcomes of the discussions to be provided to the Panel.
- 6 It was agreed that more focus on improving and investing in transport infrastructure in South Kirklees and in rural parts of the district should be considered in future strategies.
- 7 It was agreed that improving transport links from Kirklees to North and South Yorkshire would be considered in future strategies.
- 8 It was agreed that ways of sharing information, and the accessibility of information, would be considered in relation to schemes submitted through the Assurance Framework.

9. Work Programme;

The Panel noted the provisional work programme for year 2021/22 and there were no further updates.