



Leicester
City Council

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

Held: THURSDAY, 22 AUGUST 2019 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Waddington (Chair)
Councillor Sandhu (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Broadwell
Councillor Fonseca
Councillor Porter

Councillor Rae Bhatia
Councillor Valand

In Attendance:

Councillor Willmott

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15. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Joel.

16. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Sandhu declared a pecuniary interest in agenda item 11, "Workplace Parking Levy", in that his wife owned a property in the Cultural Quarter. Councillor Sandhu advised that, due to the nature of his interest, he would withdraw from the meeting during consideration of this item.

Councillor Rae Bhatia declared an Other Disclosable Interest in relation to agenda item 11, "Workplace Parking Levy", in that his wife worked at Leicester University. In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, this interest was not considered so significant that it was likely to prejudice Councillor Rae Bhatia's judgement of the public interest. He therefore was not required to withdraw from the meeting during consideration of this item.

Although not a member of the Commission, Councillor Willmott declared an Other Disclosable Interest in agenda item 9, "Planning Enforcement Performance", for transparency, in that he was Chair of the Belgrave Hall

Conservation Society, which had liaised with officers about concerns regarding the lack of enforcement action taken in certain situations. This interest was considered to be relevant to the meeting's discussions and so did not preclude Councillor Willmott from addressing the Commission at the invitation of the Chair.

17. MINUTES

Further to minute 9, "Overview of the Commission's Remit", it was noted that a request had been received from organisations interested in the Evesham Road link to address the Commission when the link was considered. This request would be considered at the appropriate time.

Further to minute 10, "Manifesto Programme Issues relating to the Commission's Remit", it was noted that the Chair of this Commission was meeting the lead Executive members for the items in the manifesto that fell within this Commission's remit, to facilitate the monitoring of progress with them.

AGREED:

- 1) That the minutes of the meeting of the Economic Development, Transport and Tourism Scrutiny Commission held on 27 June 2019 be confirmed as a correct record; and
- 2) That the Scrutiny Officer be asked to circulate the presentation given under minute 9, "Overview of the Commission's Remit", to all members of the Commission.

18. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

19. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

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

20. QUESTIONS FOR THE CITY MAYOR

Provision for Cycle Parking

Councillor Broadwell referred to her recent experience of bike theft and expressed concern that fear of such theft could deter people from cycling in the city and impact on cycle shops' business. She therefore asked the City Mayor if he could give consideration to the provision of more cycle parking in the city and specifically more secure cycle parking.

The City Mayor welcomed the question, noting that cycle parking had increased significantly in the city centre in recent years and that, in particular, the Bike Park on Town Hall Square was a popular and well-used facility. He advised that he would be happy to undertake an audit of this provision, in order to clarify current cycle parking provision and establish whether further provision

was appropriate.

AGREED:

- 1) That the City Mayor be asked to undertake an audit of cycle parking in the city centre to determine if current facilities are adequate and whether the addition of further facilities would be appropriate; and
- 2) That the City Mayor be asked to report back to this Commission in due course on the findings of the audit referred to under 1) above.

21. CITY CENTRE ACCESSIBILITY

The Director of Planning, Development and Transportation submitted a report outlining the approach taken to accessibility design relating to proposed highway and transport schemes in and around the city centre.

The City Centre Streets Programme Manager introduced the report, drawing attention to the following points:

- It was believed that Leicester had one of the largest pedestrianised areas in the country in its centre. Although it was necessary to admit vehicles to this at times, care was taken to ensure that the area was not dominated by vehicles;
- Healthy streets assessments were undertaken, which included Healthy Streets Audits to determine how conditions could be improved for all street users, and consideration of how streets could be made safer by design. Work was ongoing to extend this beyond the city centre, as part of the Council's work to move away from the dominance of cars in the city;
- Almost all bus stops in the city centre now had level access. A shallow sawtooth layout was used to ensure that buses could pull up parallel to the kerb at bus stops;
- Drivers with disabilities who held a "blue badge" were able to park on single yellow lines for up to three hours;
- It was recognised that provision needed to be constantly reviewed, as the city centre changed constantly; and
- It was intended to look at accessibility in the north-west and south-west of the city next, before moving on to the rest of the city.

