

# Transportation, Highways and Engineering Advisory Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Transportation, Highways and Engineering Advisory Committee held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the 28<sup>th</sup> April 2014.

## Present:

Cllr. Heyes (Chairman);  
Cllr. Feacey (Vice-Chairman);  
Cllrs. Burgess, Claughton, Michael, Robey, Wedgbury, Yeo.

## Also Present:

Cllr. Galpin.

Health, Parking and Community Safety Manager, Assistant Health, Parking and Community Safety Manager, Engineering Services Manager, Technical Administrative Assistant, Senior Member Services and Scrutiny Support Officer.

## 418 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Wedgbury	Announced an 'Other Interest' as a Member of Kent County Council.	420, 421, 422, 423
Yeo	Announced an 'Other Interest' as a member of the Transport Salaried Staffs' Association.	421

## 419 Parking Review

The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed all those present. The report in front of Members was a work in progress but set out the latest position with regard to the Council's parking review. The Chairman explained that this was an opportunity for Members to give feedback and ideas about the future of the Council's car parks so that those ideas could be incorporated in the review and discussed by Cabinet before any decisions were taken.

Discussion was opened up to the Committee and the following responses were given to questions/comments: -

- At this stage the report was only about car parks rather than the charges for on street parking. It was a massive area of work and there was much detail to consider. In terms of options for reduced charges after 3pm and on Sundays, it was suggested that a more subtle approach could be employed. Usage of the existing car parks varied quite widely so there may need to be different policies for different car parks rather than a blanket approach. It would also be important not to set policies that were too inflexible as Ashford developed and

changed. For this reason any changes would need to be introduced as pilots in order to gauge effectiveness.

- The review was also looking at utilising new technologies in car parks such as Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) and smartphone payment apps. ANPR would reduce the need for coin machines/collection and may encourage people to stay for longer as they did not have to purchase parking in prescribed time blocks. This was expected to work well in some car parks.
- The scheme at Braintree (10p parking after 3pm) certainly had its merits, as did potential free parking on Sundays, although implementation of these would have financial implications. The key aim of such schemes would be to generate additional footfall in to both Ashford and Tenterden town centres in an attempt to make them more sustainable and support both businesses and shoppers. In terms of Ashford, Edinburgh Road appeared to be the most appropriate location for a reduced scheme, certainly during the week, but other car parks should not be ruled out, especially for Sundays.
- Edinburgh Road car park was operated by the Council on a long lease and did require an increasing amount of remedial work. It had been hoped that by now the area would have been re-developed but the economic situation had not allowed this to happen.
- A reduced parking fee of 10p after 3pm had been examined rather than free parking as this would allow user numbers to be monitored. Whilst this was recognised as a fantastic signal to shoppers, a Member asked if it would be worth examining a totally free option by using ANPR technology to assess take up and a potential reduction in staff costs. The psychological boost of parking being totally free after a certain time was seen to be a massive incentive for young families etc. to pop into town on their way home from school/work.
- The effect on other modes of transport by offering free or reduced parking had to be considered carefully as part of this review. So much work had gone in to developing bus services through the Quality Bus Partnership and it was important that momentum in this area was not lost.
- Negotiations were ongoing with the landowners with a view to leasing the top car park at Waitrose, Tenterden. An offer had been made and the Council was waiting for a response.
- Linking car parking charges to a car park's proximity to the centre of town was not favoured. Experience showed that people wanted to park as close to the centre of town as they could regardless of charge and offering cheaper or free parking further out would make little difference.

The Chairman advised the Committee that the views put forward during the meeting would be used to formulate a paper that would be put to the Cabinet for consideration.

**Resolved:**

**That the Committee note the current position regarding the parking review, note progress and agree that detailed recommendations will be handled via the Joint Transportation Board and Cabinet.**

## **420 Potholes and Weather Damaged Roads**

The report from KCC Highways & Transportation advised of the background to the poor state of the roads in the Borough and how KCC were using the extra funds they had been allocated to accelerate maintenance. There would be a further report, with Officers present to answer questions, to the Joint Transportation Board (JTB) on the 10<sup>th</sup> June 2014. Members had the opportunity to raise any questions they would like answered to give prior notice to the County Officers. The Chairman said that going forward, where topics were going to both the JTB and this Committee, JTB reports should include a paragraph summarising the views expressed by this Committee.

