

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee
held in Committee Room 2, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxon
at 2.00pm on Thursday 12 October 2017

PRESENT

Councillors: Mr D A Cotterill (Chairman) A H K Postan (Vice-Chairman), R J M Bishop, M Brennan, A S Coles, J C Cooper, P J G Dorward, H B Eaglestone, E J Fenton, Miss G R Hill, H J Howard and Ms E P R Leffman.

Also in attendance: Mrs C E Reynolds

25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

Apologies for absence were received from Mr P Emery and Mrs E H N Fenton.

Mr J C Cooper attended for Mr A M Graham.

26 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 July 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

27 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or Officers in matters to be considered at the meeting.

28 PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

In accordance with the Council's Rules of Procedure, Mr John White, the Mayor of Burford, addressed the meeting in relation to Agenda Item No. 7 (A 361 High Street (Burford) Proposed 7.5 tonne Weight Restriction). A copy of his submission is attached as Appendix A to the original copy of these minutes.

Mr Cotterill thanked Mr White for his update and the Committee then gave consideration to the report of the Head of Democratic Services which appeared as Agenda Item No. 7.

29 A 361 HIGH STREET (BURFORD) PROPOSED 7.5 TONNE WEIGHT RESTRICTION

The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Democratic Services regarding the proposed introduction of a 7.5 tonne Weight Restriction within Burford.

Mr Cotterill advised that, when the High Street was particularly busy, retail satellite navigation system designed for the private motorist directed traffic via Barns Lane. This route was clearly unsuitable for HGV's and there had been numerous occasions when such vehicles became stuck and had to be towed out or had caused damage to buildings.

Mr Coles expressed his sympathy for the problems faced by Burford and enquired whether Public Service Vehicles would be exempted from the proposed restrictions. Mr White advised that the weight restriction would only apply to goods vehicles, not to PSV's. Mr Coles also asked whether the County Council had given a commitment to enforce the restriction. Mr White advised that the restriction would be enforced by Trading Standards if the Town Council agreed to meet the cost. An enforcement protocol had been agreed between the County Council and the Burford Town Council whereby the town Council would provide CCTV evidence of transgression and Trading Standards would take action should the Town Council meet the cost. Discussions were ongoing to set a ceiling on potential Town Council Expenditure.

Mr Cotterill noted that Automatic Number Plate Recognition cameras were employed at Newbridge where there was an 18 tonne weight limit and Mr White indicated that there were similar aspirations for Burford.

Ms Leffman indicated that there was a weight limit on the bridge at Charlbury as the structure was weak and questioned whether a similar restriction could be applied at Burford. Mr White advised that the bridge had been strengthened significantly by the American Forces during the Second World War to enable its use by armoured vehicles so this was not an issue. Ms Leffman recalled that there had been plans for a wider restricted zone and sought clarification of the current proposals. Mr White advised that, whilst there had been initial proposals for a wider ranging restriction, the Town Council had been unable to guarantee to monitor this area and the current proposals related solely to the High Street. Whilst it was possible that further work could revive this suggestion, Mr White considered this to be unlikely.

Ms Leffman noted that ANPR technology was used successfully elsewhere and suggested that the Town Council raise this with the County.

Mr Fenton asked if routes through Burford were restricted on hauliers' maps and on professional satellite navigation systems. He also questioned whether ANPR technology could be used to enforce against foreign registered vehicles. Mr White explained that Trading Standards did not attempt to enforce against foreign registered vehicles but could not advise on the capability of satellite navigation software. The hope was that, by imposing a weight restriction, HGV's would use alternative routes.

Mr Cotterill advised that a freight quality partnership had been in operation in the past, run by the County Council and incorporating a range of industry professionals as an outcome of the 2006 Transport Plan. From this, Burford had been removed from international hauliers' maps which showed the route as being via Northleach and the Fosse Way. The route via Burford was also not given on professional hauliers satellite navigation systems and the larger foreign companies adhered to the approved routes. However, it was difficult to get systems designed for the private motorist to incorporate such practical information.

Mr Fenton questioned whether the proposed restrictions would be effective and Mr White advised that the erection of 'No HGV' signage had been shown to reduce the number of vehicles by 70%. It was hoped that the introduction of a weight restriction would have the same effect.

Mr Eaglestone questioned whether the introduction of a 20MPH speed limit would have an effect but Mr White indicated that he did not believe that this would reduce HGV movements.

