

At a meeting of the ENVIRONMENTAL AND PLANNING REVIEW COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on MONDAY, 8TH DECEMBER, 2008 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Miller in the Chair

Councillors I Cuthbert, Kelly, D. Richardson, Scaplehorn, Tye, Wakefield, Whalen, Wood and A. Wright

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ball and E. Gibson.

Also Present

Councillor Tate and Councillor Ivan Richardson.

Minutes of the Meeting held on 10th November, 2008

- Councillor Cuthbert referred to page 3 of the minutes and the recording of his congratulations to Jack White on being named the North East Climate Change Champion. He stated that he had also asked that a letter of thanks be sent to Mr. White.
 - Keith Lowes referred to page 3 of the minutes and Councillor Wakefield's concern regarding the operation of the methane capture facility. He advised that he had received assurances that the facility was fully operational and once this had been confirmed in writing he would forward the correspondence to Councillor Wakefield.
 - The Chairman referred to page 5 of the minutes and the request that the Committee receive clarification of the number of Penalty Charge Notices issued in each Beat. He advised that clarification had now been received and the figures were circulated for Members' information.
1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting held on 10th November, 2008 be confirmed and signed as a correct record subject to the inclusion of Councillor Cuthbert's request that a letter of congratulations be sent to Jack White.

Declarations of Interest

Item 4 – Feasibility Study into the Re-opening of the Leamside Line.

Councillor Wood declared a personal interest in the item as a member of Railfuture.

Item 5 – Study into Public Transport

Councillor Wood declared a personal interest in the item as a member of the PTA and Chairman of Compass Community Transport.

Councillor A. Wright declared a personal interest as an employee of the Go Ahead Group

Item 6 – Operation of the Kerb It Recycling Scheme

Councillor I. Cuthbert declared a personal interest in the item as his wife and ward colleague were mentioned in the report.

Feasibility Study into the Re-opening of the Leamside Line

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided the Committee with background information on the Leamside Line and which introduced Mr. Bernard Garner, Nexus Director General and Mr. Nigel Gay of Network Rail.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr. Garner advised that the feasibility study into the re-opening of the Leamside Line had shown that the best use of the line would be to improve connectivity between the Tyne and Wear and Tees Valley conurbations, to provide local stations for passenger services and to increase the amount of freight carried by rail.

The Study had been completed earlier in the year and scrutinised by Nexus and the PTA. Fraser Kemp MP had been asked to take the issue forward by lobbying the Department of Transport.

Network Rail had investigated the matter and although there was a long term ambition for the line within the Rail Utilisation Report, it did not foresee any investment prior to the 2019-2024 period.

Mr. Garner stated that the aspirations of the region were on a much shorter timescale and he would like to see the investment brought forward into the preceding five years of 2014 to 2019. He advised that a meeting had been held with the Rail Minister on 10th November where a case was made that reinstating the line would make such a significant contribution to the North East that Network Rail should be encouraged to bring the investment forward.

The Minister, whilst recognising the benefits of the scheme, felt the region needed to make a stronger case if investment was to be brought forward.

To this end investigations were being undertaken to identify the costs of taking the scheme forward and how much of a financial priority it was among public sector partners. It was envisaged that the exercise would be completed in time to report back to the PTA in January 2009.

Mr. Cay referred to the pinch point on the East Coast Main Line centred on the two track section north of Darlington. He advised that Network Rail would be looking to take intervention during control period 6 (2014 to 2019). If a strong case was made, the Company may be able to push the scheme forward.

Discussion ensued during which Mr. Garner and Mr. Cay addressed comments and questions from Members regarding the cost of producing a business case and the state of the track bed and structures such as the Victoria Viaduct.

Members welcomed the progress being made and that everyone was pulling in the same direction. Councillor Tye and Councillor I. Cuthbert offered their thanks to Fraser Kemp MP for his lobbying work on the matter.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Kelly, Mr. Cay advised that he would investigate whether it was likely that the opening of the direct service from Sunderland to London would have a beneficial effect on the Leamside campaign.

In drawing a conclusion to the debate, the Chairman moved that the Committee express its support for as strong a case as possible being made to the Rail Minister to bring forward investment for the re-opening of the Leamside Line from the 2019-2024 period to the 2014-2019 period.

2. RESOLVED that:-

- i) the report on the financial cost of progressing the scheme, anticipated to be considered by the PTA in January 2009, be submitted to this Committee for information in due course;
- ii) support be given for as strong a case as possible being made to the Rail Minister to bring forward investment for the re-opening of the Leamside Line from the 2019-2024 period to the 2014-2019 period.

Study into Public Transport

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) which introduced Mr. Bernard Garner and Mr. Tobyn Hughes, who were attending the Review Committee to provide evidence from Nexus as part of the Committee's study into the public transport system in the City.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr. Garner advised that he had moved to Tyne and Wear in 1986 to deal with bus deregulation following the Transport Act of that year. The new Local Transport Act 2008 would provide Nexus with the tools to significantly improve bus services within Sunderland and Tyne and Wear in general. Sections of the legislation would be enacted over the next 12 months, however, Nexus had already started work to ensure the bus network met aspirations regarding the modal shift and the inclusion element of the legislation.

