
General Public Services and Economic Development Committee

MINUTES

Of a meeting held in the Penn Chamber, Three Rivers House, Northway, Rickmansworth, WD3 1RL, on Tuesday, 16 January 2024 from 7.31 pm - 9.45 pm

Present: Councillors

Stephen Giles-Medhurst (Co-Chair)
Paul Rainbow (Co-Chair)
Andrew Scarth (Co-Chair)
Jonathan Solomons
Chris Whately-Smith
Oliver Cooper
Andrea Fraser
David Raw
Kevin Raeburn

Officers in Attendance:

Kimberley Rowley, Head of Regulatory Services
Sally Riley, Finance Business Partner
Jason Hagland, Strategic Housing Manager
Anita Hibbs, Committee Manager

GPS&ED10 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Joan King.

GPS&ED11 MINUTES

The Committee considered the minutes of its meeting held on 10 October 2023.

Referring to Item Service Planning 2024-27 – Planning Policy & Conservation, Councillor Fraser stated that the minutes did not accurately reflect the discussion of the Conservation Area Update in which it had been agreed that there should be a report to this meeting of the Committee on how best to progress the Conservation Area Appraisals.

The Chair proposed that the recording of the meeting held on 10 October 2023 be checked and the minutes be suitably amended if necessary.

Notwithstanding this action, the Officer confirmed Officers were reviewing the budgets available to progress with a review of Conservation Area appraisals and a report would be presented at a future date.

The recording of the Committee's proceedings of 10 October 2023 has been checked; it was confirmed that the Committee had requested a report to the January 2024 meeting of the Committee updating the Committee on how best to progress the Conservation Area Appraisal reports referred to in the Committee's Work Programme.

With that amendment to the minutes, the Committee approved the minutes of its meeting of 10 October 2023 and authorised the Chair to sign them as a correct record.

GPS&ED12 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

GPS&ED13 NOTICE OF OTHER BUSINESS

There were no items of other business.

GPS&ED14 BUDGET MONITORING (PERIOD 6)

Members of the Committee requested an update on staffing and the number of vacancies; in particular the Senior Transport Planner post.

Kimberley Rowley, Head of Regulatory Services, advised that successive rounds of recruitment were unsuccessful in 2023, therefore, in 2024, the service area have committed to a different way of providing an officer with remit for the services. The roles and responsibilities of the job profile will be reviewed again in the coming weeks, and recruitment is anticipated in February.

Sally Riley, Finance Business Partner, reported that the Senior Planning Officer role, currently filled by an internal post, has recently been filled, the Community Infrastructure Levy Officer post has been filled, the Housing Supplier Officer post has also been filled, and the Associate Director - Economy Infrastructure & Planning post is subject to a report that is going to Policy & Resources Committee on 29 January.

Furthermore; the Grounds Maintenance Trainee Operative post and HGV Driver post have both been filled.

Jason Hagland, Strategic Housing Manager advised that the Housing Enforcement Officer post is currently being covered by an interim officer.

Members also requested an update on Garden Waste income and the kerb side collection. The Officer advised that currently there is no update on the Garden Waste income and kerb side collection as these are not presented in the period 8 budget monitoring. The next comprehensive budget monitoring report will be available in March.

Members pointed out that it is regrettable that the budget monitoring (period 6) report was received only now at this committee meeting. The Officer reminded the committee that the decision to reduce the number of committees was made 18 months ago, therefore this is the first opportunity for this report to be presented to this committee.

Concerns were raised around the cost of waste and recycling vehicles. The Officer clarified that as at 30 September 2023, the Council spent £210,099 out of a £1,070,413 budget. The original budget was approved at Full Council in February 2023. Officers did not know at that time how much needed to be rephased until they did the out turn position in April. Officers were then able to rephase the amount of capital budget that wasn't spent in 2022/23 into 2023/24. This would have been brought to and approved at the July 2023 Full Council meeting. The Officer confirmed that the budget had not been increased because of procurement costs.

Members raised concerns regarding the notable increase of private trade waste companies being used by retailers in Rickmansworth and requested further information for the reasons behind this. The Officer advised that the number of users are not constant throughout the year, and financially, there is no impact.

The Chair proposed that it would be useful to have the figures on the Council's rates and how that compares to comparable commercial sectors, included in the final out turn report for the committee. In addition; the number of traders each month should also be included in the presentation in future. The Officer confirmed that this will be added from period 10 onwards.

Further questions were raised regarding the cost of Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points and car park restoration. The Officer clarified that this was CIL money identified through Policy & Resources Committee and Full Council to utilise for EV charging points. This has not been spent yet.

The car park restoration is on the capital programme. It includes work that improves the car parks across the district. So far, there has been no spend as a lot of the spend previously has been revenue, not capital.

RESOLVED:

That Members note and comment on the contents of the report.

GPS&ED15 WATFORD TO CROXLEY RAIL LINK PRESENTATION

Kimberley Rowley, Head of Regulatory Services introduced the presentation and explained the following key aspects of the project:

- Background and objectives
- Possible transport modes
- Routeing proposal
- Value for money
- Related Hertfordshire Projects

The Officer advised the Committee that this was a very early, high level presentation at this stage.

