

At a meeting of the ENVIRONMENTAL AND PLANNING REVIEW COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on MONDAY, 13TH NOVEMBER, 2006 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Blackburn in the Chair

Councillors Higgins, Paul Maddison, L. Scott, Tansey, Whalen, Wares and Wood

Also Present:-

Councillors Lawson, Rolph and Tate

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Fletcher, MacKnight and Tye.

Declaration of Interest

Item 5 - Quality of Local Bus Services

Councillor Wood declared a personal interest in the item as a Council appointed Member of the Tyne and Wear Passenger Transport Authority and as Chairman of the Board of Compass Community Transport.

Minutes of the Last Meeting

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 16th October, 2006 (copy circulated) be confirmed and signed as a correct record, subject to:-

- (i) Page 10, paragraph 3, reference to "methanol gas" be amended to read "methane gas";
- (ii) Page 10, paragraph 4, reference to an electrically powered cleansing vehicle "was being trialled" be amended to read "was being used"; and

- (iii) Page 10, paragraph 5, reference to an experiment with drivers starting work from home rather than the depot “was being undertaken” be amended to read “was to be undertaken”.

Study into the Council’s approach to Carbon Management – Evidence Gathering

The City Solicitor and Director of Development and Regeneration submitted a joint report (copy circulated) which introduced Mr. Barrie Brass, Regional Manager, of the Carbon Trust who was present to provide evidence to the Committee with regard to its study into carbon management.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr. Brass explained that the Carbon Trust was an independent company funded by the Government through the climate change levy. Its main aim was to assist the Government in reaching its Kyoto targets by helping the UK to move to a low carbon economy. The Trust would provide advice to businesses and the public sector on reducing carbon emissions and highlight the opportunities provided by low carbon technology. The move towards a low carbon economy had been boosted by the recent publication of the Stern Review which dispelled claims that such a move would be economically damaging.

Mr. Brass informed the Committee of the Local Authority Carbon Management Programme which guided Local Authorities through a five stage process to help them realise carbon emissions savings. Sunderland was only 6 months into its programme, which was due to be completed in April 2007 and Mr. Brass felt it was not appropriate to comment on outcomes which were not yet clear. He advised that Members were in a unique position in representing the people of the City and as purveyors of the public purse. Examples set by the Council would be emulated by others. The advantage of the early adopter approach was that it created a confidence which encouraged others to follow.

For the programme to be sustainable it required the full support of Senior Officers and Members and a top down approach throughout the organisation. Other important elements included, ring fenced budgets for energy efficiency, the appointment of a Carbon Reduction Manager and procurement policies which included life cycle costings.

As an example of best practice in the region, Mr. Brass cited the wind turbines at the Nissan car plant.

The Chairman referred to an online calculator he had seen which could be used by people wishing to make payments to offset carbon emissions created when taking flights or car journeys.

Mr. Brass replied that this could be found on the Energy Saving Trust's website. He stated that opinions on the value of offsets were mixed and that personally he remained to be convinced. Priority should be given to addressing demand side issues with offsets used only as a last resort.

In response to an enquiry from the Chairman, Mr. Brass advised that wood was considered to be carbon neutral. Egger UK were building a 50,000 kilowatt wood fuelled boiler at its Hexham plant which had previously burnt gas. The boiler would be the largest of its kind in Britain.

There being no further questions for Mr. Brass, the Chairman thanked him for his presentation.

As part of the Committee's study and with a view to the long term future, Councillor L. Scott suggested that a feasibility study into the use of High Temperature Incineration might prove interesting. In addition with regard to the schedule attached to the report, he advised that the list of Members undertaking the study should be updated to provide for the addition of Councillor Tansey and the deletion of Councillor Dixon.

Peter High having informed the Committee of the options being considered as part of the development of a future waste management contract, it was:-

2. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the evidence submitted by Mr. Brass be received and noted; and
- (ii) the study schedule be amended to include Councillor Tansey as a replacement for Councillor Dixon.