At the invitation of the Chair, Maureen Peberdy, representing Labour Disability, addressed the Commission, making the following points:

- Almost a quarter of people in the United Kingdom were registered as disabled, but there were many more with disabilities who were not registered;

- A recent World Organisation study recognised that places were missing a large economic gain from people with disabilities. For example, it was estimated that in the United Kingdom the “purple pound” was worth £249billion. However, none of the cities ranked highest for accessibility were in the United Kingdom;
- The walk round the city centre to gain an impression of accessibility, on which she had accompanied Councillors and Council officers, had been very useful in helping to identify aspects of accessibility that were working well and those which could be improved;
- Many people did not use certain businesses due to poor accessibility, barriers to entry, or poor customer service for disabled people;
- Some people were not able to navigate cluttered environments, so did not use the city centre;
- Investment in digital democracy could be an important aid to encouraging disabled people to use the city centre. For example, an app could be created enabling people to plan accessible routes, possibly using crowd-sourced information;
- The provision of Changing Places toilets was very welcome, but these were only located in the city centre and at least one further one was needed there in order to spread the locations more evenly across the city centre;
- A safe space was needed for people who needed to move away from a crowded and/or noisy environment for a short time;
- Induction loops and audio-assistive systems needed to be introduced;
- Ramps should be used where possible rather than steps;
- In general, toilets in the city centre were very badly sign-posted;
- A booklet sign-posting people to facilities would be very useful. This could be stocked by the Information Bureau, as it already received requests for this information; and
- Ability needed to be considered as well as disability.

Ms Peberdy strongly encouraged the Council to consider entering the Access Award, which was a European Union award recognising cities that became more accessible to their citizens. At present, Chester was the only city in the United Kingdom to have received this award, so it could be useful to examine how it had achieved this. However, it was noted that entries for this year’s award needed to be submitted by September.

Ms Peberdy noted that she had only addressed accessibility in the city centre and expressed the hope that issues in the outer areas of the city could be

discussed at some point.

The Commission welcomed the analysis of city centre accessibility and considered how people could be moved around it. One suggestion was the use of electric golf-cart style vehicles or a land train on set routes, but it was recognised that care would have to be taken to ensure that people could get on and off these. People using walking aids could not easily get on to moving things, such as moving pavements, so any means of transport would have to stop completely to pick up and set down. Consideration also would need to be given to the implications of introducing vehicles to areas that currently were vehicle-free.

In considering these suggestions, the City Mayor noted that consideration was being given to whether a workplace parking levy should be introduced, (see minute 24, "Workplace Parking Levy", below). If this was introduced, income from the levy could be a potential revenue source for alternative forms of transportation, including initiatives such as accessible transport around the city centre.

The Commission noted that, as set out in the report, various issues had been identified during a walk around the city centre. The following points also were made in relation to this:

- A lot of shops had steps at their entrances, preventing wheelchair users from going in. Some premises were not able to use a ramp over these steps and some had bells that could be rung from service, but it was acknowledged that this this did not remove the disadvantage to disabled people;
- Some parking bays designated for disabled drivers would be hard for wheelchair users to use, as the bays had high kerbs which could not be mounted by a wheelchair;
- Some road crossing points had drains close to them, which could catch the wheels of wheelchairs;
- It appeared to be relatively straightforward for wheelchair users to manoeuvre on and off buses. Bus companies were willing to let disabled users try this out by appointment at the bus station;
- In response to concerns that cars often parked at certain bus stops, preventing people from using the raised kerb, Highways officers were introducing parking restrictions to address the situation;
- In some locations, cars parked in front of dropped kerbs, restricting access to those kerbs; and
- Items on pavements, such as rubbish piled up next to litter bins or A boards outside premises, restricted the useable area of those pavements.

AGREED:

- 1) That the Director of Planning, Development and Transportation be asked to consider the suggestions recorded above to make the city more accessible and report back to this Commission as appropriate;
- 2) That all Councillors be invited to advise Highways officers of locations in their Wards at which parking at bus stops prevented bus users from using the high kerbs at the bus stops and that Highways officers be asked to take appropriate action in response to such notifications; and
- 3) That the Director of Planning, Development and Transportation be asked to liaise with the Chair and Vice-Chair of this Commission to arrange a walk around areas outside of the city centre to assess the accessibility of those areas.

