

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Planning, Transport and Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 18 NOVEMBER 2014

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

Also Present: Councillor Harper

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

RESOLVED: That all items on the agenda be webcast.

96. APOLOGIES

Councillor de Wiggondene sent his apologies for being late and joined the meeting at 19:00.

Councillor English gave his apologies for having to leave the meeting early and left at 18:50.

97. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no substitute members.

98. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

Councillor Harper was in attendance for items 9 and 10.

99. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

It was noted that Councillor Harper had been appointed Kent spokesperson for the National Cycle Touring Club.

There were no Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests declared by members or staff.

100. 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.

101. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 21 OCTOBER 2014

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 October 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the following amendment:

That for clarity the sentence on page four of the minutes "During lengthy discussion the committees' raised the following points" should read "During lengthy discussion members of the committees' raised the following points relating to the two following documents:".

102. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD 3 NOVEMBER 2014

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the following amendments:

On page six of the minutes the sixth paragraph starting "Councillor Hughes stated that early and meaningful..." be deleted and replaced with:

"Councillor Hughes stated that Maidstone Borough Council had not undertaken 'early and meaningful engagement and collaboration with neighbourhoods' on the draft Local Plan as required by the National Planning Policy Framework paragraph 155. As a result the Coxheath Neighbourhood Plan had been delayed by about one year."

On page six of the minutes the eighth paragraph starting "Councillor Hughes stated Coxheath Parish Council..." be deleted and replace with:

"Councillor Hughes stated that verbal advice had been received from Locality that the amendments and re-consultation on the Coxheath Neighbourhood Plan being advised by Maidstone Borough Council could lead to much greater delay and loss of weight as a material consideration than was being suggested by Maidstone Borough Council."

The Recommendations on page eight, reference, 2a and 2b, be amended to read:

2. That Coxheath Parish Council be recommended to:
 - a. Make a request to Locality to put the verbal advice the parish council had received from them regarding their Neighbourhood Plan in writing, and;
 - b. Share and discuss the advice given to them in writing with Maidstone Borough Council's Spatial Policy Team to assist with progressing the parish's Neighbourhood Plan.

103. PETITION

The Chairman advised the committee, that due to advice received regarding the rules of the Constitution on the presentation of petitions, Agenda item 11 was to be withdrawn from the agenda and referred to the Cabinet, as the most appropriate committee for consideration.

RESOLVED: That the petition regarding future development on all fields boarding the designated Loose Valley Conservation Area be withdrawn from the agenda and referred to the Cabinet for consideration at their meeting of 17 December 2014.

104. CHANGE TO THE ORDER OF THE MEETING

RESOLVED: That item 10 on the agenda be taken before item 9.

105. TRANSPORT IN MAIDSTONE - ALTERNATIVES TO USING A CAR - PART THREE - RAIL SERVICES

The Chairman introduced the item and explained that the committee had been carrying out a review of Transport in Maidstone – alternatives to using a car since July 2014.

The committee had already looked at how walking and cycling and bus services could assist with easing congestion in Maidstone town. The draft report would be discussed under item 9.

This agenda item focused on Rail services in the borough and how they could help to ease congestion in the town.

The Chairman welcomed the witnesses invited to provide evidence for this review and invited Mike Gibson from South Eastern Trains to deliver his presentation.

Mr Gibson began by explaining that South Eastern Trains (SET) regularly surveyed its customers. The data gathered demonstrated that customers' main priorities included; value for money services; more frequent trains at times convenient to them and a seat on the train. Other areas of importance included; a reduction in journey times; trains that were on time; regular and accurate information, especially regarding disruptions, and wifi access on trains.

Mr Gibson went on to say that value for money would be a major focus for SET for the next four years. The Government set the cost of regulated fares, for example season tickets. SET had control of off peak fares and in the coming months customers would see more offers on off peak services.

In previous franchise agreements SET would have received revenue support from the Government to provide rail services. The new franchise meant SET were in 'Revenue Risk'. This meant they had to generate all their income. This would result in SET embarking on more effective marketing and partnership working with local bus service providers and tourist attractions.

Mr Gibson explained to the committee that from January 2015 Maidstone would benefit from a direct off peak service from Maidstone to Canterbury West as well as more frequent services to Blackfriars in London.