Quality of Local Bus Services

The City Solicitor and Director of Development and Regeneration submitted a joint report (copy circulated) which provided background information on the current situation regarding bus services operating in the City. The report also introduced John Usher, Nexus Head of Transport and Integration and Peter Lawson, Nexus Transport Planning Manager who provided the Committee with a detailed powerpoint presentation on the Tyne and Wear Bus Strategy.

(For copy report and presentation – see original minutes).

Members were advised of the following issues:-

- (i) the bus network comprised of:
 - Superoute (commercial bus services)
 - Other commercial bus services
 - Secured bus services
 - Demand responsive services – *Linkup*

- Schools and Works services
 - Community transport
- (ii) the objectives of the bus strategy were to:
- Increase ridership (stop decline)
 - Encourage modal shift from car to bus
 - Produce reliable services – linked to bus priority
 - Improve integration between modes and services
 - Ensure good accessibility to essential services (social inclusion)
 - Improve overall product – information, passenger infrastructure, bus priority, quality vehicles, fares
 - Keep under review methods of delivering bus services (voluntary partnership through to Quality Bus Contract) to ensure integrity and development of the network
- (iii) the current position included:
- Overall bus use increasing with impact of free concessionary travel, but adult farepaying and child decreasing so trend of decline may reappear after one “off impact”
 - Only 70% of buses are punctual
 - As costs of operation rise above inflation so do fares need to rise above inflation
 - Concentration on core routes with reduction in overall bus miles operated
- (iv) current bus strategy delivery options under the Transport Act 2000 included
- Voluntary Partnership – Superoute
 - revised to give new impetus but will it deliver?
 - Statutory Quality Partnership (SQP)
 - Little take up since 2000
 - Enhanced Quality Partnership
 - Recognition that SQP not being developed – attempt to strengthen partnership – needs more to overcome legal barriers
 - Some progress to date with Go North East, Stagecoach and Arriva to build new relationship
 - Quality Contract
 - Political support throughout Tyne and Wear
 - Bus strategy identifies possible reasons for intervention
 - Very difficult to justify under current legislation – lobbying to make process easier
- (v) The key issue – what needed to be delivered and how
- A stable network – less frequent changes to timetables and fares
 - Reliable services – through monitoring and enforcement with stable network encouraging bus priority

- Better integrated – network planning, common brand, ticketing, information
- True integration of services and ticketing
- Better buses (consistency)
- Higher levels of funding will deliver a better product

(vi) favoured changes to the legislative framework:

- Lowering the barriers to Quality Contracts to
 - Remove Secretary of State's powers of approval and untie hands to make local decision
 - Ease the "only practicable way" test plus three "E" (Effective, Efficient, Economic)
 - Permit longer franchise periods (up to 10 years)
- Lowering the barriers to Partnerships - particularly competition issues to enable co-operation (but does this merely lead to local monopolies?)

(vii) deliverables from a Quality Contract:

- Stable costed network based on consultation
- Integrated network – timetable and ticketing
- Improved reliability (linked to bus priority)
- Consistent quality standards

But :-

- Quality comes at a cost
- PTA/Nexus become accountable
- Critical that district councils deliver bus priority and supporting land use decisions

(vii) deliverables from a Quality Partnership:

- Influence on network design – but has to be profitable
- Full consultation
- More stable fares – linked to the cost of the business
- Oversight of patronage and revenue data

But :-

- No integration of timetables and ticketing
- Does not deliver full control
- Local semi-regulated monopolies
- How to cope with more than one operator in an area (competition law)
- Again critical that district councils deliver

(xi) the way forward:

- Continue to lobby for greater local determination of bus service delivery
- Continue to develop Quality Contract Proposals
- Continue to develop partnership options with the bus operators

The Chairman thanked Mr. Usher and Mr. Lawson for their presentation and invited questions from Members.

He stated that in reality, public transport rested in those routes secured by Nexus. There was no public control over other routes. Mr. Usher stated that Nexus could report to the Committee what was happening on these routes but not why. The operators could not be forced to explain their actions to Members.