The Chairman opened the item up to questions and the following matters were raised: -

- It would be useful to have a detailed breakdown of where the money was going to be spent as the problem was now such a large one, not every pothole would be able to be tackled and there would have to be an element of prioritisation.
- Was the situation now so bad in some areas that the 'find and fix' process of simply patching individual potholes was not enough and resurfacing should be seen as a more cost effective option? Where there were numerous potholes in close proximity could the comparative costs of patching (which did not tend to last very long) and resurfacing be outlined?
- The main cause of the potholes and road damage this year was rain and flooding rather than ice or snow. It had created a slightly different issue in that many of the potholes now appeared in the centre of roads. This was an issue that needed particular attention.
- As there had been no snow this year there should be an underspend in that budget which could also be used to assist in this problem. Could some clarity be sought on this? Additionally, there was a suspicion that the weather damaged roads were becoming an excuse for neglecting other work.
- The state of the roads was a particular hazard for cyclists, which was unfortunate when everything possible was being done to try and encourage cycling.
- The report advised that the Leader of KCC had committed to spending the additional funding and completing the work by the end of May 2014. Given the scale of the problem, this seemed extremely ambitious.

**Resolved:**

**That the report be received and noted and the questions above be put to KCC Officers at the Joint Transportation Board on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2014.**

## **421 Direct Rail Service to Gatwick**

The report updated on plans to introduce a new hourly rail service from Kent to Gatwick Airport. A business case had been completed by ARUP in February 2014 and the conclusion was that although the proposed service fitted with strategic aims, it was not recommended to go ahead with the scheme. The chief reasons were a poor Benefit Cost Ratio and difficulties of implementation within the current infrastructure which would not make it a worthwhile project to progress. The Chairman said that the report made it quite clear that the direct service was not going to happen, however he felt there were other options for alternative semi-fast services that could be brought forward and had not yet been investigated. He said he would be interested in the Committee's views.

A Member said that whilst he accepted the findings of the report, he agreed that not all alternative avenues had been pursued. He said that ARUP had done a good job with their business case, but they had been constrained because they were only asked to assess a regular, all day new service. They had used existing ticket data and talked with train operators, but perhaps KCC could have asked a different set of questions which would have widened the brief towards options and what might be workable within existing resources. He considered they could have been asked to look at whether there could be more frequent Redhill to Gatwick services, which would increase opportunities and in turn perhaps there could be a future investigation into making journeys from Tonbridge to and from Gatwick more frequent or more usable. For example, if at weekends some existing journeys became just Redhill to Tonbridge, there could still be a case to ask Southern to see if the hourly trains could run on to Gatwick at those times. Secondly, there may be scope for Gatwick-Redhill-Tonbridge services early hours and after 8pm on weekdays to fill in the gaps and permit people wanting to catch early flights from Gatwick to use the trains. His view was that KCC should concentrate on seeking extra journeys at marginal times, suited to aircrew members as well as passengers catching flights early or late in the day. This would at least lead to some improvements to Ashford services to Gatwick.

The Chairman said that he agreed with these comments and they should be discussed with KCC Officers, perhaps at the next JTB. He also considered there was a lack of fast services from Ashford to Tonbridge and this could also be examined to improve the overall situation. The Committee considered there should be better rail connectivity between Ashford and Gatwick and that there were multiple options which could be explored using existing infrastructure.

**Resolved:**

**That the report be received and noted and the comments of the Committee be forwarded to KCC Officers for consideration.**

## 422 KCC's Sensible Street Lighting Plan

The Chairman advised that KCC Officers had been requested to attend this meeting to discuss the Plan but they had refused due to the fact that they had already undertaken to attend the JTB on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2014 to present an update report and answer questions. He had requested that the matter stay on this Agenda, in order for Members to discuss the issue and formulate ideas/experiences prior to the JTB.

