

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Planning, Transport and Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 22 JULY 2014

Present: Councillor Springett (Chairman), and
Councillors Chittenden, English, Munford, Powell,
Round, de Wiggondene and Willis

Also Present: Councillors Burton and Harper

28. THE COMMITTEE TO CONSIDER WHETHER ALL ITEMS ON THE AGENDA SHOULD BE WEBCAST

RESOLVED: That all items on the agenda be webcast.

29. APOLOGIES

It was noted that Councillor De Wiggondene was running late (arrived at 18:45).

There were no other apologies.

30. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no substitute members present.

31. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS/WITNESSES

Witnesses for agenda item 8:

- James Gower, cycling enthusiast;
- Tay Arnold, Cycling Transport Planner, Kent Highways, Kent County Council (KCC);
- Colin Finch, Senior Public Rights of Way Officer, Kent County Council;
- Bartholomew Wren, Economic Development Officer, Regeneration and Transport, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC);
- Elliot Dean, cycling enthusiast;
- Councillor Paul Harper.

Councillor Burton was in attendance as an observer.

32. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

33. TO CONSIDER WHETHER ANY ITEMS SHOULD BE TAKEN IN PRIVATE BECAUSE OF THE POSSIBLE DISCLOSURE OF EXEMPT INFORMATION

RESOLVED: That the items on the agenda be taken in public as proposed.

34. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24 JUNE 2014

RESOLVED: That subject to the addition of the words 'in addition to the multi-agency event' being added to the end of recommendation 2 of minute number 22, the minutes of the meeting held on 24 June be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

35. REVIEW OF TRANSPORT IN MAIDSTONE BOROUGH - ALTERNATIVES TO USING A CAR - EXTERNAL WITNESS INTERVIEWS

The Chairman welcomed the witnesses.

Prior to the meeting the witnesses had been asked for their thoughts, ideas and information on the following questions to help them prepare:

James Gower, Tay Arnold and Colin Finch:

- What is already being done to encourage cycling and walking in Maidstone and the Borough?
- What is working?
- What is not working?
- What are other areas doing?
- What is your 'dream vision' for cycling and walking in the borough?
- What can Councillors do to help?

Bartholomew Wren:

- What are Tunbridge Wells doing to encourage cycling and walking?
- What is working?
- What is not working?
- What is your 'dream vision' for cycling in Tunbridge Wells?

James Gower delivered his presentation to the Committee. The main points he raised were:

- Main roads in Maidstone were unpleasant for non-motorised users - there was little cycling infrastructure and crossings were designed to prevent inconvenience to cars, rather than being convenient for cyclists or pedestrians;

- Cycling infrastructure that existed was often of poor quality - mostly pedestrian infrastructure with cycling allowed;
- Cycling was an afterthought, or squeezed in at the sides - cycling specific schemes were rarely considered;
- Cycling was not considered as a proper mode of transport.

As a result Mr Gower considered few people cycle for utility purposes.

Mr Gower's suggestions for improvement included:

- Maidstone needed to change the way it thought about its relationship with the car, in order to improve the wellbeing of the people living in Maidstone and the town itself;
- The best way to achieve this was through enabling mass cycling;
- Provision for cycling needed long term commitment and the will to change on behalf of local government as well as national government;
- The best place to start was filtered permeability and use of one way streets with cyclist exemptions;
- Then main roads needed to be made safe for cycling too;
- Don't be anti-car – be pro cycling.

Tay Arnold, Cycling Transport Planner, Kent Highways, Kent County Council (KCC) explained her work with KCC was mainly focused on encouraging commuter cycling. Her role was county wide and covered the twelve Kent districts. She went on to outline the work KCC were doing to encourage more cycling in the borough. The main points of her presentation included:

- Figures collected using counters at Cold Harbour, J6 M20 (road cycling) and Mote Park (recreational cycling) demonstrated a snapshot of low numbers of people cycling in Maidstone – approximately 2,000-3,000 journeys per month;
- To encourage more people to cycle softer measures were needed to promote cycling as an affordable and sustainable mode of transport and improve peoples' confidence;
- Bikeability cycle training (a countrywide road safety standard training scheme) was being offered to children and adults in the borough using some funding subsidised from the Department for Transport;
- Work had been done with the KCC Public Health Team to promote the health benefits of cycling pitched at getting people on bikes who were not already using a bike;
- Cycle routes had been showcased to show people where they could cycle in Maidstone;

