

At a meeting of the ENVIRONMENT AND ATTRACTIVE CITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the HETTON CENTRE on MONDAY, 27TH FEBRUARY, 2012 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Miller in the Chair

Councillors Bonallie, E. Gibson, Heron, Lauchlan, D. Richardson, Scott and A. Wright.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Porthouse, I. Richardson and Tye.

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Environment and Attractive City Scrutiny Committee held on 16th January, 2012

Councillor A. Wright referred to Page 2, Paragraph 3 of the minutes and stated that it should read 'centralising/decentralising local government procurement'

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 16th January, 2012 be confirmed and signed as a correct record subject to the above amendment.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of interest.

Change in Order of Business

The Chairman proposed the Committee consider Item 6 first as witnesses for Item 5 were delayed.

2. RESOLVED that Item 6 be considered first.

Low Carbon Vehicles in the Delivery of Public Services Review 2011/12: Fleet Carbon Reduction Analysis

The Chief Executive submitted a report, supplementary report and powerpoint presentation (copies circulated) to provide the Committee with background information in regard to the fleet carbon reduction analysis being undertaken for the City Council by Cenex.

(For copy reports – see original minutes).

Robert Anderson, Programme Manager and Brian Fothergill of Cenex presented the report and were on hand to answer Members queries.

Councillor T. Martin referred to the testing carried out on the electric vehicles and enquired as to what gradient these were performed on.

Mr. Anderson advised that the simulation pack did not use gradients but it was something that they could build in to the programme.

In response to Councillor T. Martin's enquiry, Mr. Anderson advised that vehicle performance was not affected by state of charge.

In response to Councillor Heron's enquiry, Mr. Anderson advised that the tests were performed based on the vans carrying a load of 500 kg and the more weight carried would increase the drain on the battery.

Councillor Heron commented on the costliness to replace the batteries and the drop off effect with electric vehicles, the length of the journey was not the prime factor, but the weight and inclination were, so there was a need for a cost analysis on this as well as omissions.

Mr. Anderson advised that the issue of battery life was something being looked at by manufacturers as new technology always created concerns over battery longevity and the need for replacement.

Mr. Fothergill referred to the second life of batteries, advising that they would still have worth financially, after being used on a vehicle, therefore they were an investment in one respect.

The Chairman commented that they were beginning to ask better more informed questions now and the Committee had carried out a great deal of work. There was a need to find a model best suited to Sunderland City Council specifically and felt that there would be strong opportunities to use the batteries second life.

The Chairman also commented that he was impressed with the level of detail contained within the excellent report which had identified an economic benefit of using electric cars, if not vans at the present moment.

Les Clark, Head of Street Scene, wished to echo the Chairman's comments on the report which he felt would provide a useful tool to make decisions on electric vehicles and had given an indication of where the Council could start. Although the line of enquiry may be narrow, there was a clear indication of scope to start small and grow and adapt over time.

The Chairman commented that the report would mean the Cabinet were better placed to make an informed decision when the time came and thanked Mr. Anderson and Mr. Fothergill for their presentation.

3. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Low Carbon Vehicles in the Delivery of Public Services Policy Review 2011/12: Low Carbon Sector

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide the Committee with information in relation to the low carbon sector in the region. The report would contribute to the evidence for the Committee's policy review for 2011/12, Low Carbon Vehicles in the Delivery of Public Services.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chairman introduced Mark Nailis of Inova Power who provided a presentation on the Hydrogen and Fuel Cell Co-operative and Chris Baylis of Avid Vehicles which produced specialist electric vehicles.

In response to Councillor T. Martin's enquiry, Mr. Baylis advised that the vehicles were pure 100% electric but they would be looking to work with developers on range extenders using petrol/diesel to top up the battery if needed.

Mr. Nailis referred to the earlier Cenex presentation and enquired if their findings had been carried out during the winter period, when heaters and such like would be used in vehicles. Mr. Fothergill advised that data had been collected on both summer and winter cycles.

The Chairman commented that the heating issue had been raised before.

Councillor T. Martin referred to the Hydrogen Technology and enquired if there were uses for the inert material and possible environmental consequences.

Mr. Nailis advised that the residue could be resold at £1,000 per tonne.

Councillor Scott enquired if range results differed between large and small vehicles through using the heaters, lights etc. Mr. Baylis advised that the range was dependent on the discharge rate.

In response to the Chairman's enquiry over Inova Powers links with Smiths Electrics, Mr. Nailis advised that they had been approached for the supply of 30 vehicles and they would be supplying some technology for Smiths to fit. They were also in talks with Nissan about range extension and removing anxieties.

Councillor Heron commented that he was glad to see the problems experienced over hydrogen vehicles being tackled.

Mr. Nailis advised that BMW had almost perfected the hydrogen vehicle and if could perfect, would have a winning project. Mr. Nailis also commented that the next EU laws may 'cripple' some car companies and Inova Powers products could help.

Councillor Heron enquired if there would be a single connector for charging vehicles.

Mr. Fothergill advised that there would be a standard connector with the infrastructure across the North East being upgraded to type 2 connectors.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Nailis and Mr. Baylis for their presentations.

4. RESOLVED that Members received and noted the report.

City Centre Quick Wins Proposed Fawcett Street Improvement Project

The Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director of City Services submitted a report (copy circulated) to update the Committee on the proposed public realm, traffic and highway improvements to Fawcett Street.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr. L Clark and Kevin Johnson, Principal Landscape Architect presented the report who advised that the paving at Fawcett Street had not lasted and had suffered from the cleaning machines which use the street. There was a need for the best materials such as granite from Spain/China in order to move forward and they were looking at a more contemporary design, but due to the size of Fawcett Street, this would also be expensive.