Mr. Hughes advised that since his last visit 6 months ago, bus patronage had continued to decline overall although amongst the elderly and disabled, patronage was increasing. Bus use had declined by 12% overall in Tyne and Wear and 4% in Sunderland.

It had been noted, however, that during the first six months of the year there had been an increase in fare paying passengers in Tyne and Wear. It was possible that this was due to the introduction of more attractive buses, an increase in fuel prices discouraging car use or the effect of the general economic downturn.

Nexus and the PTA were currently in the middle of the consultation process for the new Tyne and Wear Bus Strategy. Full details were available on the Nexus website and as many responses were encouraged as possible to ensure planned actions reflected what people saw as important in making bus travel easier. The information gleaned from the consultation process would be used to engage more fully with operators with a view to improving services.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Kelly, Members were advised that there was a dialogue between the Go Ahead Group and Nexus. The length of notice given regarding changes to services was variable and the ability of Nexus to request that a service which had been cut for commercial reasons be reinstated was generally nil.

Mr. Garner advised that the new legislation would require that a more holistic approach was taken which would allow Nexus to plan a more comprehensive bus network. Currently Nexus operates at the margins after the operators had decided what services they wished to offer. Ways of working would range from no engagement through gentle partnership to quality contracts.

Councillor Tye stated that he would welcome the use of quality contracts and expressed concern at the cuts to services made by the Go Ahead Group. He contended that its consultations were just paper exercises and that concerns were not listened to. Councillor Wood advised that his experience of the Go Ahead Group had been good and that with regard to Washington, services had been improved.

Mr. Garner advised that establishing accessibility standards would require some re-design of the network and that Nexus would be entering into a dialogue with operators in this regard.

With regard to the statutory operator partnerships, Mr. Garner advised that these could involve multi operators. If services could not be improved through Partnerships, then Nexus would have the option of pursuing quality contracts.

Councillor I. Cuthbert expressed his fear that the cost of funding improvements to the network would ultimately fall back onto local authorities. Mr. Hughes replied that there was a degree of public funding available and cited the improvements to the W heatsheaf Gy ratory as an example.

The Chairman concluded debate and looked forward to the implementation of the Local Transport Act with the hope that an integrated approach would ensure people received what they needed.

The Chairman, having thanked Mr. Garner and Mr. Hughes for their attendance, it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the information provided by Mr. Garner and Mr. Hughes with regard to the Committee's study into public transport be received and noted.

Operation of the Kerb It Recycling Scheme

The Director of Community and Cultural Services submitted a report (copy circulated) in response to a Member request for specific information in relation to the operation of the Kerb It Scheme.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Peter High, Head of Environmental Services, presented the report which provided a comprehensive response to the questions raised by Members as detailed in paragraph 1.2 of the report.

Councillors Ivan Richardson and Ian Cuthbert then addressed the Committee to provide evidence in support of their concerns and in particular those relating to the appearance that Councillors received preferential treatment when it came to receiving replacement black boxes.

A general discussion then ensued on the issues raised in the report. The Chairman stated that he did not want to get into a 'he said, she said' situation regarding the matter. There had been an acceptance that Washington residents had experienced some problems with the operation of the Kerb It scheme in their area and it was hoped that those concerns had been addressed by Mr. High's report. However, in the event of any further issues arising relating to the delivery of the scheme, then the Head of Service should be alerted in the first instance.

4. RESOLVED that
- i) the report of the Director of Community and Cultural Services be received and noted; and
 - ii) the Head of Service be alerted in the event of any further issues arising in relation to the delivery of the Kerb It scheme.

Sunderland City Council Local Development Framework: Annual Monitoring Report 2007/08

The City Solicitor submitted a report appending a report of the Director of Development and Regeneration (copies circulated) which had sought Cabinet approval of the Council's Local Development Framework Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) for 2007/08 for submission to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Cabinet had considered the report at its meeting held on 3rd December, 2008 and resolved that:-

- i) the Annual Monitoring Report be agreed and endorsed;
- ii) authority be delegated to the Director of Development and Regeneration to finalise the Annual Monitoring Report, including amendments of a non-substantive nature, prior to its formal submission to the Secretary of State; and
- iii) officers be authorised to make appropriate arrangements for submitting the Annual Monitoring Report to Government Office for the North East acting on behalf of the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

Neil Cole, Manager, Planning Policy, having presented the report and addressed enquiries from Members, it was:-

5. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted and the final version of the report be submitted to the committee for information.

Washington Village Conservation Area: Character Appraisal and Management Strategy

The Director of Development and Regeneration submitted a report (copy circulated) which informed the Committee of the responses received following consultation on the draft version of the 'Washington Village Conservation Area

Character Appraisal and Management Strategy' and which sought Members' comments on the revised document.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mark Taylor, Senior Conservation Officer, presented the report and advised that any comments from the Committee would be reported to Cabinet at its meeting on 14th January, 2009 when approval would be sought to a recommendation to adopt the revised Washington Village Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Strategy as Formal Planning Guidance.

Councillors Whalen and I. Cuthbert, having welcomed the Management Strategy and its positive nature, the Chairman added that Washington Village was a beautiful part of the City and he fully supported the document.

6. RESOLVED that the revised Washington Village Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Strategy be endorsed and that Members' comments be reported to Cabinet at its meeting to be held on 14th January, 2009.

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

(Signed) G. MILLER,
Chairman.