- Collisions for the period 2011-14 were mainly in the town centre and longer routes such as the A20 (17 incidents) and A229 (21 incidents) the majority of which were considered slight accidents;
- Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) already had a draft Cycle Strategy dated June 2012. This would benefit from being updated and linked into the on-going work carried out by KCC. The aspirations in the strategy were still relevant;
- The benefits of a grass roots consultation on the strategy, demonstrating a public and political desire to adopt it, would include better access to funding to implement it;
- With a clear map of where the cycle routes were planned the council would be able to draw section 106 funding from developers to invest in a cycling infrastructure;
- Small things to start encouraging people to cycle more included:
 - Provision of cycle parking in strategic places
 - Brompton Dock style cycle hire at train stations etc.
 - Park and Ride Cycling – drive in and cycle the rest of the way (using a hired cycle) into town and/or cycle in and bus the rest of the way into town.

Colin Finch, Senior Public Rights of Way (PROW) Officer, KCC delivered his presentation and began by giving an overview of the role of his team. The PROW team worked on ways of developing the counties network of footpaths, byways, bridle ways and restricted byways and maintained a legal record of where the routes were. Their work also included promotion of the network, for example by producing maps.

Mr Finch went on to describe what he felt was the good and the bad in relation to PROW as follows:

Good – what worked

- Maidstone had 11.3% of the 4,200 miles of PROW in Kent providing a good historical asset of walking and cycling routes;
- The Moat Park regeneration project had provided superb traffic free routes which were being very well used;
- Inter parish 'behind the hedge schemes' had been developed – for example East Farleigh, Forge Lane route linking the village to the school and a similar scheme at Hunton linking the village to the church and village hall – and provided safe pedestrian routes;
- The Millennium River Project along the river corridor also provided a safe route for pedestrians and cyclists;

- Local Government Funding recently awarded to KCC to improve cycling provision in the Maidstone Borough was very positive and the authorities should work together to get the most out of it.

Bad – what did not work

- Maidstone Borough Council planning policy EVN26 was considered a very 'tight' policy stating no development would be allowed where there were PROWs unless developers agreed to maintain or divert the routes. This had resulted in planning consultants and developers shying away from developing in areas with a PROW. This in turn had resulted in 'back garden allies' where the PROW were overgrown, unsafe and unused. This could be overcome by a policy within the Blue and Green Infrastructure Strategy being enforced so developers developing near these routes did so in a way that the routes were visibly overlooked in open green spaces making them safer to use;
- River connections could be better on the Maidstone United Football Club and rowing club side of the river;

Wish List

- Promotion of PROW through pushing the promotion of maps for cycling and walking;
- Identify land to use for the development of more routes with MBC looking at their land supplies first then approaching private landowners to create missing links in the network;
- Pursue contributions from developers to create new routes and maintain existing ones;
- Adopt the Maidstone Borough Cycling Strategy as soon as possible – that way developers would know where and how they could contribute to the network;
- MBC to sign up to the KCC PROW Service Level Agreement – this would allow KCC to process Town and Country planning applications for MBC and assist in the diversion of PROW when developers put plans forward;
- Explore the 'no through road' concept where authorities could create links to schools without contravening main thoroughfares – for example Buckland Hill, Oakwood Road, Upper Fant Road.

Bartholomew Wren, Economic Development Officer, Regeneration and Transport, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) delivered his presentation. His main points included:

- Cycling in Tunbridge Wells had increased in recent months. However, it accounted for a small proportion of road users (2%);