Mr Gibson advised the committee, to assist with reliability issues, Network Rail would be removing speed restrictions and improving their programme of asset repairs and maintenance. Also, issues with timetables for 2015 had been resolved.

Mr Gibson informed the committee that information provided to customers was crucial, especially when services were delayed and the reasons for the delays. In the first four months of the new franchise 100 additional staff had been employed. Plans were in place to provide front line staff with iPads to assist customers with timely information. Information boards at Maidstone were also due to be upgraded and a mobile phone app was available, free, for customers to download to provide timely information on services.

Mr Gibson explained SET were expanding their City Safe Haven scheme with local police, where train stations were used as a place of safety for the public. The scheme had been trialled in Medway and London and SET were looking to extend it to other areas.

SET were embarking on a £5m station improvement plan where all South East rail stations would have been deep cleaned by the end of 2015. Other improvements would include online information and CCTV, ticket machines and ticket gates. Staplehurst had recently had a ticket gate installed.

Mr Gibson explained that SET saw the new franchise contract as an opportunity as well as a challenge and wanted to work with Maidstone Borough Council to improve the services provided.

After some discussion the following points were raised by the committee:

- The morning train from Bearsted station taking school children into Maidstone had been cancelled several times because of a broken down freight train. This resulted in parents having to take children to school who otherwise would not have needed to. Mr Gibson explained that Network Rail allocated time slots to service providers and freight operators. The freight trains used were old and prone to breaking down. SET felt the problem was unacceptable where commuters, who paid a lot of money for their service, were being delayed in this way and were taking the matter up at a senior level with Network Rail.
- Rural stations, in particular Headcorn, provided a good station and a good service. However, passengers from other areas in the borough, with less convenient services, were travelling across to Headcorn station to use the rail services. This resulted in the residential streets being used by commuters to park their cars rather than in the station car park where there was capacity. Mr Gibson informed the committee that Network Rail could expand car parks but funds would need to be available to do so. He went on to say that car park charges could be looked at with a view to

reducing them to make parking in station car parks more attractive to commuters.

- In 2009 the Canon Street service from Maidstone was stopped. The committee agreed it would be useful to establish how many people were travelling across the borough to Tonbridge were the service was provided. Mr Gibson reported that there had been an increase in passenger numbers from Paddock Wood. It was possible to find out where season ticket holders lived who were travelling from this station to establish how far they had driven to catch their train.
- In geographical terms SET operated one of the smallest franchises with 178 stations. Service specifications were set by Government, for example the number of trains per hour. The times of trains were set by the operator. Services would be quicker if there were not so many infrastructure issues and trains did not stop at so many stations. It was explained that Maidstone could lobby Government for an enhanced service to Blackfriars and for trains to not stop at so many stations.
- The current franchise contract with SET would expire in early 2018. Consultation on the new service would be carried out by the government in 2016. The committee agreed Maidstone Borough Council should take the opportunity to make representations as part of this consultation.
- Concern was raised regarding the transport infrastructure in the proposed Rural Service Areas in the draft Local Plan, such as Lenham and Harrietsham. Stations in these areas were in a poor state of repair with no lighting and no staff. Mr Gibson confirmed SET wanted to make stations welcoming to customers to encourage people out of their cars and on to trains. This would be achieved by more attractive off peak travel, providing decent clean stations where customers could buy a ticket and improved timetable information.
- SET had £4.8m to invest in station improvements from Network Rail in partnership with Kent County Council and local businesses.
- SET were working with other public transport providers to link up and co-ordinate services. Plus Bus was one scheme which included rail and bus travel, however, Mr Gibson felt it was not advertised well.
- It was agreed more work needed to be done to integrate public transport. Some providers were more proactive than others in working together. Mr Gibson highlighted SETs relationship with Stagecoach in Thanet as an example where the two services worked well together.

- The Department for Transport was responsible for factoring in any proposed increases in development in a particular area when writing rail service specifications.
- The committee agree Maidstone Borough Council should be represented on the South Eastern Rail Users Group to allow their issues and suggestions to be taken forward.
- Improvements such as halts (small train stops) and new stations would need a business case as there was a cost to Network Rail to provide these. The potential increase in journey times additional stops would create would need to be taken into account.
- Increased frequency of services would be looked at on a case by case basis by SET as would the extension of the high speed service.
- Kent County Council had carried out a feasibility study into providing services to Gatwick from Maidstone with the conclusion that the service would not be economically viable.
- The committee agreed station improvements such as the recent provision of a lift at Bearsted station were very much appreciated by its users, as was the £1 train fares for children during school holidays.

