

At a meeting of the ENVIRONMENTAL AND PLANNING REVIEW COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on MONDAY, 16th FEBRUARY, 2009 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Miller in the Chair

Councillors Ball, I, Cuthbert, E. Gibson, Kelly, D. Richardson, Scaplehorn, Whalen, Wood, A. Wright

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Tye and Wakefield

Also Present

Councillor Tate – Chairman of Policy and Co-ordination Review Committee.

Minutes of the last Meeting of the Committee held on 19th January, 2009

On the Waste Management item Peter High advised that the minutes should have stated that an opportunity for tender would be available before 2010 rather than the recorded in 2010. He also advised that he had stated that it was likely that more waste would be recovered and recycled during the interim period rather than the recorded more waste taken.

On the Parking Issues Task and Finish Group Update Councillor Wood advised that there were approximately 50 members of Hospital staff who used the park and ride from Sainsbury's. There was a discussion regarding park and ride sites from the North of the city. It was considered that, the retail park at Roker, currently subject to a planning application to build a Tesco supermarket, could be an ideal location.

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

Speed Management Strategy – Update

The Director of Development and Regeneration submitted a report (copy circulated) which updated the Committee on progress to date and to discuss proposals for the future.

(For Copy Report – see original minutes)

Burney Johnson, Head of Transport and Engineering, presented the report. He advised that all 26 roads in the city with 40 mph speed limits had been reviewed and that there had been a need to change the speed limit identified on 5 roads. He also advised that he would be briefing the ward members in respect of the roads within their wards.

The Members welcomed the report and expressed their support for the proposals.

Councillor Wood expressed concerns that Silksworth Lane after the Sainsbury's roundabout was to remain a 40 mph road. The road was twisty, narrow and had houses along its full length and he suggested that the limit could be reduced to 30mph.

Mr Johnson advised that the Ward Members would be consulted to ensure that any local knowledge was passed onto the department.

Members suggested that the speed limit at Tunstall Hope Road should be reviewed and the speed limit reduced from the National Speed Limit to 40 mph. It was argued that this was a dangerous road with a history of accidents.

Mr Johnson agreed that consideration should be given to whether safety could be improved along Tunstall Hope Road.

The Members commented that other authorities had Speed Limit Repeater Signs in 30 mph zones and signs stating '20 is plenty'.

Mr Johnson advised that these signs were unlawful as the only speed limit signs allowed in 30 mph zones were the signs on entry to the zone. These unlawful signs could make it more difficult for the police to enforce the speed limits.

Councillor Richardson advised that the Vehicle Actuated Signs did work and that people slowed down while driving past them.

Councillor Kelly commented that he would prefer to see police officers stop people for speeding rather than have speed cameras issuing tickets. He also asked for information regarding the amount of times the police had opposed speed limit reductions.

2. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Review of the Penalty Charge Band Associated with Civil Parking Enforcement

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) which allowed the Committee to consider the report of the Director of Development and

Regeneration which sought Cabinet approval to revise the penalty charge associated with Civil Parking Enforcement which was considered by Cabinet on 11th February, 2009. This report was included on the agenda at the request of the Chairman.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Burney Johnson, Head of Transport and Engineering, presented the report and advised that the change to the Band 2 level of penalty charge would bring the Council into line with the surrounding authorities which already charged the higher rate of penalty.

Councillor I. Cuthbert asked whether there was any evidence that increasing the fines would increase compliance with the parking regulations. He also asked why Sunderland was making a loss while other authorities Civil Parking Enforcement was at the least self funding.

Mr Johnson advised that he had no concrete evidence that increased fines would increase compliance as there had been no research done on the subject. The evidence showed that Sunderland had a fair and even handed approach to enforcement. The council issued less tickets per person than other authorities which was the reason why it was not self financing.

In response to a question from Councillor D. Richardson, Mr Johnson advised that the figures for the number of cases referred to the Traffic Enforcement Centre at Northampton County Court and to Bailiffs were available in the Annual Parking Report. This was available online. Mr Johnson also agreed to provide Councillor D. Richardson with a paper copy of the report.

The Chairman agreed with the comments made, especially relating to the timing of the decision. He hoped that next year the system would break even. He commented that if people parked properly they would not get fined.

3. RESOLVED that:-

- (i). The report be received and noted; and
- (ii). Mr Johnson provide a copy of the Annual Parking Report to Councillor D. Richardson.