- 60% of workers and residents interviewed would like to cycle, but did not due to perceived barriers such as safety and cycle parking;
- South East (SE) Trains had been working on providing more cycle parking for commuters and found as soon as it was made available it was full. SE Trains were looking for other options such as two tier cycle stands;
- TWBC had a Transport Strategy adopted in 2003 which included cycling. Many proposals had not been taken forward, possibly because of changes in officers, priorities and lack of funding. The strategy was considered to be a bit dated;
- TWBC were in the process of developing a new Transport Strategy which included cycling, and was at a similar stage to MBC;
- The new TWBC transport strategy would provide a high level introduction to cycling and a stand-alone cycling strategy would re-engage with the established local cycling forum;
- Tunbridge Wells had a thriving cycling culture with the Vello Café and shop providing a focal point for cyclist;
- Greg Clarke, MP, who was engaged in national cycling debates, held a public meeting in November 2013, independently of TWBC. It was very well supported by locals with outcomes still being implemented, which included:
 - Support for new routes;
 - Cycle parking;
 - Advance stop lines;
 - 20mph speed limits;
 - Measures to make the street environment more inviting for cyclist;
- Tunbridge Wells' Cyclist Forum was formed in January 2014, with its own terms of reference but with no decision making powers. The forum was supported by TWBC officers and chaired by a member of the council interested in seeking cycling solutions. The forum was very well attended with up to 25 cycling enthusiasts usually attending. Two sub groups had been established focussing on education and events, and infrastructure;
- Events supported and promoted by TWBC included:
 - Safety campaigns with the AA;
 - Bikeability cycle training funded by Department for Transport;
 - Tunbridge Wells Great Bike Ride;
 - Cycle Friday – launched 6 June 2014;
 - Cycle Friday web site which promoted routes, parking and events;

- TWBC had been concentrating on the softer measures to encourage cycling and would move on to the infrastructure which would take longer;
- Mr Wren's final thoughts on how to introduce a cycling culture included:
 - Concentrate on partnership working, engage with other forums and local authorities;
 - Provide the necessary resources to deliver a cycling strategy, especially at officer level.

The Committee then questioned and discussed the points raised with the witnesses.

The main points discussed included:

- Nationally revenue cuts had restricted the maintenance of footpaths, byway and bridle ways. Maintenance had been carried out by local volunteers and Rambler groups;
- The Committee agreed it would be useful to advertise for more volunteers to help maintain PROW;
- PROW could be converted to cycle routes. Bridleways would be the easiest option and would mean approaching the landowners. This would open up to wider use;
- The Committee raised concerns that MBC had not signed up to the KCC PROW service level agreement;
- It was confirmed by Ms Arnold the Cycling Strategy needed to be adopted in order to assist with seeking funding from developers through section 106 agreements to establish new routes. Maintenance of such new routes would fall to Ms Arnold's team, Kent Highways, Transport and Waste at KCC;
- The £2m awarded to the borough would be used to help develop a cycle route from Maidstone to Tonbridge;
- Councillors raised concerns that the proposed improvements to the gyratory system would mean the removal of an existing cycle route and asked Ms Arnold to ensure the design of the new system was considered carefully;
- The Committee discussed the possibility of the Cabinet Member creating one new route per year that supported growth, housing and jobs in the borough, as part of their priorities, but this could only be done once the Cycling Strategy had been adopted;

- The Committee agreed the draft Cycling Strategy needed refreshing to include more ambitious and aspirational short and long term goals linked with the Integrated Transport Strategy and Local Plan so it could go out to consultation with these documents before being adopted;
- The Committee discussed including, in Appendix 3 of the draft strategy, provision be made for cycle paths to, and, parking at 'spoke' bus routes in villages to enable villages with less or no bus services to cycle to where the service was more frequent;
- The Committee also discussed linking cycling with all public transport by providing cycle parking at train stations and cycle parking and cycle hire at park and ride sites;
- The Committee explored the value of a cycling forum for Maidstone borough that included a Councillor as a member. It was agreed engaging with KCC, local residents and businesses and cycling enthusiasts would reap benefits in terms of designing and planning;
- It was agreed MBC should continue and develop the partnership work with KCC established by Michael Murphy by ensuring the work was picked up by his successor;
- The Committee considered the use of 20 mph speed limits in the borough to improve safety for cyclists and pedestrians. It was agreed the Committee should ask KCC for the results of their trials in the borough to help the Committee establish if there was value in implementing them;

The Chair invited Councillor Harper to the table to provide his evidence.

Councillor Harper drew on his experience of developing cycling strategies and reinforced many of the points already discussed. Other points he raised included:

- Segregation of cyclists and cars was very expensive and needed a large element of public land to accommodate it;
- Dropped and tactile curbs supported walking, as did pedestrian priority at junctions and traffic lights;
- Street lighting being turned off after midnight created safety issues – turning off alternate street lights would be an alternative.

The Chair then invited Elliot Dean, a Fant resident and cycling enthusiast to provide his evidence to the Committee.