22. LEICESTER LOCAL PLAN TIMETABLE AND CONSULTATION

The Director of Planning, Development and Transportation submitted a report outlining the timetable for the next stages of the Local Plan, including provisions for scrutiny and consultation.

The Head of Planning introduced the report, noting that an accessibility standard would be considered as part of the Local Plan, (see minute 21, "City Centre Accessibility", above). He also explained that, due to the wide-ranging issues covered in the Local Plan, meetings currently were being held with the Chairs of the Council's scrutiny commissions to determine how the development of the Plan would be managed, including consultation processes.

Some concern was expressed that the development of the Local Plan appeared to be taking a long time and that this would result in consultations being held over the Christmas period, when fewer people were likely to respond. It therefore was suggested that consideration could be given to delaying the start of consultation to January 2020. In reply, the Head of Planning explained that the Council was under pressure to complete the Plan as soon as possible, but previously consultation periods had been extended to allow more time for comment, so this could be considered again if Members wished. The City Mayor acknowledged the concerns raised and undertook to discuss with officers whether the consultation period should be extended in this case.

AGREED:

- 1) That the Local Plan timetable and provisions for scrutiny of, and consultation on, the Leicester Local Plan be noted; and
- 2) That the City Mayor be asked to discuss with the Director of Planning, Development and Transportation whether it would be appropriate to extend the consultation period scheduled to be held at the end of this year to account for public holidays at that time.

23. PLANNING ENFORCEMENT PERFORMANCE

The Director of Planning, Development and Transportation submitted a report providing an overview of the effectiveness and performance of the Leicester City Council's planning enforcement function in comparison with other authorities, as appropriate.

The Head of Planning introduced the report, drawing Members' attention to the examples of enforcement action included in the report, stressing that the preferred method for resolving enforcement issues was through negotiation.

At the invitation of the Chair, Councillor Willmott addressed the Commission, reminding Members of the interest he had declared in this item.

Councillor Willmott advised the Commission that the Belgrave Hall Conservation Society had become concerned that limited enforcement action was being taken in a number of cases. Although the Council's policy was to retain the character of the area, there were some streets where changes to buildings were starting to change the profile of those streets through the cumulative impact of the addition of things such as dormer windows and extensions. Councillor Willmott therefore asked what criteria were used in deciding what was acceptable and what was not and asked that officers try to increase the number of cases resolved through negotiation.

Members expressed concern at the extent that negotiation resulted in advice being given that retrospective planning permission be sought. This could give the impression that development could be undertaken that was in breach of planning requirements, but the situation could then be remedied through the use of the retrospective planning permission process.

In reply, the Head of Planning drew Members' attention to the government guidance that planning officers were required to follow. This advised that an appellant could appeal against an enforcement notice on the ground that a retrospective planning application could have been made with a reasonable expectation of it being granted. All planning applications, whether retrospective or not, had to be considered on their individual merits.

The Head of Planning reminded the Commission that all Councillors received a weekly update on planning enforcement cases. Councillors were invited to contact officers if further information on any of these cases was required.

Councillor Willmott addressed the Commission further, noting that the comparative data provided in the report was useful, but asking that this be given greater analysis and a further report made to the Commission if any aspect of the data was considered to be of wider interest. He also expressed the concern that, if a development initially was refused, but went ahead and then was approved as a retrospective planning application, this could become a pattern for a developer and asked that, if possible, it be investigated whether this occurred.

The Commission queried whether there was lack of consistency in negotiations, as some enforcement action appeared to be taken on the basis of

very few complaints, but issues that appeared to have a significant impact on an area appeared to be left unchecked, (for example in respect of issues of emissions from unauthorised flues). The Head of Planning advised that every assessment was a matter of public record and could be examined. Assessments routinely included negotiations with other service areas, such as Environmental Health, as needed. If the issue was proven to be a statutory nuisance, Environmental Health officers could, and did, take action on it, but government guidance was clear that Planning officers should not seek to achieve compliance with environmental legislation through what would be an inappropriate use of planning powers.

AGREED:

- 1) That the report be noted; and
- 2) That the Director of Planning, Development and Transportation be asked to note the comments recorded above.

In accordance with his declaration of interest recorded above, (see minute 16, "Declarations of Interest"), Councillor Sandhu left the meeting at this point. He remained absent for the rest of the meeting.

24. WORKPLACE PARKING LEVY

Councillor Rae Bhatia reminded the Commission of the interest he had declared in this item.