Councillor Wares stated that bus usage had decreased because buses were not available. It was becoming increasingly difficult to use the buses, routes had been withdrawn or frequencies decreased. He stated that the people of Sunderland deserved a decent bus service and asked what Nexus required to enable a service similar to that of the pre de-regulation era.

Mr. Lawson explained that the legal complexities of the Transport Act 2000 were a hurdle, no-one in the UK had taken up a Statutory Quality Partnership. He hoped that legislation in the Queen's speech would help remove this hurdle. Mr. Usher added that the messages coming from Government seemed favourable in this regard.

Councillor Tansey stated that he endorsed everything that had been said by Councillor Wares and expressed sympathy with Nexus. He stated that during its first few weeks of operation the Park Lane Interchange had averaged 400 daily bus journeys, this was now down to 170. He added that Stagecoach no longer chose to use it and asked whether this was because of differences in charges. Mr. Usher advised that there was a fixed rate for all operators.

Councillor Tansey added that although it was only a 200 yard walk from Holmeside to the Metro station at the Interchange this was difficult for the elderly and disabled passengers of operators not using the Interchange.

Councillor Whalen stated that he had sympathy for Nexus but advised that every day he received representations about the increasing isolation being faced by senior citizens because of the reduction in routes and frequencies.

Councillor Wood confirmed that Stagecoach didn't use the Interchange to the extent it had done in the past as it was quicker for cross City services not to do so. He stated that the No. 38 still went into the City Centre via the Interchange but the majority of people got off at the bottom of Burdon Road as that was where they wanted to be. He advised that the Transport Minister had quoted Sunderland as an example of a bus/train/light rail interchange but had been referring to Fawcett Street not Park Lane. He urged the Council to work in co-operation with the operators and Nexus to prioritise bus services and provide the priorities required by operators to speed up services and make them more effective.

Mr. Usher advised that Nexus were working to:-

- improve journeys where they hit congestion and pinch points.

- introduce full corridor improvement schemes e.g. on Durham Road which didn't currently operate as a full corridor because of issues of access.
- make buses more attractive and efficient.

Councillor L. Scott stated that everyone would like to go back to the 'good old days' of pre de-regulation. In reality this would be a struggle. There was now falling ridership, increased car usage and more choice in how to get from A to B. He highlighted cost as a factor in declining bus usage. A shared taxi journey was usually cheaper as well as being more convenient, direct and comfortable.

Mr. Usher confirmed that recent price rises introduced by operators were above inflation and with regard to subsidy, Nexus would like to see commercial operators cross subsidise less profitable routes via the more lucrative ones.

In response to a further enquiry from Councillor L. Scott, Mr. Usher advised that operators made a profit of 13% in Tyne and Wear. One operator had run a depot in South Shields at a profit of 10% which it had found was not sustainable.

The Chairman having thanked Mr. Usher and Mr. Lawson for their presentation moved that representatives of Bus Operators within Sunderland be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee.

3. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the evidence provided in the report and presentation be received and noted; and
- (ii) representatives of bus operators in Sunderland be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee.

Update on Sustainable Development Initiatives for Communities and Residents in Sunderland

The Director of Development and Regeneration and City Solicitor submitted a joint report (copy circulated) which updated the Committee on the initiatives which had been delivered or were being developed during 2006/7 which supported communities in Sunderland in becoming sustainable communities.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Jim Gillon, Sustainability Co-ordinator presented the report and tabled for Members information a copy of 'Green Speak – Your Personal Guide to Environmental Jargon'. In addition, Mr. Gillon informed the Committee of the Sustainability Team's page on the Council's website which detailed the range of educational events and activities to help residents, schools and organisations learn about how they could become more sustainable. Members also viewed a short eco-footprint, day-in-the-life video diary of a Washington resident which had featured on the BBC's Politics Show.

Members welcomed the Green Speak leaflet as extremely useful and the Chairman asked if an article on sustainability could be placed in Sunrise. Mr. Gillon replied that this would depend upon whether funding could be secured.