The main point of concern and contention appeared to be a lack of consultation and clarity over the proposals and that the JTB appeared to have given its backing to something which had subsequently developed further in terms of part night lighting to a complete switch off. A Member said he thought most people were accepting of the switch off between 00:00 and 05:30 but that they had been somewhat taken aback by the complete switch off in some areas. The Engineering Services Manager advised that the original KCC report did make it clear that there would be a two phase process with a trial switch off of surplus lights as phase 1 and a conversion of many other lights to part night lighting as phase 2. Phase 1 was now complete and phase 2 should be complete by the end of May. He accepted that it may appear that some additional lights had been turned off in error but these may be faulty. If they were part of the trial they should have been marked with red tape. Any that were out and not marked in this way should be reported to KCC. However, it was only fair to point out that both phases of the trial had been proposed from the start.

With regard to particular points of concern the following issues were raised: -

- There had been a lot of complaints about the switch off of lights at Trinity Road into the Eureka Leisure Park. It was affecting pedestrians and cyclists who wanted to use the pathways to access the cinema and restaurants and seemed counterproductive as it may force local people back into their cars.
- Could the switch off of alternate lights be considered rather than every light?
- There was a lot of technology that could be used to reduce lighting costs (timers, motion sensors, LED and more efficient lighting etc.) and it appeared KCC had not examined these fully before deciding to go ahead with the current trial. A complete switch off in some areas did seem extremely excessive.
- The perception and fear of crime in areas where street lighting had been removed could not be ignored. A Member who was also a KCC Member said the KCC Cabinet Member had already pledged to review switch offs in areas where there were valid concerns about increased crime and safety. Safety was the paramount factor and it was hoped that this would be taken fully and honestly into consideration when analysing the results of the trial.
- There needed to be a clear and proper debate about the issue, engaging the public, as there were clearly some areas where street lighting could be removed but were others where it was essential.
- Members said they would like some clarification over what were the criteria for success from the trial and who would decide if the trial had been successful?

- At the last JTB it was stated that a number of defective street lighting columns in and around the town would be removed and replaced by the end of March 2014. A number of these had yet to be replaced and there were also still a number of 'stumps' left behind. What was the status of these works?

**Resolved:**

**That the report be received and noted and the points of concern above be put to KCC Officers at the Joint Transportation Board on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2014.**

## **423 Bus Gate Camera Enforcement**

The report set out the latest position with regard to the introduction of camera enforcement in Ashford. The Council had been advised that KCC was running a similar pilot project for a period of 12 months in Tunbridge Wells and they believed it would be advantageous to wait for the results of that project before proceeding any further. They had indicated that this would allow all parties to judge the success of the scheme and to be able to understand the full implications for Ashford. The Chairman said he was increasingly frustrated and dismayed by the whole situation. Members had previously been led to believe that the cameras could be in place by May 2014, but there had been no further progress and it now appeared it would be well in to 2015 before anything could be implemented. He said this was just further delay and procrastination over an issue that had been going on for approximately 15 years. Members considered that the funding was in place, the legislation was in place and therefore there appeared to be no need to wait for Tunbridge Wells and KCC should do everything it could to achieve an appropriate and timely solution.

The Leader of the Council had written to the KCC Cabinet Member and a response was awaited. In the meantime the Assistant Health, Parking and Community Safety Manager had advised that the Council would not be signing the current proposed legal agreement because of concern over ongoing liabilities. The Chairman asked that the Committee's views again be made clear to KCC.

**Resolved:**

**That the report be received and noted and the concern of this Committee over the ongoing delays to this project be expressed to Kent County Council.**

## **424 Date of Next Meeting**

The next Meeting of the Committee (Industry Updates and Discussion) would be Friday 11<sup>th</sup> July 2014 at 9.30am.

The next Strategic Issues Meeting of the Committee would be Monday 27<sup>th</sup> October 2014 at 7.00pm.

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