The Chairman commented that it was important to improve Fawcett Street and in the correct way as residents expected it to have a certain status. The Chairman also commented that this had been an ongoing issue for some time and a number of visits to the area had been carried out by this Committee.

Councillor A. Wright commented that he believed Fawcett Street to be a critical link between Sunnyside and the City Centre and there was a need for something to encourage people to visit the area so anything we can do to improve Fawcett Street would be a step in the right direction.

Councillor E. Gibson commented that there were a number of beautiful buildings on Fawcett Street, some of which were privately owned and enquired if anything could be done to work with these owners to improve the buildings.

The Chairman advised that the former Head of Planning had found it troublesome in trying to work with the private owners but requested that Mr. Clark investigate the findings on the matter further.

Councillor Heron commented that the traffic build up and the island on Burdon Road needed to be looked at. There was also the need to try and connect the two shopping areas through the middle and give consideration to improving the side streets as we needed to link up the City Centre better than it is at present.

Mr. Johnson advised that Fawcett Street needed revitalisation and removal of bus routes could mean using granite surfaces but if they were to remain, then tarmac the area may be the best solution.

The Chairman commented that a City's Legal Sector usually provided a thriving area, yet Fawcett Street appeared to be more of a barrier than a resource.

Councillor Scott commented that it was a main thoroughfare and needed to be improved. Councillor Scott referred to a past trip to Cardiff to see their City Centre Management Team and improvements they had made and queried why our city's team were not following their example. Councillor Scott felt we needed to knuckle down with the appropriate Officers, rather than 'penny pinching' and tackle this long standing issue once and for all.

The Chairman commented that Fawcett Street had been lacking and starved of infrastructure but now the Council was in control of such sites as Vaux, it was hoped we could move forward.

Councillor A. Wright sympathised with Officers situation as he felt there was no short term solutions and that the pressure to develop the Vaux site could damage the growth of Fawcett Street and plans needed to be made now for future years when we could get back to a 'boom time economy'.

Councillor T. Martin felt that there was a severe lack of disabled parking/general parking on Fawcett Street, there was a need to simplify the taxi routes and enhancement at ground level of the area would be brilliant.

Councillor Heron commented that development of the Vaux site should help the surrounding areas as it would bring more people into the City but we still needed to keep the infrastructure of the City Centre moving forward.

Colin Clark, Head of Planning and Property commented that he empathised with much of what the Committee had raised and advised that a great deal of effort was going into the future planning of the City Centre, land acquisition, bringing in businesses and their spending power to help regenerate the City Centre.

They were seeking to create a business district, the likes of which we haven't seen before, but this would take time and the difficulty we face is the current economic climate which was not conducive to bringing businesses forward, but work was ongoing.

Councillor D. Richardson commented that the new Court buildings should attract legal business and barristers for example.

Mr. Colin Clark advised there were a number of plans being worked on such as Courts, Hotels, new public spaces, these were part of a whole host of opportunities being worked on by Officers during a difficult time and we had to keep planning for the future.

Councillor Scott enquired as to why the Doxford Park business could not have been brought into the City Centre instead.

The Chairman advised that funding had not been available for City Centre development but had been in place for out of town developments at that time.

The Chairman commented that he felt progress would not advance until developers knew what was happening to the Vaux site as projects such as Holmeside Triangle and Farringdon Row had stalled due to the uncertainty of Vaux and it was unfortunate that now we had control of the site we had entered an economic downturn.

The Chairman referred to paragraph 6.1 of the report and hoped that consultation would start this year when capital funding became available.

Les Clark advised that they were hopeful, should the funding be agreed.

5. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

School Travel Plans and Local Sustainable Transport Fund Key Components

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to advise the Committee of the role of School Travel Plans (STP) and the Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) Key Components, that assists with the overall approach, to sustainable school travel in Sunderland.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chairman wished to thank Councillor T. Martin for attending the meeting as a representative of the Children, Young People and Learning Scrutiny Committee.

Les Clark presented the report and was on hand to answer Members queries.

In relation to paragraph 2.1 of the report, Councillor D. Richardson enquired which six schools had not taken part in the School Travel Plan project and stressed the need for them to participate in the scheme.

Mr Clark advised that he would feed back on the schools which had not taken part in the project.

In response to Councillor E. Gibson's query, Mr. Clark advised that there was a piece of work ongoing for a standard sound to be introduced on electric vehicles to help road safety in such environments close to schools.

In response to Councillor Scott's enquiry, Mr. Clark advised that the Authority had an extensive Health and Safety Programme in schools on educating children in road safety.

The Chairman commented that he was glad to see inconsiderate parking outside of schools being looked at as it was a real and growing issue. The Chairman also informed of a recent visit to a primary school in which he had witnessed the parking issues first hand.

Councillor T. Martin commented that people needed to be aware of their actions when taking children to school.

Councillor Heron felt that parents needed educating over how to safely drop their children off at schools.

The Chairman commented that he was in full support of this and felt we had to try and find a way to influence parents to act appropriately.

Councillor Scott commented that issuing warning letters before fining parents did help reduce instances of inconsiderate parking but unfortunately we did not have the capacity to enforce this at present.

6. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted with Members supporting the implementation of LSTF in Sunderland.

Work Programme 2011-12

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which was attached for Members' information, the current Work Programme for the Committee's work during the 2011-12 Council year.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

7. RESOLVED that Members noted the information contained in the Work Programme.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1st February, 2012 – 31st May, 2012

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide Members with an opportunity to consider those items on the Executive Forward Plan for the period

1st February, 2012 – 31st May, 2012 which related to the Environment and Attractive City Scrutiny Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

8. RESOLVED that the Committee had considered the Executive's Forward Plan for the period 1st February, 2012 – 31st May, 2012.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting.

(Signed) G. MILLER,
Chairman.