The Chairman asked if the DEFRA funding was a 'one off' grant. Mr. Gillon confirmed that it was. He advised that it was hoped that the video diary could be placed on the website and that he would investigate the feasibility of distributing copies to community groups and schools.

There being no further questions for Mr. Gillon the Chairman thanked him for his report, and it was:-

4. RESOLVED that the ongoing progress of the Council's Sustainability Team in delivering, supporting and communicating to communities how they could become more sustainable through practical approaches, be noted.

Local Transport Plan 2001/2006 – Delivery Report

The Director of Development and Regeneration and the City Solicitor submitted a joint report which highlighted the progress and achievements set out in the Local Transport Plan for Tyne and Wear Delivery Report 2001/2006.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

To complement the report Bob Donaldson, Manager, Transportation provided Members with a presentation which informed Members of the following:-

- The Local Transport Plan 2001-2006 (the LTP) was prepared by the five Tyne and Wear Local Authorities and Passenger Transport Authority/Nexus. Its Delivery Report provided an opportunity to reflect on the success of the first LTP, and to inform residents, businesses and other stakeholders.
- The Delivery Report covered:-
 - The impact of the Local Transport Plan
 - Major Schemes carried out in Tyne and Wear
 - The contribution to wider objectives
 - Progress Against Targets
 - Delivery of LTP Strategies.
- Between April 2001 and March 2006 an implementation programme of schemes and policy measures was carried out throughout Tyne and Wear.
- Major Schemes included Sunderland Direct and Southern Radial Route.
- 15,000 individual schemes and programmes included road safety and public transport improvements, road and bridge maintenance schemes.

The LTP was set out in the context of a variety of challenges, which included:-

- Over 5,000 road accident casualties each year.
- High levels of child pedestrian accidents.
- Steady decline in bus patronage leading to withdrawal of marginal services, often heightening social exclusion.
- Growing congestion on key corridors.
- Faster rate of growth in car ownership than all other metropolitan areas outside London.
- Long-term decline in cycle use.

The objectives of the LTP were:-

- To improve accessibility to key services.
- To support and promote increases in economic activity.
- To reduce adverse Environmental impacts of traffic.
- To improve integration between public transport and between land use and transport planning.
- To continue to improve Road Safety and reduce fear of crime associated with transport.

The Strategies of the LTP focused on:-

Accessibility: Improved access to key services such as health care, education and employment.

Cycling: Promotion of cycling, to reduce congestion and provide environmental benefits.

Public Transport: Improved public transport, to provide an alternative to the private car.

Maintenance: Maintenance and improvement of the existing transport infrastructure.

Safety: Maintained progress in reducing road casualties.

Demand Management: Traffic and travel demand managed effectively.

Economic: Economic growth supported to increase prosperity and reduce social exclusion.

Environment: Contribution to environmental programmes and improved air quality.

A total of £51 million LTP spending took place in Sunderland between 2001 and 2006 this was divided between maintenance (£20m), integrated transport (£18m) and major schemes (£13m). Spending within the 3 blocks included:-

Maintenance –

- Highways Schemes - £9m
- Bridges Schemes - £10m
- Street Lighting - £1m

Integrated Transport -

- Cycling - £1m
- Safety and Security - £3m
- Safer Routes to School - £1m

Major Schemes

- Southern Radial - £13m between 2001-2006
- The following significant Maintenance Schemes were funded from the Integrated Transport Block:-
 - Wearmouth Bridge - £3m (Structural Maintenance)
 - Queen Alexandra Bridge - £4.4m (Exceptional Bid for Major Maintenance)

Mr. Donaldson highlighted the following case studies which had contributed to the overall objectives of the LTP:-

- Sunderland Direct
- Sunderland Cycle Schemes
- the Southern Radial Route
- Signage in Washington
- the Hetton Sustainable Transport Project
- the Hylton Grange Interchange
- the Doxford Travel Plan

In conclusion Mr. Donaldson advised that:-

- The LTP had delivered significant investment and improvements in transport in the City.

