

Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Wednesday, 6th March, 2013.

Present:- Councillors Wright (Vice-Chair), Bains, Carter, Dar, O'Connor, Plenty and Sohal

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillor Swindlehurst

Apologies for Absence:- Councillors Minhas and Bal, and Terry Conroy

PART 1

89. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

90. Minutes of the last meeting held on 10 January 2013

The minutes of the last meeting held on 10 January 2013 were approved as a correct record.

91. Member Questions

There were no Members Questions submitted.

92. Review of Traffic Congestion in Slough

The Panel undertook a review of the issue of traffic congestion on the strategic route network in Slough based on the terms of reference agreed by the Panel at its meeting on the 10 January 2013, with the slight amendment that it would cover the strategic route network and not just the A4, A355 and A412.

The Panel received a report from the Assistant Director for Enforcement and Regulatory Services and questioned the following at its meeting: Head of Transport; Head of Planning Policy and Projects; Head of School Services; Principal Engineer; Assistant Director for Enforcement and Regulatory Services; and the Commissioner for Neighbourhoods and Renewal.

The initial discussion focused on restricting the number of public car parking spaces in Slough to 5000, how this was managed (particularly in relation to the Trading Estate), and what the aim of this was (particularly in reference to limitations on new developments in the town centre). The Panel was informed that the restriction on adding more parking spaces was one element established through Slough's Spatial Strategy, which also focused future development with limited parking spaces, both commercial and residential, in areas that proved to be the most intensive trip generators, thereby encouraging the use of public transport or other sustainable forms of transport as a more convenient alternative. With regard to Segro the management of

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this was done through monitoring the net change in parking places involved in any planning applications made.

The Panel then discussed the impact of business commuters on congestion levels during peak times, and the fact that this costs the town an estimated £34 million each year. A major element in management of the peak hours levels was linked with the motorway network, and the need to join the management of traffic on the M4 motorway with Slough's own strategic route network to improve traffic flows. It was confirmed that Slough was involved in a national pinch-point programme regarding the M4, but that this was focused very much on journey reliability rather than capacity, and therefore this element may need further investigation.

The principal issue regarding the major peak hours revolved around the level of traffic exceeding the capacity of the junctions. If capacity could be reduced by approximately 10% this would allow for the network to better cope with any minor incidents such as a stalled vehicle at a traffic light junction which could disrupt the cycle.

Members questioned whether the use of yellow boxes could assist with preventing cars from blocking major junctions on the network, but informed that the Council did not currently have the enforcement powers for these which were only available in London and Manchester, with Police enforcement elsewhere; however, lobbying was ongoing regarding this.

In discussing the impact of education on the strategic route network the Panel focused on the potentially increasing impact as schools expanded to meet growing demand. Members recognised that all schools had travel plans, but were concerned that these were not actively being used to encourage parents to use other modes of transport in taking their children to school.

With links to the obesity agenda, there was a need for robust action with schools to address this issue. The success of schools' travel plans was one element that needed to be looked at as the message did not appear to be getting through to parents. Other options to be considered should be introducing staggered start times, which should also be looked at in terms of businesses as well, and even terms dates if proved to be viable. In all cases, with both schools and businesses, the publicising of the benefits of not using the car should be a priority.

The Panel discussed how the Council should be seen to be leading by example through the implementation of best practice, and were reassured that this was being introduced.

The Panel then reviewed the current network management that was in place including the improvements made through the Heart of Slough traffic lights system, the current upgrade to the traffic light control software and the introduction of new strategies to deal with different, potentially disruptive events such as accidents on the M4 which could then be managed through

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the new Urban Traffic Management Control system. The aim was the introduction of these new systems within the next financial year.

Members discussed the need for real time bus service information, as well as a general need for information relating to public transport options to improve the customer experience and encourage future use. The potential for the introduction of a Bus Rapid Transit System for the A4 could provide the reliable journey times and generally better product quality.

In noting final comments, the Panel recognised the health and environmental benefits of reducing the numbers of cars on Slough's strategic route network and, in particular, the link with the Council's carbon reduction commitment.

Resolved – to recommend to Cabinet:

- a) the formation of a Working Group to investigate possible solutions and report back on its findings;
- b) that this Group include the relevant Cabinet Members (identifying those responsible for Transport and Education specifically) and a Representative from the Scrutiny Function (to be named at a later date); and
- c) that the Group's Terms of Reference are published, for information, in the next agenda of the Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel.

93. Date of the Next Meeting

Resolved – that the date of the next meeting be confirmed as 19 June 2013.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.00 pm)

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