In response to concerns raised by Mr White in his presentation, Mr Cooper questioned whether there was a bus to take school children from Fulbrook to Burford. He advised that residents of Woodstock did not support the proposals which would result in HGV's being diverted through the town. He enquired about the cost of signage and Mr White advised that this would be in the region of £120,000 which would be raised by the town. In addition, the legal and administrative procedures would cost a further £3,000 which would be met by the Town Council.

Mr Cotterill indicated that existing signage on the A40 directed HGV's away from Woodstock along the A40 to Evesham, Northleach and the Fosse way. He noted that Burford had 252 Listed Buildings of which 162 were located on the High Street whilst Woodstock had 165 with only 32 on the main route.

Mr Howard expressed his support for the principle of a weight restriction which would set the tone for vehicle movements through heritage towns for the rest of the nation. He noted that Australia and New Zealand had imposed a ban on engine assisted breaking in residential areas as this reduced noise levels significantly. He also expressed concern that the introduction of an Order as drafted would apply equally to PSV vehicles. Mr White assured Members that the County Council had advised that this was not the case but undertook to raise the question with them.

Mr Postan questioned whether the Council should seek support at Government level for HMRC to take action against foreign registered vehicles failing to comply with such restrictions.

Having been proposed and duly seconded it was:-

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet be requested to support for the proposed introduction of a 7.5 tonne Weight Restriction within Burford, excluding Public Service Vehicles and tourist coaches.

(Mr Cooper requested that his vote against the foregoing resolution be so recorded)

30 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2017/2018

The Committee received the report of the Strategic Director which gave an update on progress in relation to its Work Programme for 2017/2018.

30.1 Waste and Recycling Contract

The Head of Environment and Commercial Services provided Members with an update on the introduction of the new waste and recycling contract. She advised that, since the last meeting, the Council had been able to secure the lease of a site for the provision of a temporary bulking station (waste transfer station). Initially, the Council had been unable to identify an appropriate site and had sought tenders for the provision of a bulking service. Only one tender had been received, that submitted by the then waste collection contractor. As it was considered that this did not represent value for money, it had been intended to re-tender the bulking contract on a wider geographical basis.

However, having failed to secure a contract with the Council, the waste collection contractor decided to relinquish their lease of the bulking site which then became available to the Council.

A report was submitted to the Cabinet at its meeting held on 23 August and the lease secured. Given its location adjacent to the existing vehicle depot, this site, due to become operational shortly, was to be operated by Ubico and would provide the most cost effective solution with the least environmental impact.

The Council had taken possession of the site the previous week and the new vehicle fleet was now on site. Staff training had commenced prior to the contract transfer date and on the first day of the new contract every member of staff employed by the previous contractor had reported for work. Whilst staff had been working hard and for long hours, they were positive about the new regime and the changes that had taken place. They were now working with new vehicles and the depot site had been cleaned up. Welfare facilities were being improved and better and more supportive management arrangements put in place.

The Head of Environment and Commercial Services acknowledged that there had been some difficulties during the transition but advised that measures were being taken to put solutions in place. A large number of missed collections had been recorded but this was, in part, due to the fact that errors on the part of residents were being treated as missed collections and vehicles despatched to deal with such instances as such. This had placed an additional burden on crews; two additional crews had been employed solely to deal with missed collections with others going out again once they had completed their designated rounds. It was hoped that the backlog would be cleared by the end of the coming weekend and that rounds would settle down rapidly now that a full cycle of collections had taken place and the Head of Environment and Commercial Services asked Members to be patient whilst the inevitable initial teething problems were addressed.

There had been some activity on social media questioning the motivation for the revised service model. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services emphasised that the changes had been a response to residents' wishes as communicated through the survey and consultation process which established that a co-mingled recycling collection using a wheeled bin was by far the favoured option. The new service had a higher cost but provided a higher quality of service which met the needs of the public. A greater range of recyclable material, including small electrical items, was now collected.

The Head of Environment and Commercial Services made reference to problems experienced at 'bring sites' and advised that the previous contractor had significantly under-priced the provision of this service which, in consequence, had been under-resourced. Now that this service had been taken over by Ubico it was expected that a marked improvement would be evident over the next month or so. The fact that material fly tipped at bring sites had been left for long periods in the past encouraged others to do likewise. It was expected that, by responding to such instances rapidly, the overall level of fly tipping would reduce.

The Head of Environment and Commercial Services expressed the hope that positive data, including an increase in recycling rates, would be available at the next meeting.