Newbottle Village Conservation Area: Character Appraisal and Management Strategy

The Director of Development and Regeneration submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided members with an updated version of the Newbottle Village Conservation area Character Appraisal and Management Strategy to allow Members to comment on the revised document.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Mark Taylor, Senior Conservation Officer, presented the report. He advised that Houghton Road was in the Houghton Ward and that the Houghton Ward Members had been consulted earlier in the day.

Councillor D. Richardson asked why there were buildings excluded along Houghton Road and Coaley Lane. Mr Taylor advised that these were modern buildings with no historic significance.

The Chairman advised that Councillor Wakefield was unable to attend the meeting but had requested that his concerns regarding the consultative exercise be raised at the meeting.

A request had also been made to expand the conservation area. Mr Taylor advised that the issue had been looked at; it was felt that there was no need to extend the conservation area to the West as while there was amenity value to the land there was no historic significance. The open space was also protected from development so did not need to be protected by its inclusion into the conservation area.

Councillor Wood asked whether the report would be brought to the Committee for a third time. He also expressed his surprise at the modern infill developments being allowed to be built within the Conservation Area.

Keith Lowes, Head of Planning and Environment, advised that it was not intended to bring the report back to the Committee and that it would be finalised and reported to cabinet.

4. RESOLVED that:-

- (i). The report be received and noted
- (ii). The Members' comments be reported to Cabinet

Study into the Development of Cycling within the City – Progress Report

The Director of Development and Regeneration, Director of Community and Cultural Services and the City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) which updated Members on the progress being made in implementing the recommendations of its study into the development of cycling in the city.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Jim Diamond, Review Co-ordinator, presented the report.

In response to a query from Councillor Wood, Mr Johnson advised that he believed 'trailblazing' was a term used by Sustrans. He agreed to find out exactly what it meant and feed the information back.

Councillor I. Cuthbert welcomed the report and the issues which had been addressed. He asked what cycle parking provision there was at the Civic

Centre and how much additional cycle parking would be provided over the next year.

Mr Johnson advised that there were lockable cycle stores in the Underground Car Park at the Civic Centre and agreed to provide the programme for development of Cycle Parking.

Councillor I. Cuthbert then commented on the improvements at the end of the Coast 2 Coast route and advised that there needed to be improvements at the boundaries to the City as these were in a poor condition with fly tipping and graffiti which created a negative first impression of the city.

Members commented on the possible removal of byelaws restricting cycling especially in popular locations such as parks and the footpath to the south of Mount Pleasant and Cox Green.

Mr Johnson advised that the removal of byelaws was being actively pursued and that there were ongoing proposals for improvements to be carried out in Barnes Park.

5. RESOLVED that:-

- (i). The report be received and noted;
- (ii). Mr Johnson provides (a) a definition of the term 'trailblazing', and (b) the programme for provision of new cycle parking locations.

Graffiti and Fly-Tipping

The Director of Community and Cultural Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided members with information regarding graffiti and fly tipping and the performance measurements used.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Peter High, Head of Environmental Services, presented the report and explained how the performance was measured using the National Indicators and previously the Best Value Performance Indicators.

Mr High first presented the information relating to Graffiti before moving on to fly tipping; he then welcomed questions and comments from members.

The Members congratulated the Cleaning teams on their work with removing graffiti and fly tipping.

With regards to graffiti the Members raised the following issues and questions:-

Councillor I. Cuthbert asked what the costs were for removing graffiti. He also congratulated the Street Scene Unit for their work on removing graffiti however he was concerned that other departments did not deal with graffiti as

quickly. He suggested that there could be a combined effort between departments to ensure that all graffiti on council property was removed quickly.

Mr High advised that the costs of removal of graffiti were not specified as they were included in the street cleaning budget. There were plans to issue front line cleaning staff with handheld information devices to enable them to tackle issues quicker.

Councillor I. Cuthbert then asked for information regarding graffiti in Subways.

