



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, TRANSPORT AND TOURISM SCRUTINY
COMMISSION

Held: WEDNESDAY, 16 OCTOBER 2019 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Waddington (Chair)
Councillor Sandhu (Vice Chair)

Councillor Broadwell
Councillor Fonseca
Councillor Valand

Councillor Joel
Councillor Porter

In Attendance:

Sir Peter Soulsby – City Mayor

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27. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology was received from Councillor Rae Bhatia.

28. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In respect of the Evesham Road Link, it was noted that members of the Commission had received email correspondence from objectors.

Councillor Broadwell also declared that she had previously objected to the principle of any proposals for the link road being brought forward.

29. MINUTES

AGREED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 22 August 2019 be confirmed as a correct record.

30. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

31. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer reported that no questions, representations or statements of case had been received.

32. EVESHAM ROAD LINK

The Chair referred to her decision to allow the 'End of the Road Campaign' to address the Commission on the item, in accordance with Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

It was confirmed that a total of 30 minutes would be allowed, noting that four members of the public had asked to present their views as representatives of the larger number of organisations making up the 'End of the Road Campaign'.

The Chair then referred to the attendance of two Ward Councillors who had also asked to speak. It was confirmed that the Ward Councillors would be allowed 5 minutes each to address the Commission.

As a further procedural point, the Chair explained to Commission members and the public present that the Commission would not be making a decision on any future proposals, but that proper scrutiny of the issue would lead to a recommendation being made to the City Mayor and Executive. The Chair emphasised this point and reminded the Commission that following debate on the item, members would be asked to make any comments for future consideration by the City Mayor.

The Chair then asked the City Mayor and lead Director to introduce the item.

The City Mayor commented on the historical and geographical aspects of the Evesham Road link, as it had been included on previous development plans and documentation.

He stated that there were no current plans to create a link road by extending Evesham Road through to Boundary Road and confirmed he had no plans to allocate any funding to such a scheme.

In the historical context, the City Mayor referred to the other river crossings put in place due to their need in previous times. He commented that an Evesham Road link road had been seen as a possible additional river crossing that may be desirable in the future, as it was argued there could be beneficial as well as detrimental aspects to the idea.

The City Mayor commented that the link road to the Aylestone area and creation of an alternative route and by-pass to relieve congestion in parts of the Aylestone Village had been suggested as a benefit from any future project. The additional benefit to public transport and particularly improved bus routes was also referenced, alongside the expectation that greener and cleaner private cars and vehicles would become more common in the future.

The City Mayor asked the Commission to note that this was why the proposed link road 'line' had been included in previous development plans and had been the subject of an environmental appraisal over 25 years ago. The City Mayor confirmed that the line on the plan demonstrated what was proposed at that time.

In conclusion, the City Mayor stressed the points made at the beginning of his introduction; that there was no proposal to implement an Evesham Road link, and that no funds were available or allocated to support it. It was also explained and accepted that at current values, the likely estimated costs of a river crossing scheme would be too high to allow it to proceed.

The Director of Planning, Development and Transportation was then asked to comment on the item.

It was reported that in terms of the current status, the Evesham Road link road was not allocated in the current adopted Local Plan. It was noted that highway improvement schemes shown as 'lines' on plans were primarily used to give an indication of safeguarded land and that these were shown on local land charge searches. In respect of the emerging options document, as part of the current Local Plan process, the road link was referenced for discussion alongside other historical safeguarded links in the city.

It was noted that since publication of the Agenda, which included a request for written responses, 23 separate objections had been received, beginning with a submission from The End of the Road Campaign, Leicester Friends of the Earth, and Footpaths: Routes to a Greener Future. The objections received were circulated to members prior to the meeting.

The timetable for the Local Plan consultation was presented (PowerPoint Slides attached) and explained as follows:

- Overview and Scrutiny Committee would receive a report and presentation at its meeting to be held on 28 November 2019
- Full Council would be asked to approve the consultation Draft Local Plan in January 2020

- Further themed scrutiny meetings would be convened during the Draft Local Plan consultation between February and March 2020
- The submission of the Local Plan after expiry of the consultation was expected in late 2020
- The 'Examination in Public' would be held in 2021

It was reiterated that comments made at this meeting concerning the Evesham Road link would be considered as part of the wider consultation process described above. Any specific recommendations at this stage would also be referred to the City Mayor and Executive.

The Chair thanked the City Mayor and lead Director for their introduction to the item.

At this point, the Chair welcomed the representatives of the 'End of the Road Campaign' who were invited to address the Commission.

Kim Burley Jones introduced herself and her campaign colleagues; Jill Fisher (Friends of the Earth), Zina Zelter (Footpaths: Routes to a Greener Future), and Andy Warley (Aylestone Meadows Appreciation Society).