The Director of Planning, Development and Transportation submitted a report explaining the background to the Workplace Parking Levy (WPL) and providing an early indication of the likely actions to take forward the Council's commitment to consult on a WPL for Leicester.

The City Mayor introduced the report, asking for Members' views on the proposal for a WPL before wider consultation was undertaken. He stressed that this matter was at a very early stage of consideration, with a lot of work needed before consideration could be given to preparing a draft scheme.

It was queried whether these proposals were the same as those that had been discussed a few years previously, in relation to the Park and Ride scheme. The City Mayor advised that they were not the same, as the scheme that had been considered previously was a very limited congestion charging scheme.

A concern also was raised that the proposals were quite limited and that the Council should be seeking to take more action on this issue. For example, it was suggested that suggested ways forward could be sought from outside the Council and public consultation then held on a scheme that had public support.

Members also queried how ideas could be sought on how revenue raised could be used, to avoid the WPL not being accepted through lack of knowledge and/or information. In reply, the City Mayor explained that initial conversations would include discussions on how any revenue raised could best be used to help deter people from using cars in the city, while being offered a realistic alternative.

It was suggested that the introduction of electric mobility vehicles to help people move around the city centre could be an appropriate scheme to fund from revenue raised by a WPL. Another option could be to offer reduced bus fares for young people in the city, as many of them experienced financial difficulties.

At the invitation of the Chair, Maureen Peberdy, representing Labour Disability, addressed the Commission, noting that limited “blue badge” parking was available for disabled drivers holding blue badges and parking in some car parks was very expensive. This deterred those drivers from coming in to the city centre. Ms Peberdy therefore asked whether holders of blue badges would be exempt from a WPL. In reply, the City Mayor advised that this would be considered during the discussions to be held before any scheme was drafted.

It also was suggested that an alternative option could be to fund a trolley-bus mass transit system. At present, an exemption from current legal requirements for public transport systems could be needed, as trolley buses were longer and more articulated than currently permitted. It therefore was requested that the possibility of obtaining such an exemption be investigated.

Members also queried whether the potential economic impact of a WPL on businesses had been considered, either as a deterrent or encouragement to their development. In reply, the City Mayor noted that experience of a WPL in Nottingham showed that benefits to the economy of having funding available for public transport outweighed the negative aspects of having to pay the WPL. An assessment therefore needed to be made of whether this also would be the result in Leicester. This consideration would include discussions with trades unions, including an assessment of the impact of a WPL for lower-paid workers if an employer passed on the full cost of a WPL to their employees.

AGREED:

- 1) That the Director of Planning, Development and Transportation be asked to investigate whether an exemption from current legislation covering the permitted size of public transport vehicles could be gained to potentially enable a trolley-bus mass transit system to be established in the city; and
- 2) That the City Mayor be asked to report back to this Commission when the conversations referred to above on the introduction of a Workplace Parking Levy have been held, to update the Commission on progress with these discussions and the proposed way forward.

25. WORK PROGRAMME

The Commission received and considered its work programme.

The Chair reported verbally that she had been meeting the lead Executive members for the items in the manifesto that fell within this Commission’s remit and four possible review areas had been identified:

- Work would continue on Accessible Leicester for people with disabilities, (see also minute 21, “City Centre Accessibility”, above);
- The Commission would be fully involved in the consideration of transport improvements with the funds raised from a Workplace Parking Levy, (see also minute 24, “Workplace Parking Levy”, above);
- The Commission would host a hearing on the Living Wage towards the end of the year, to which a range of employers and interested bodies would be invited, including City Council representatives. Planning for this would be undertaken by a small task group, to include the Chair and the Assistant City Mayor with responsibility for Policy, Delivery and Communications. Members therefore were invited to express an interest in participating in the task group; and
- A scoping document would be prepared for a review of the development of job creation, skills and investment plans for areas which are doing less well – looking for encouragement of business development, opportunities for young people.

AGREED:

- 1) That the Commission’s work programme be noted; and
- 2) That Members of the Commission wishing to participate in either the task group preparing for the proposed hearing on the Living Wage or the proposed review of the development of job creation, skills and investment plans for areas which are doing less well, (or both), be asked to advise the Scrutiny Policy Officer of their interest.

26. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 7.10 pm