

At a meeting of the ENVIRONMENTAL AND PLANNING REVIEW COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on MONDAY, 13TH OCTOBER, 2008 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Miller in the Chair

Councillors Ball, I. Cuthbert, E. Gibson, Kelly, D. Richardson, Scaplehorn, Wakefield and Whalen

Chairman's Welcome

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillors Tye, Wood and A. Wright

Also Present

Councillor Tate

Minutes of the last Meeting

Councillor Wakefield advised that Mr Cole had stated that Fence Houses was classed by developers as being in the area between Houghton and Easington Lane rather than the recorded 'part of Washington'

Councillor I. Cuthbert advised with regards to graffiti that he had stated that there was some graffiti on Council property that was outside of the control of the Head of Environmental Services.

He also advised that Councillor A. Wright had stated that the use of Edinburgh bus operation as an example of how well municipal transport was run was unfortunate, Lothian Transport had just announced ten services are to be cut on economic grounds, rather than ten services had been cut due to falling passenger numbers.

Councillor I. Cuthbert stated that as he had expected, he had received complaints from residents regarding bus stop clearways.

Mr Keith Lowes, Head of Planning and Environment, advised that the Regional Spatial Strategy recommended 19 pitches across the Sunderland,

Derwentside, Chester le Street and Durham sub-region with each pitch accommodating one caravan. However there is a legal responsibility for each authority to identify how many pitches are required within its own area, rather than the recorded 'each pitch was for several caravans with the RSS advising 19 caravans per pitch'

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting be confirmed and signed as a correct record subject to the inclusion of the above amendments.

Declarations of Interest

Item 4 – Study into Carbon Management 2006/07 – Progress report

Councillor Kelly declared a personal interest in the item as he had recently become involved in the industry

Item 6 – Design Supplementary Planning Documents

Councillor I. Cuthbert declared a personal interest in the item as an employee of one of the consultees.

Study into Carbon Management 2006/07 – Progress Report

The City Solicitor and Director of Development and Regeneration submitted a report on the above (copy circulated)

(For copy report - see original minutes)

Jim Gillon, Sustainability Co-ordinator, presented the report and welcomed comments from members.

Councillor I. Cuthbert commented that good progress was being made. He also asked how long the Travel Plan Officer post had been vacant and how long it would take to fill it.

Burney Johnson, Head of Transport and Engineering, advised that the post had been vacant for four weeks. Previous candidates for the Traffic Manager position were being asked if they were interested in the post and responses had not yet been received.

Councillor I. Cuthbert then commented that the Council needed to take the lead with reducing emissions levels from employee lease cars. It was disappointing that there had been little progress made in improving recycling facilities for staff and that facilities to recycle plastic cups and cans should be installed next to water coolers and vending machines.

Mr Gillon advised that emissions targets had been set for lease cars and that this had been brought in before the company car tax changes. He also advised that there were plans to reduce the limits further. However as the lease scheme was based on a four year cycle, it would take four years before the entire lease vehicle fleet was replaced with low emissions vehicles.

In response to a question from Councillor Scaplehorn, Mr Gillon advised that the wood pellets were made from waste wood, often from pallets, by compressing it into usable pellets. This allowed the recycling of wood that normally would be disposed of..

Councillor Kelly asked how much of the £1.2million from the Strategic Investment Plan committed for funding wind turbines and wood processing would be spent on consultancy. He also commented on the introduction of wood chip boilers within council properties.

Mr Gillon advised that £650,000 would be spent on consultants. With regards to wood chip boilers he advised that there were plans to implement one at South Hylton House and that this was currently at the procurement stage.

Councillor Kelly then asked whether there were plans to look at a wide range of technologies or just the tried and tested ones before making decisions. He also advised that it would be more effective to combine multiple energy sources within one building rather than just having one per building as it would help with total energy efficiency. Additionally he asked whether there would be continual monitoring and that it would not be monitored on an ad hoc basis.

Mr Gillon advised that the Council had access to wood waste and that this could be used for wood chip and as such there was a requirement to find a location for a wood chip boiler. He also assured members that there would be monitoring and that it would not be ad hoc. He advised that the SALIX fund would cover projects however there was not funding for long term projects.

Councillor Kelly then advised that he was aware of Washington Residents who wanted their own Wind Turbines and wood pellet boilers and that some schools were considering solar and wind power and asked if schools were being involved in the project. Mr Gillon advised that all council properties would be looked at as part of the project.

Councillor Wakefield advised that the largest electric vehicle manufacturer in Britain was located in Washington and asked whether there were any plans to use electric vehicles in the Council's fleet.

Peter High, Head of Environmental Services, advised that there was an electric vehicle on the fleet however it had suffered from reliability issues. He also advised that the vehicles produced at Washington were expensive and that there would be implications for service provision should the Council invest in the vehicles.

The Chairman commented that the 1.6 percent reduction in the Councils carbon emissions was excellent and asked what the next step was. Mr Gillon advised that this year the emissions had remained level due to the Aquatic Centre being built. However the 10 percent target for the next five years was still attainable as the Building Schools for the Future scheme will help with reducing carbon emissions from schools.

2. RESOLVED that the progress report be received and noted.

Adequacy of Public Footpaths

The Director of Development and Regeneration and the City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) which allowed members to consider the adequacy of footpaths in the City.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Burney Johnson, Head of Transport and Engineering, presented the report and advised that Allan Calvert, Traffic Manager, was unavailable. He welcomed questions and comments from members.