- Of the £236 million investment in Tyne and Wear, £51 million was invested in Sunderland, in addition to Sunderland Direct.
- Major projects included refurbishment of both the Wearmouth and Queen Alexandra Bridges.
- No less important were the numerous smaller schemes and progress which had contributed to the wider objectives of the LTP, such as Social Inclusion and Quality of Life.

Members welcomed the report and Councillor Wood asked if the Committee could receive reports at a future meeting on the Strategic Transport corridor and the 3rd Wear Crossing. This was agreed.

The Chairman having thanked Mr. Donaldson for his presentation, it was:-

5. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the progress and achievements set out in the Local Transport Plan for Tyne and Wear Delivery Report 2001/2006 be noted; and
- (ii) reports on the Strategic Transport corridor and the 3rd Wear Crossing be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

Reference from Cabinet : Comprehensive Performance Assessment – Value for Money Self Assessment

The City Solicitor and City Treasurer submitted a joint report (copy circulated) on the Council's Value for Money Self Assessment which had been considered by Cabinet at its meeting held on 8th November, 2006. The report had been referred to each of the six Review Committees to provide Members with an opportunity to comment on how the Council was seeking to provide value for money for local citizens with regard to those areas within the purview of their Committee's terms of reference.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Andrew Stewart, Finance Manager introduced the Cabinet report highlighting the background as detailed in paragraph 3, and the overall position as detailed in paragraph 5.2.1. Keith Lowes, Head of Planning and Environment together with Bob Donaldson, Manager, Transportation were in attendance highlighting the issues detailed in the report regarding:-

- Economic and Community Development
- Planning
- Transport Planning Policy and Strategy
- Highways Roads and Transport Services
- Street Lighting
- Traffic Management and Road Safety
- Public Transport – Parking Services

In addition to the information contained in the report Mr. Lowes advised that Sunderland had been provisionally removed from the list of Planning Standards Authorities for 2007/8. This would be confirmed in March 2007. The Service had been stabilised and improved through investment in better business practices, improved performance management and in recruitment and retention. The recent planning peer review had been favourable, the Service had recently achieved maximum Pendleton Points and all Department for Communities and Local Government targets in respect of planning were being exceeded.

Councillor Wood referred to page 104 of the Cabinet report and asked for clarification of the term 'rationalisation of car parks'. Mr. Donaldson replied that this referred to the removal of the Tavistock Multi-Storey Car Park and its replacement at Sunnyside.

There being no further questions or comments, it was:-

6. RESOLVED that the Value for Money Self Assessment be endorsed.

City of Sunderland Local Development Framework Annual Monitoring Report

The Director of Development and Regeneration submitted a report (copy circulated) which sought comments from the Committee on the Council's Local Development Framework Annual Monitoring Report 2005/06.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Neil Cole, Manager, Planning Policy presented the report advising that the Committee's comments would be reported to Cabinet for consideration on 6th December, 2006 when approval would be sought for a recommendation that the Annual Monitoring Report be agreed and submitted to the Secretary of State via the Government Office for the North East. The matter would also be submitted to the Planning and Highways Committee for comment.

Mr. Cole informed Members that he would bring a full progress report on the Development Plan Documents to the Committee at its meeting in January 2007.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Wood, Mr. Cole advised that appendix 1 in relation to Business Development referred to the amount of employment land available by specific type. B1a referred purely to office development and B1 referred to office development and light industrial.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Whalen, Mr. Cole advised that item 9 in the appendix referred to the wind turbine development at the Nissan Factory. The whole of the Tyne and Wear Regional Spatial Strategy target in this regard was being met in Sunderland.

7. RESOLVED that Cabinet be advised that the Committee supported the recommendation that the LDF Annual Monitoring report be agreed and submitted to the Secretary of State.

The Chairman then closed the meeting having thanked Members and Officers for their attendance.

(Signed) J. BLACKBURN,
Chairman.