Mr Elliot supported the points already made and recommended infrastructure plans remain realistic.

Mr Elliott supported a '20 is plenty' campaign and said he felt what was needed was an attitude shift at a national level and suggested MBC and KCC took a lead on such an initiative.

Another suggestion from Mr Elliot was to create an award for local businesses who promoted and encouraged cycling with their staff by providing facilities such as showers.

Mr Elliott also pointed out that the cycle routes by the river in Maidstone were washed away during the flooding at the end of 2013.

RESOLVED:

- a. That the Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport and Development be recommended to lobby Kent County Council on the reconfiguration of the gyratory system in Maidstone to ensure safe cycle passages. The design of the gyratory system to incorporate surface cycle passages (not subways) for cyclist heading in and out of the town from west Maidstone using the A20 and A26.
- b. That the Head of Planning and Development be recommended to urgently refresh and update the draft Maidstone Borough Council Draft Cycle Strategy, dated June 2012, for further scrutiny by the Committee with a view to consulting upon and formally adopting the refreshed Strategy. The Committee would aim to have the principal proposals relating to cycling used to inform the emerging Integrated Transport Strategy.
- c. That the Head of Planning and Development be asked to report back to the Committee on the costs and possible sites for the provision of cycle ways from rural locations (Villages and Hamlets) with poor bus services, to bus stops on major routes with a more frequent bus service. In addition provide cycle parking at the end of these routes. The short term aim should be to firstly identify the routes and provide the cycle parking with the longer term aim of developing the cycle route to the cycle parking.
- d. That the Head of Planning and Development be recommended to request from Kent County Council a copy of the results of their trials of 20 mile per hour speed limits around schools in the borough and a copy of their policy for 20mph zones around schools in the borough.
- e. That the Head of Planning and Development be recommended to reintroduce the Maidstone Cycling Forum and ensure it is supported by an officer with responsibility for cycling in their job description. Additionally a lead member should be identified to act as a cycling champion within the authority.
- f. That the Head of Planning and Development be asked to report back to the Committee the reason why Maidstone Borough Council

has not signed up to the Kent County Council service standards for Public Rights of Way.

36. REVIEW OF TRANSPORT IN MAIDSTONE BOROUGH - ALTERNATIVES TO USING A CAR - REVIEW OF WALKING AND CYCLING AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO USING THE CAR

The Chair introduced Sarah Shearsmith, Community Development Team Leader to address the Committee.

Ms Shearsmith presented the main points outlined in her report and emphasised the biggest barrier to people taking part in the activities available to them was a lack of awareness of them.

Ms Shearsmith invited the Committee to contact her if they required any further information on her report.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the report of the Community Development Team Leader.

37. REVIEW OF TRANSPORT IN MAIDSTONE BOROUGH - ALTERNATIVES TO USING A CAR - REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT - CYCLING AND WALKING IN MAIDSTONE

The Chair notified the Committee that Mr Hapgood had informed her all the points he would have made had already been covered and moved straight on to questioning and discussion.

The Committee then went on to discuss short term measure that could be considered by the Committee when making their recommendations in their report. These included:

- Liaison with SE Trains and other local rail companies to identify funding opportunities for supplying bike storage at train stations;
- Coloured tarmac and 'armadillos' (rounded rubber blocks screwed down to the road) could be retrofitted to trial separation of cyclists from traffic;
- Possibly joining with TWBC to joint trial solutions.

RESOLVED: That the committee noted the report of the Head of Planning and Development.

38. FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME AND SCRAIP UPDATE

The Committee considered its Future Work Programme.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

- Note the update from the Chair;
- Note the Cabinet Member/Scrutiny workshop arranged for 23 July 2014;
- Note the Economic and Commercial Development (ECD) Overview and Scrutiny Committee workshop on the ECD Strategy arranged for 29 July open to all Councillors to attend and input;
- Note the joint meeting between the Planning, Transport and Development and the Economic and Commercial Development Overview and Scrutiny Committees on 21 October 2014 to consider the report on proposed employment sites in the borough;
- Agree the second part of their review of Transport in Maidstone Borough – Buses is carried out at their meeting 30 September 2014 and the third part, Rail is carried out at their meeting 18 November 2014.

39. DURATION OF THE MEETING

18:30 – 21:57