Burney Johnson, Head of Transport and Engineering, advised that subways were classed as part of the highway and as such the cleaning was paid for out of the Highways Maintenance budget. This budget was £160,000 per year and graffiti was costing approximately £20,000 to £30,000 per year. The majority of this cost was traffic management while the cleaning was ongoing as there were Health and Safety rules which the Council needed to adhere to. If subways were a cause for concern and were generally not used appropriately then measures such as closure and replacement with pedestrian crossings at road level would be considered. Allowing children to paint the subways in a form of legalised graffiti had been used by other authorities and if used in the appropriate place could be successful for reducing vandalism. He also advised that generally if graffiti was not obscene then it would be left until other works were required to be carried out. He accepted that this was not ideal however it helped to reduce maintenance costs.

Councillor Wood asked for clarification of the Council's powers with dealing with graffiti on private property.

Mr High advised that if the graffiti was within the highway then a notice would be served on the owner and the Council would remove the graffiti if the owner did not. The guidance from Defra was that there should be a partnership between the Council and the property owners. There are ongoing communications with the utilities providers regarding the removal of graffiti from the telecoms boxes. He believed that the timescale for the notices was 28 days however he would need to confirm this. He also advised that if the graffiti was outside of the highway; this included walls which were adjacent to the highway; then the Council had no powers to remove the graffiti. If the graffiti was obscene then the Council would remove it from private property as soon as the disclaimer notice had been signed by the property owner, this would generally be within a few days. On Council property obscene graffiti would be removed immediately.

He advised that the department could be contacted by calling the contact centre at Doxford Park.

The Members also advised that they had received a leaflet containing the number to call for graffiti and fly tipping and that the 101 service could also be used to report problems.

The Chairman commented on the graffiti problem raised by Councillor G. Hall in the Roker area and stated that it was taking too long to remove this obscene graffiti.

Mr High advised that the graffiti was on private property and that a disclaimer notice had been sent out however a response had not been received. The wall was rendered and it would have been possible to damage the wall while removing the graffiti using a high pressure water spray. The police had become involved in getting this graffiti removed.

The following points were made regarding fly tipping:-

In response to a question from Members regarding costs Mr High advised that the Flycapture website applied a charge to each incident and the litter response teams dealt with minor incidents.

The Members congratulated officers on their work to combat fly tipping and commented that they were happy to see that there had been prosecutions. Clearing shrubs and installing CCTV cameras was a welcome move which would have an impact on reducing problems. It was good to see that the enforcement officers were taking on duties other than dog fouling patrols.

Mr High advised that there had been an increase in the duties carried out by the enforcement officers and there was to be an increase in the number of officers.

Councillor Ball advised that in Millfield there was a problem with 3 piece suites being dumped in the back lanes behind the shops. There were also beds and other furniture left in the lanes behind houses. She asked what was being done about the problem.

Mr High advised that punishment of offenders was easier when they were caught in the act. There needed to be persuasion and education to prevent offences. Short term letting of houses contributed to the problem as the enforcement officers would regularly see the contents of the same houses being dumped in the back lanes.

Councillor Kelly asked whether the recorded incidents of fly tipping could be broken down into residential and industrial waste; there was a problem in Washington with the dumping of building materials including bricks and windows.

Mr High advised that the incidents were only categorised by size, ranging from small quantities such as the contents of a car boot or a small quantity of sacks ranging to large scale dumping from tipper wagons. He advised that the upper tiers only represented three percent of all incidents.

In response to a further question from Councillor Kelly, Mr High advised that he could recall one incident where chemicals had been dumped; a barrel of oil

contaminated water had been found on an allotment. He also advised that tyres were a major problem as since the ban on landfilling tyres there had been an increase in fly tipping.

Councillor I. Cuthbert advised that he was aware of two other incidents of chemical dumping. There had been an oil drum dumped at James Steel Park and a luminous liquid poured into the stream at Princess Park. Both times the Police had been called.

6. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Work Programme 2008 – 09

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with the current work programme for the Committee's work during the 2008-09 Council year.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Jim Diamond, Review Co-ordinator, presented the report and advised that the work programme had been provided for Members information and that it reflected the discussions at the Scrutiny Workshop and previous Committee Meetings. It was a flexible, working document and it could be developed throughout the year.

In response to a query from Councillor I. Cuthbert; Burney Johnson, Head of Transport and Engineering and Keith Lowes, Head of Planning and Environment, advised that the 'Improving Gateways to the City' report to the April Meeting was to be based on Highways gateways into the city however the report could be expanded to include all gateways into the city. Any access point into the city could be described as a gateway.

7. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

(Signed) G. MILLER,
Chairman.