Ms Leffman indicated that she was reassured by the commitment to address problems at the 'bring sites' and made reference to particular difficulties experienced in Charlbury. She advised that currently there was no paper bank at the car park site and, whilst acknowledging that the contract was in its early stages, indicated that black recycling bins had not been collected in parts of Charlbury, Churchill and Fawler. She asked that residents be advised when these would be collected as she was concerned that the material would simply be put into the general refuse stream. Ms Leffman also noted that textiles and batteries had not been collected.

The Head of Environment and Commercial Services advised that the increased volume of recyclable material had caused some difficulties as, once a vehicle was full, it had to abort the remainder of its designated round. Missed collections would be dealt with at a later stage and the Head of Environment and Commercial Services undertook to look into the specific issues raised. Textiles were currently collected by a separate crew but this was to change shortly when modifications would enable a single vehicle to be used. In the meantime, residents should leave any uncollected material out for collection at a later date.

Mr Bishop recognised that this was a new system and was pleased to note that steps were being taken to address any problems identified. It had been suggested to him that the new vehicles did not have sufficient capacity to deal with the volume of recyclable material to be collected but the Head of Environment and Commercial Services gave an assurance that this was not the case.

Mr Eaglestone expressed some concern that some residents had continued to place green waste bins out for collection having failed to obtain an annual licence and enquired how this would be addressed. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services advised that only those bins with a valid licence would be emptied. Unused bins could be removed and if any particular instances of misuse were reported the Council would endeavour to address this with the residents or the landlord of a rented property.

Mr Howard questioned why flyaway plastics were no longer collected and the Head of Environment and Commercial Services explained that the value of such material had fallen to such an extent that it had not been possible to find anyone that would reprocess it as the cost of doing so exceeded the value of the resulting product. Even if such material was collected separately, it would not be reprocessed but would simply be diverted to landfill. Following the introduction of charging for plastic bags, the volume of flyaway plastics had reduced and, whilst they would not be recycled, plastic bags could also be used to line waste caddies. In response to a question from Mr Dorward, she advised that flyaway plastics collected in household refuse were sent to be processed as energy from waste.

Mr Howard also expressed concern over the condition of the 'bring site' at Asda in Carterton, suggesting that CCTV should be provided to discourage fly tipping and take action against those responsible. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services suggested that the problem was one of mismanagement, comparing the site with that operated by Sainsburys in Witney where similar difficulties had been experienced and addressed through the application of greater resources.

She indicated that, whilst the provision of equipment was not unduly expensive, the need to review tapes and the work involved in pursuing enforcement action was resource intensive. She suggested that, if the site was managed better, problems would be reduced. If that proved not to be the case, the provision of CCTV could be considered but the Head of Environment and Commercial Services considered that it would be preferable to see how the new contract bedded in before going down that route.

Mr Fenton advised that Ducklington parish wished to see the introduction of CCTV and expressed concern over the misuse of 'bring sites' by commercial undertakings. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services acknowledged that this was a common concern and advised that enforcement action would be directed against businesses rather than individual residents.

Mr Brennan questioned how many times paper could be recycled before it became unusable. It was established that, dependent upon the quality of the finished product, paper could be recycled between four and eight times.

Miss Hill questioned whether there was any possibility of the Dean Pit Household Waste Recycling Centre being re-opened. It was explained that this had been a County Council operated facility and that West Oxfordshire had lobbied against the closure.

The County Council was currently looking to rationalise its waste recycling facilities and, whilst there were no plans to make any further closures at present, a reduction could be anticipated in the future. Against this background it was most unlikely that Dean Pit would re-open.

Ms Leffman requested that the level of fly tipping be monitored following the introduction of charges for the disposal of certain items now classified as non-household waste and reminded Members that West Oxfordshire had sought to identify a site to serve the north of the District. In conclusion, she agreed that the Council should assess the impact of its new recycling service before considering any further measures.

RESOLVED: That progress with regard to the Committee's Work Programme for 2017/2018 be noted.

32 CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The report of the Chief Executive giving an opportunity for the Committee to comment on the Work Programme published on 19 September 2017 was received.

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet Work Programme published on 19 September 2017 be noted.

33 ADOPTION OF THE WASTE AND RECYCLING POLICY

The Committee noted that Agenda Item No. 8 (Adoption of the Waste and Recycling Policy) had been withdrawn from both the Overview and Scrutiny and Cabinet agendas.

34 PROVISION OF ADDITIONAL CAR PARKING CAPACITY

The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Environment and Commercial Services which sought consideration of the policy options relating to the growth in demand for parking capacity identified in the Council's Car Parking Strategy.

Mr Cotterill indicated that he believed that the scheme in Burford was the only project currently achievable.