Councillor I. Cuthbert commented on the Washington area in particular that the proposals for the Bus Only Links would be expensive; he also commented that if the Bus Only routes were opened up to all vehicles then traffic calming measures would need to be put in place. He suggested that the available budget could be reallocated to cover the shortfall in budget for footways. He also advised that changes to bus services could cause problems and gave the 73 and 74 services as an example as they had been removed from Teal Farm in Washington.

Mr Johnson advised that he understood the comments on Bus Links and stated that he would rather they were put to better use than removed as this would give better flexibility, although if other vehicles were allowed to use the existing Bus Links there would be a need to look at the safety of the roads involved. He advised that if there were any available funds then there would need to be a case made for reallocating the budget to footways.

Councillor Scaplehorn asked whether there was a timescale in place for the trials on the bus links. Mr Johnson replied that the trials would be looked at with Ward Members and will then go to Cabinet for approval and it was hoped that the trials would be implemented at three sites at the start of the next calendar year.

Councillor Wakefield advised that in Doxford next to Morrisons Supermarket, there was a footpath with a mobile phone mast in the middle of it leaving very little space for pedestrians. He asked whether this was normal practice for the locating of masts and whether it was legal. Mr Johnson agreed to investigate this and provide a response to Councillor Wakefield.

Councillor Richardson advised that at Rainton Bridge a similar proposal for a mast had been refused as it would have taken some of the footpath.

Councillor Kelly advised that the previous week he had been in Washington with Officers from Highways department looking at dropped kerbs. There were some anomalies such as new lamp posts installed in the middle of footpaths and the holes where the previous lamp posts had been had not been filled properly resulting in the surface sinking up to six inches. He also advised that in the Dales area of Washington there were some steep footpaths which were in poor condition which posed a risk especially for disabled footpath users. Mr Johnson advised that the policy was that tarmac should last 100 years before needing to be resurfaced.

Councillor Kelly then advised that some newly laid footpaths in Washington had poor quality reinstatement work done after the utilities companies had carried out works and asked if there were any plans to tackle this.

Mr Johnson stated that the Council was not responsible for ensuring the quality of the paths until they were adopted and that for the paths to be adopted by the Council they needed to meet a minimum standard. He also advised that he wanted roads to be adopted and that he would raise any reported issues with gentoo.

Councillor Kelly advised that he had been told that the paths were already adopted and it may need to be looked into. He also commented that some of the paths being adopted by the Council were of poor quality.

Mr Johnson agreed to speak to Councillor Kelly to determine which footpaths were causing problems. He also advised that there were liaisons with the Public Utilities to combat dissatisfaction; he then stated that most authorities only required a temporary reinstatement from the utilities companies which were then permanently reinstated by the Authority; however Sunderland required the Utilities companies to carry out permanent reinstatement works immediately. He also advised that there was only funding to inspect ten percent of all works so despite the Council's best efforts some would slip through unchecked.

Councillor I. Cuthbert asked whether footpaths were included in the inspections of roads. Mr Johnson advised that he understood that it did however he would further investigate this.

Councillor I. Cuthbert then advised that 93 percent of inspections were successful however there was still a big numeric problem as this equated to over 500 sites failing the inspections.

The Chairman advised that it was the responsibility of Councillors to report problems. He also advised that the works in Washington were expected to cost £250,000 while the budget was only £150,000 and that included in the works was movement of signs and lights. He stated that he did not want these movements and instead wanted the focus to be on paths and kerbs first. He

also expressed concern that the condition of footpaths was a citywide issue and not one that only affected Washington. He advised that on the Super Routes the Bus services were good however elsewhere the services were declining and as such people needed to be able to walk.

3. RESOLVED that the progress made on improving the adequacy of footpaths in the city be noted

Design Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)

The Director of Development and Regeneration submitted a report (copy circulated) which advised Members of the responses received following consultation on the proposed policies proposals and sought the Committees comments on the revised Design Supplementary Planning Documents.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

David Giblin, Planning Implementation Manager, presented the report and welcomed comments from members.

Councillor I. Cuthbert asked whether the six weeks consultation period was statutory, how much the consultation cost and whether the ten responses received was an expected number.

Mr Giblin advised that the consultation needed to run for a minimum of four weeks and a maximum of six and that the Council had allowed the maximum permitted amount of time. He also advised that he would find out the cost of the consultation and that he was surprised that there was not a greater response. Additionally he stated that there was a requirement to consult widely.

Councillor I. Cuthbert then referred to the concerns raised by the Home Builders Federation that the Design SPDs were overly prescriptive and stated that he hoped there would be some flexibility while assuring quality.

Mr Giblin advised that the policy was intended to ensure that housing developments were built to a high standard and it showed developers what the authority would consider when looking at housing development planning applications. He also advised that each scheme would be considered on its own merits. Additionally he advised that there was scope for flexibility, for example, the basic spacing standards could be varied if it could be demonstrated that the layout and architectural design of a housing scheme protected residents' privacy and amenity.

The Chairman commented that he felt that the SPDs would lead to improvements and that there was an alternative option, not to implement the SPDs, however this would cause problems; he also agreed that it was

disappointing that there had been so few responses especially considering that the Council could not have done more to get responses.

Mr Lowes advised that although there had not been many responses they had been from major consultees such as the Home Builders Federation, One North East and the North East Assembly and that quality of responses was more important than quantity.

4. RESOLVED that the responses to the consultation be received and noted and the Committee's comments be reported to Cabinet on 5th November, 2008.

(Signed) G.MILLER,
Chairman.