

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **24th July 2012**

Present:

Cllr. Chilton (Vice-Chairman in the Chair);

Cllrs. Apps, Bennett, Buchanan, Galpin, Mrs Hutchinson, Mortimer, Robey, Shorter, Smith.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2(iii) Councillor Buchanan attended as a Substitute Member for Councillor Hodgkinson.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Aaby, Bartlett, Claughton, Davison, Hodgkinson, Mrs Martin, Yeo.

Also Present:

Cllr. Mrs Blanford, Sims.

Development Planning Manager (KCC), Principal Urban Designer, Engineering Services Manager, Senior Scrutiny Officer, Member Services & Scrutiny Support Officer.

102 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 26th June 2012 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

103 Ashford Shared Space – 3 year post implementation report

The Development Planning Manager (KCC) introduced the item. He advised the Committee that visitors had come from far afield to see the Shared Space scheme in action. Using a PowerPoint presentation he gave Members an overview of the presentation that he had given to a number of organisations, including the Society of Road Safety Auditors. The presentation showed the different stages of the scheme, including before and after photographs. The scheme had resulted in a reduction in the speed limit from 30mph to 20mph. Future changes would result in a further reduction of the speed of vehicles. He acknowledged that, whilst the publicity before and during the construction of the scheme had been of a high standard, the post construction publicity could have been handled better.

The Development Planning Manger (KCC) was pleased to report that there had been a 41% reduction in personal injury crashes on the ring road as a whole, with a 36% reduction in casualties. In the Shared Space section of the ring road, and including Bank Street, there had been a 50% reduction in personal injury crashes and casualties. There had however been an increase in cyclist related accidents from one to two. The improvement in safety on the ring road was largely as predicted. In the three years of operation of the Shared Space seven personal injury crashes had been recorded, these were detailed to the Committee. On the remainder of the ring road, they were reviewing the pedestrian signals at the North Street and Somerset Road junction following a number of incidents. All of the incidents were included in the 'three years of operation' analysis.

There was a need to be honest about the shortcomings of the scheme. The materials had been costly, overrunning of some areas by larger vehicles had caused damage and there had been surface staining issues in Bank Street. The issues with the maintenance had not progressed to the extent that had been hoped. An investigation would be held during the summer and would involve Ashford Borough Council Officers. On a positive note the Shared Space had a much improved safety record, the speed of traffic had been reduced and the area had been de-cluttered. There was one side of Elwick Road that was undeveloped, once this had been developed it was hoped that the Shared Space would become more effective.

The Vice-Chairman in the Chair advised the Committee that Ashford Visually Impaired Persons (VIPs) had been invited to attend the meeting; no comments had been received from them. The Senior Scrutiny Officer advised that Councillor Cloughton, the Chairman of Ashford Access, had sent his apologies to the meeting and had welcomed the report and gave the scheme his full support.

During the discussion, the following issues were raised:

- There was a distinct difference between perception and reality. The positive news surrounding the Shared Space should be promoted. The Development Planning Manager (KCC) agreed and explained why a cautious approach to the release of information had been taken.
- Would there be a way to prevent service providers digging up the Shared Space and refilling the section that had been dug up with tarmac? The Development Planning Manager (KCC) advised that with particular schemes limitations were placed on what service providers could do and how they had to reinstate the area worked upon. He believed in this case there were provisions made for a five year limitation. The key element however was the placement of services prior to the construction of a scheme.
- Members questioned how the maintenance issues were progressing, in particular the staining of the materials. The Development Planning Manager (KCC) advised that this was being dealt with by the Head of Operations, who had commissioned an investigation into these issues to be carried out in the summer.

- The Portfolio Holder for the Environment felt that KCC needed to work alongside the Council's Communications Team to ensure that the success of the Shared Space was promoted properly. She advised that the results of the maintenance investigation were expected to be received by the Council in September 2012. It was suggested that the Chairman of the Committee write to KCC to emphasise the need for an investigation and the involvement of Council Officers in the process.
- A Member felt that the footfall in the area would increase once the shops improved and the café culture came to fruition. The scheme was not yet complete and so it felt that the comparison of the safety record was premature.
- Members agreed that the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, in conjunction with the Leader, should write to KCC to underline the need for an investigation into the maintenance of the Shared Space and to impress upon them the desire of the Committee for Council Officers to be involved in this process.
- The Vice-Chairman in the Chair advised that an email had been received from a Member requesting that a review be undertaken in relation to various aspect of the project. The Vice-Chairman reminded the Committee that the last time the Shared Space was discussed by the Committee they had decided not to undertake a review of the project. The Development Planning Manager (KCC) advised that KCC had undertaken a review of the project and important lessons had been learnt. A Member questioned what the processes were behind this review and how KCC ensured that lessons learnt became policy. The Development Planning Manager (KCC) advised that a tighter approach to project management had been introduced following the review. Lessons learnt had been put into practice with schemes at Maidstone and Victoria Way.
- It was proposed that the Committee recommended to the Cabinet that the real, not perceived, safety figures were promoted to the residents of the Borough in conjunction with KCC. This was seconded.
- A Member highlighted a number of issues with young people on BMX bikes and suggested that some signage be placed around the Shared Space to remind cyclists how to behave. The Development Planning Manager (KCC) advised that it was noted that further engagement was needed with the public.

Resolved:

That:

- (i) **The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee write, in conjunction with the Leader, to Kent County Council to underline the need for an investigation into the maintenance of the Shared Space and that Ashford Borough Council Officers be involved in this process.**

- (ii) **The Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends that Cabinet, in conjunction with Kent County Council, ensure that the real not perceived, safety figures are promoted to the residents of the Borough to make residents feel safe in the Shared Space.**
- (iii) **The report be received and noted.**

104 Ashford Borough Council Business Plan Performance Report – Quarter 1 2012/13 (to end May)

The Vice-Chairman in the Chair advised that there were no Officers present to answer questions on the Report, however if Members had any questions these would be taken back to the relevant Officer.

A Member was delighted by the progress that had been made with the Five Year Business Plan.

A Member drew attention to the Open Spaces and Public Realm Review and highlighted a number of issues experienced in his Ward in relation to management companies. Another Member suggested that a further report on the issue be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

105 Future Reviews and Report Tracker

The Vice-Chairman in the Chair drew Members' attention to the Tracker. The Meeting of the Committee in August had been cancelled and the Meeting in September would receive reports on the Post Mayoralty Review and Apprentices. Members were encouraged to contact the Senior Scrutiny Officer if they had any suggestions for future reviews.

Resolved:

That the Future Reviews and Report Tracker be noted.