Mr Cooper noted that there was a problem at present but acknowledged that, if there had been an easy way in which to address it the Council would have done so. He advised that a member of the Woodstock Town Council had raised the possibility of developing an internet site promoting off-street parking on private drives. He asked if shift patterns could be revised to allow for effective enforcement of the three hour waiting restrictions in Woodstock as parking provision was already limited and expressed concern over full sized spaces being sterilised by motorcycle parking. Mr Cooper enquired how the minimum cost of £13,000 per space had been calculated.

In response, the Head of Environment and Commercial Services advised that as there were already a number of commercial sites operating in the manner suggested, it would be inappropriate for the Council to seek to enter that market. She advised that existing shift patterns allowed for effective enforcement of the three hour waiting restrictions in Woodstock and acknowledged that there was an existing need for additional car parking throughout the District.

The cost of £13,000 per space was based upon decked parking, hence the reason the unit cost at Burford was lower as there was land available for surface parking.

Evidence of potential costs had come from a recent scheme in Cirencester which suggested a figure of between £13,000 and £15,000 per space depending upon the total number to be provided. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services also undertook to consider the question of provision for motorcycles.

Mr Coles thanked Officers for the report and, given the potential impact on workers, visitors, shoppers and residents in the vicinity, expressed his opposition to the loss of the Woodford Way car park through development. He suggested that the Committee should recommend that the Cabinet deletes proposals for the development of the Woodford Way car park included in the emerging Local Plan.

The Head of Environment and Commercial Services drew attention to the recommendation at paragraph 3 (v) of the report that the Cabinet adopts a policy on the Councils Strategic approach to parking capacity incorporating the provisos that it will not dispose of car parking assets unless any future development on that site:-

- (i) provides suitable alternative parking during development, so there is no loss of overall provision, and,
- (ii) replaces any loss in parking spaces, within the development and,
- (iii) meets the demand for parking generated by the development itself, onsite;

and which supports the delivery of parking capacity through partnership to mitigate the cost implications for the Council, suggesting that the caveats proposed would address the concerns that he raised.

Mr Bishop agreed that parking in Woodstock was a desperate problem and questioned plans for parking at the Police Station and Doctor's Surgery. Mr Cooper advised that he was not aware of any proposals but undertook to investigate.

Mr Postan stressed that adequate car parking provision was essential to the future of the District as, without vibrant businesses, the Council would have no revenue from Business Rates and hence no ability to provide services. It was absolutely essential that this issue was addressed.

Mr Howard concurred and expressed his support for the policy as set out. He suggested that, rather than look at the feasibility of delivering additional parking capacity in Witney in isolation (as referenced in the Cabinet Work Programme as item No. 4) a Working Party could be formed to consider parking provision throughout the District. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services advised that this item was a discrete, site specific issue the subject of current discussion. It was necessary to put a policy in place at a strategic level before seeking to progress specific schemes.

Mr Brennan enquired whether there were any proposals to provide electric vehicle charging points in the Council's car parks and Mr Postan advised that this suggestion had also been made by the Working Party established by the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

With regard to the number of spaces identified as being necessary to 2031, the Head of Environment and Commercial Services explained that these had been calculated to correspond with the life of the emerging Local Plan.

Whilst the numbers specified might not necessarily be required at present, the totals reflected the likely levels of demand as development continued throughout the life of the plan.

Having been proposed by Mr Postan and duly seconded it was:-

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet be recommended to adopt a policy on the Councils Strategic approach to parking capacity incorporating the provisos that it will not dispose of car parking assets unless any future development on that site:-

(i) provides suitable alternative parking during development, so there is no loss of overall provision, and,

(ii) replaces any loss in parking spaces, within the development and,

(iii) meets the demand for parking generated by the development itself, onsite;

and which supports the delivery of parking capacity through partnership to mitigate the cost implications for the Council.

35 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

35.1 Waste and Recycling Contract

In response to a question from Ms Leffman, the Head of Environment and Commercial Services confirmed that the Council would revise its policy on the collection and recycling of materials such as flyaway plastics should market changes make it viable to do so.

35.2 Discarded Elastic Bands

Mr Coles enquired whether there had been any response from Royal Mail regarding the concerns expressed by the Committee over the number of elastic bands discarded by post office delivery workers.

Officers advised that, whilst letters had been sent to the relevant Delivery Office Managers requesting that they draw the concerns raised to the attention of their staff, these had not been drafted in such a way as to elicit a direct response.

Members were asked whether or not this remained an issue.

The meeting closed at 3.30pm

CHAIRMAN