Members of the Committee raised questions and concerns around:

- How much consideration has been given to the links that could be built beyond Croxley Green if the original proposal had included Croxley tube station, with an existing railway track that could have been used to open up the link to Rickmansworth, Chorleywood and potentially beyond as well.
- Is there any information on the estimated cost of this particular option?
- Clarity around the higher and overall benefits as well as the objectives of the project
- Time scale of the consultation process

Officers started looking beyond Croxley, into Rickmansworth, however, TFL advised that it is not going to be feasible on that line routeing. The other alternative was to keep the route on the road; from Ascot Road, up to Croxley and into Rickmansworth but the roads are not wide enough to provide any priority routing for this type of mass rapid transport system, which will result in significantly extended journey times and therefore will not be a desirable mode of transport to the public.

The studies so far have shown that the benefits are of the disused railway line with the fastest possible journey time; one of the biggest benefits is the reduced journey time into Watford from any of the identified locations. Furthermore, if the plans go ahead Croxley Green will

likely become an interchange in future, and therefore the possible expansion of transport options beyond Croxley Green is considered to be part of the future plan.

The Chair pointed out that the aim of this project is not just to provide a seamless interchange onto the underground network but would also provide sustainable transport to the public that is environmentally friendly.

The Chair advised that estimated cost information is not available at this point in time, and no funding has been committed by Three Rivers at this stage.

In terms of the higher and overall benefits; the Officer explained that these benefits include:

- Modal shift – encouraging people to use public transport instead of cars
- Journey times – reduced journey times

The Officer reiterated that this is very early, high level information and further, more detailed information will become available at a later stage.

It was clarified by the Chair that the main objective of the scheme was outlined in paragraph 1.4 of the report.

In response to the information provided; Members of the Committee requested that the objectives of the scheme and the overall benefits will need to be made clearer for the benefit of the public, and a further update on the scheme to be provided to the Committee at the earliest possible opportunity.

The Officer advised that there is a communication strategy being prepared currently by Hertfordshire County Council and Watford Borough Council, involving all relevant stakeholders but no specific date has been given to Officers yet.

It was proposed that the Committee should be able to scrutinise and discuss the next report on the scheme before agreeing to adopt the communication strategy that is currently being prepared by Hertfordshire County Council and Watford Borough Council.

The Chair acknowledged the request but advised Three Rivers don't control the communications strategy which is led by Hertfordshire County Council and Watford Borough Council.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation be noted.

GPS&ED16 BERYL BIKES UPDATE

The Chair provided an update on Beryl Bikes.

The expansion of the scheme into Three Rivers has been supported for over 3 years, and the scheme is expected to go live soon. Watford Borough Council have confirmed the expansion of their own contract which will be signed off at the end of this month.

The bikes will be self-funding in terms of their revenue cost, and the maintenance of them will be undertaken by Beryl.

5 potential bay locations have been identified for cycle racks and signage. Once those have been mapped out, and consulted on with Hertfordshire County Council, the next steps will be consultation with local Members.

Hertsmere Borough Council also confirmed a similar agreement of the expansion of the scheme into Bushey.

It is intended that the scheme will be live by 1 April 2024.

In response to questions the Members raised, the Chair confirmed that there are no designated routes for the Beryl Bikes in Three Rivers; and the bay locations identified for cycle racks are:

1. All saints Church
2. Baldwins Lane North
3. Baldwins Lane South
4. Croxley Library
5. Croxley Station

Councillor Chris Whately-Smith and Councillor Andrew Scarth thanked the Chair, Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst for all his work on this project.

GPS&ED17 ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING INFRASTRUCTURE UPDATE

Kimberley Rowley, Head of Regulatory Services provided an update on EV Charging Infrastructure:

- Officers have been exploring the installation of electric vehicle chargers in council owned car parks, initially looking at the introduction of rapid chargers in 2 pilot sites (Rickmansworth and Abbots Langley) with 4 further sites enabled with use of agreed CIL funding.
- However, the funding environment is evolving, and the Council could consider Government funding for use in our car parks where accessible to residents 24/7.
- LEVI funding was announced last year, and Tier 1 councils are acting as gatekeepers for the national government funding used to install chargers. Hertfordshire County Council have been successfully allocated £6 million pounds – how it is spent is to be determined, but anticipated £6m will be distributed to Herts authorities to fund charger installation. Hertfordshire County Council has also been developing a regional programme to support District and Borough partners to install chargers.
- Given this changing context Officers have been reviewing the Council's approach to ensure best use of Council funds and opportunities to access other funding.
- Officers have created a draft EVCP specification, and they have been working with a potential operator to consider viable car park sites and reviewing installation costs. Currently determining next steps of how to deliver the EV programme making best use of funding available.
- Future Committee report is expected, providing an overview of each delivery method and their respective advantages and disadvantages.

In response to a question the Chair advised that consultation would follow the future Committee report that is expected.

GPS&ED18 WORK PROGRAMME

The following items will be added to the Committee's work programme:

Budget monitoring (period 10) – 19 March 2024

Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Infrastructure report – 19 March 2024

Update on Watford to Croxley Rail Link – date to be confirmed

GPS&ED19 OTHER BUSINESS - IF APPROVED UNDER ITEM 4 ABOVE

There were no items of other business.

GPS&ED20 HOUSING, HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2023-2028 - FINAL DRAFT

Jason Hagland, Strategic Housing Manager presented the final draft of the strategy.

Members noted the disappointingly low response to the consultation. The Officer informed the Committee that the Communications Department had developed a communication strategy for the consultation which was promoted on the Council's website, and Housing Services did provide a small additional budget to boost the promotion of the consultation on the Council's social media platforms.

Members also stated the importance of best practice when it comes to providing services to the public.

The Committee thanked the Officer for his work on the strategy.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the final draft of the strategy and provide any comments.

CHAIR