The representatives presented separate sections of the Campaign's opinions and objections as follows (PowerPoint Slides attached):

Kim Burley Jones (End of the Road Campaign) referred to the importance of Aylestone meadows as a Local nature Reserve and commented on the number of organisations and individuals that had supported the campaign. Images were displayed of the demonstration in 2028 that had asked the council to remove the road from the local plan

Jill Fisher presented the evidence for induced traffic and referred to Government research on the issue, including a Department of Transport Advisory Committee Study and Evidence Review.

Zina Zelter commented on the Council's own Essential Guide to Travel Planning for Employers in Leicester and advised that in that document it was confirmed that the success of a Travel Plan could be predicted by the package of measures implemented, including car sharing, public transport and cycling measures.

Analysis of data supporting these views was provided and explained.

Kim Burley Jones then referred to the impact the road proposal would have on health, particularly the health of children, and referred to the results of independent air quality testing carried out by the campaign.

Andy Warley reiterated the comments made concerning the designation of the area as a Local Nature Reserve and reminded the Commission that Council policy was to conserve and promote such areas. The importance of the value of the meadows and the wildlife and habitat that would be lost if a road scheme was introduced were explained.

In concluding the public addresses, campaign members expressed their opposition to the road proposals and requested that the Commission:

- Recommend to the Council Executive that they remove the “red line” for this road from the Local Plan
- Recommend that the council make a formal commitment not to build this road in the next 30 years
- Recommend that the council systematically put in place policy and invest in strategies and developments that reduce car use.

The campaign representatives were thanked for addressing the Commission.

The Chair then asked the Ward Councillors to speak on the item.

Councillor Singh Johal as Ward Councillor for Braunstone Park and Rowley Fields Ward began by thanking the large number of residents present for their attendance. He referred to the passion expressed in the objections received and evident in the End of the Road Campaign’s address to the Commission.

He commented on the uncertainty that the ‘line’ on the Local Plan document had raised and reference was made to previous sensitive and controversial planning applications involving land at or adjacent to the Meadows. He asked the Commission to note that although these planning applications were refused consent residents felt that the area was often under threat from proposals for development and were apprehensive about the future of the Evesham Road link. He said the need to ensure full and proper engagement with residents on such issues was therefore vital. The strong community values of those living in the area were described and the Commission was asked to note that many residents had stayed in the area through generations and were not a transient community as found in other parts of the city.

In conclusion, Councillor Singh Johal commented on the arguments of the campaign, which he considered had been well put and asked that the line be removed from the Local Plan, as the uncertainties that its inclusion led to were unwelcome and not in the interests of the residents.

Councillor Singh Johal was thanked for addressing the Commission.

Councillor Kitterick addressed the Commission and supported the campaign’s arguments, particularly those issues raised concerning induced traffic. Examples of situations elsewhere in the city were provided where additional road space had not resulted in any reduction in car use or congestion.

Reference was also made to the likely cost of the scheme which could be estimated at a cost far in excess of what would be reasonably affordable for the Council. Again, examples of similar road schemes were provided to emphasise this point.

Councillor Kitterick also referred to an aspect of the proposal that had not been included in the Campaign's presentation, which was the likely ambition to promote an additional link to Putney Road and across to London Road, which he considered would be of extreme detriment to the south of the city.

Reference was made to the previously stated opportunity for improved bus routes arising from a link road. The Commission were reminded that bus use was focussed on the city centre and doubt was raised on the benefit and demand that such a route would provide.

In conclusion, Councillor Kitterick commented on the anomaly of the Evesham Road link as a proposal conflicting with the Council's corporate objective to promote a city that was beneficial to its people. To support this view reference was made to recent important and valuable schemes to promote cycling and pedestrian links.

Councillor Kitterick was thanked for addressing the Commission.

The Chair then asked Commission members to comment on the item.

Clarification was sought on the status of the 'red line' and whether it was included in the current Local Plan, as there was confusion existed between the thoughts of the End of the Road Campaign and the report by officers. It was considered that clarifying information should be provided on this point before the draft document was published in January 2020.

Councillor Porter supported the point above and also stated that he felt the public had been misled on the issue. In respect of the effect of the proposals on Aylestone, he suggested that simpler solutions were available to avoid congestion. He commented on the bus lanes which he considered had caused the current problems and advised that changes to traffic light sequences would help to reduce congestion.

In response, the City Mayor clarified that the public had not been misled and reiterated his earlier comments as to why the line had remained on previous plans and documentation. He also reiterated his comments that there were no plans to implement a scheme and that no funding existed.

The City Mayor referred to the points made in the presentation by the End of the Road Campaign and he thanked representatives for their considered, comprehensive and well-presented explanation of the concerns. He asked the Commission to note that he had been instrumental in the current status of Aylestone Meadows as a Nature Reserve and that he fully understood the important ecology, noting that the area was previously redundant and inaccessible.

Comment was also made on the counter arguments of those residents that had expressed support for a link road to ease the congestion in their area. The City Mayor pointed out that this view should not be ignored in considering the issue. In response to the need for clarification concerning the 'red line', the Director of Planning, Development and Transportation was asked by the Chair to comment.

The Director reported that the link road had been a formal proposal in the 1983 Local Plan but that it had no formal status in the current Local Plan. Its only recent reference was in the Emerging Options Local Plan documentation which provided an opportunity for the Council to put forward different ideas for early discussion on a range of potential sites and developments including housing as well as transport options. The 'red line' for the Evesham Road link in this options document was shown on a plan highlighting all existing highway safeguarded lines for discussion. These are presently held separately from the local plan for future safeguarding and land searches.

It was noted that the objections would be considered before the presentation of the Draft of the Local Plan was submitted to Overview Select Committee, and on to full Council.

The City Mayor asked the Commission to note that if the Commission recommended that the scheme be removed from the local plan, the wishes of the Campaign not to revisit the scheme in the future could not be accommodated.

The Commission accepted that any decision could not bind a successor administration, and therefore that part of the Campaign's wishes could not be agreed. It was open to the Commission to recommend that the scheme be removed from the Local Plan at this stage.

The Director noted that road schemes such as this should not be included in a Local Plan where there was no degree of certainty that the scheme could proceed during the plan period and that this often related to the availability of funding for such a scheme.

In response to a further question, and for clarity, the City Mayor indicated that he was not minded to include the Evesham Road link road in the presentation to Overview Select Committee.

Councillor Porter left the meeting at 6.48 pm.

In concluding the item and summary, the Chair thanked the End of the Road Campaign and Ward Councillors for presenting their arguments to the Commission. It was noted that a formal commitment could not be made to bind any future administration, but that their other requests would be supported.

AGREED:

To recommend to the City Mayor and Executive that the “red line” for the Evesham Road link road be removed from the Local Plan and that the Council systematically puts in place policy and invest in strategies and developments that reduce car use.

33. SCRUTINY REVIEW SCOPING DOCUMENT - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AT A LOCAL LEVEL

The Chair introduced the item and reminded the Commission of the rationale of the review to develop job creation, skills and investment plans for parts of Leicester which were economically excluded, including opportunities for local businesses and for young people to engage in positive activities. The aims of the review were to explore how those aims could be achieved at local levels.

This review would also seek to evaluate how those commitments were being met and the measures that could be taken to increase economic participation at local levels, through overarching strategies and individual projects. It would identify and characterise what is meant by economic exclusion at a local level and make recommendations to address the key problems and build upon opportunities.

The Chair referred to the process underway to progress those aims and thanked colleagues for the evidence that had been gathered and submitted to date.

The intention to convene a Task Group was emphasised and the Scrutiny Policy officer circulated information concerning members’ availability.

It was confirmed that research support had been offered by De Montfort University to assist in the progression of the scrutiny review.

The City Mayor confirmed hi support to the review process and commented on early indications of evidence collected on economic disadvantage.

AGREED:

That the Scrutiny Review document be received and noted and the rationale be endorsed.

34. UPDATE ON INWARD INVESTMENT ACTIVITIES

The Director of Tourism, Culture and Investment submitted a report, which outlined key activities to support business growth and attract new business investment.

The report noted the key activities being delivered or developed to support growth of businesses in Leicester and to attract new investment.

It was noted that in recent years significant successes had created several thousand new job opportunities.

It was reported that six detailed sector-based propositions were being developed to provide up-to-date information and support the early stage investment decision making process, namely:

- Space
- Advanced Manufacturing & Engineering
- Life Sciences
- IT, Professional & Financial Services
- Advanced Logistics
- Food & Drink

In noting the sectors, comment was made concerning the further growth which was evident on the boundary of the city and it was confirmed that as transport was a key to the city economy an efficient network was vital. The Director of Planning, Development and Transportation provided details of the draft bid to Transforming Cities bid in this regard.

Further comments and consideration of car parking policies, and other sustainable transport policies involving improved cycling, walking and public transport links were also noted.

The opportunities to invest in redundant and disused industrial and factory sites was also referred to and the use of Compulsory Purchase Orders to regenerate areas, such as Woodgate and the Waterside scheme, were explained and noted. Other potential sites that would benefit from similar sympathetic regeneration schemes were also discussed and noted.

AGREED:

That the report and update be noted.

35. QUESTIONS FOR THE CITY MAYOR

There were no further questions for the City Mayor.

36. WORK PROGRAMME 2019-20

The Commission's Work Programme was submitted and noted.

37. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 7.30pm.