The Chairman welcomed Mike Fitzgerald to the meeting, who was Chairman of the Kent Community Rail Partnership and the Medway Valley Line Group.

Mr Fitzgerald pointed out to the committee his paper, emailed to members before the meeting and tabled at the meeting, outlining the work of the two groups distributed prior to the meeting (attached to these minutes as **Appendix A**).

Mr Fitzgerald went on to explain the Kent Community Rail Partnership existed to bring together a cross section of partners to enhance the social, economic and environmental benefits to the communities serviced by rural and secondary rail services. The group concentrated on rail services that were unlikely to attract investment from the rail industry. The group provided communication links between rail operators, borough and parish councils and residents.

The work of the partnership had influenced service providers to the benefit of local communities.

The partnership used pop-up displays to promote rail services to those who did not use them and improve services to those that did.

The group had promoted the provision of cycle parking at Maidstone East station. This had seen an increase in passengers cycling to the station with 50 to 60 using the facility on most days.

Mr Fitzgerald informed the committee that the partnership carried out work with local schools to promote health and safety on the railways to children between the ages of 10 and 12. They also promoted rail travel to the children.

Another scheme Mr Fitzgerald explained, was station adoption and station champions. This was where a parish council or an individual took responsibility for enhancing the facilities and look of a station. The scheme had resulted in one or two stations being adopted and had enhanced the area. There were also signs of reduced crime at these stations. Mr Fitzgerald said the scheme needed to grow.

Mr Fitzgerald pointed out to the committee that British Transport Police were members of the group and had an office at Maidstone East providing a direct link for people to raise concerns they may have regarding station safety and crime.

Mr Fitzgerald went on to outline how Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) could get involved with the partnership:

- Taking up membership of the Kent Community Rail Partnership and the Medway Valley Steering Group would help with communicating changes, enhancements and requirements;
- MBC would be able to support the drive to increase the number of rail service per hour and support the promotion of off peak services;
- Support the partnership by providing funding – as did KCC and parish councils;
- Help with the coordination of Section 106 (S106) provision. S106 funds from developers provided time limited enhancements to transport provision. If the support started too soon, ie before developments were fully occupied, the funds would run out and the services withdrawn (due to the S106 funds being used up) before the majority of people were able to make use of it.

The Chairman welcomed Keith Harrison, Chief Executive of Action with Rural Communities (ARC) to the meeting.

Mr Harris explained the work of ARC was to try and address the need for the provision of services to rural areas and address the potential of the market economy failing in these areas.

Membership of ARC was mainly parish councils and rural businesses.

Mr Harris went on to explain that two areas of ARCs work that were relevant to the scrutiny review were:

- Assisting rural communities to access funding to establish their own transport services. An announcement made recently reported that

a central government fund of £25m would be available for communities to bid for to provide community mini bus services. Further information would be sought by ARC on this fund.

- Expanding the digital agenda by looking at ways for people to work from home for part of their working week, reducing car journeys and helping to ease congestion.

The committee noted the written response received from Stephen Gasche, Principal Transport Planner for Rail, Kent County Council.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1 The Cabinet Member for Planning Transport and Development be recommended to:
 - 1 In consultation with the relevant committee at the time, respond to the Department for Transport's franchise consultation, which was due in 2016;
 - 2 To reduce unnecessary car travel within the borough, this response should request improved commuter and off peak services using high speed trains and Thameslink services to reduce the number of rail users travelling across the borough by car to other stations that offer better services than their local station
- 2 The Cabinet Member for Planning Transport and Development be recommended to promote the appointment of a Kent County Councillor for Maidstone and a Maidstone Borough Councillor to the Steering Group for the Medway Valley Line and the Kent Community Rail Partnership to ensure Maidstone Borough's needs are pursued.
- 3 Councillor Chittenden investigate how Maidstone Borough can be represented on the South Eastern Public Transport User Group and report back to the committee at their meeting of 4 February 2015.
- 4 The Head of Planning and Development be recommended to ensure Section 106 funding be sought from developers at every opportunity to:
 - a. Support public transport links to and from new developments linking bus and rail services, and;
 - b. Ensure the provision is timed in a way to provide services that increase as occupation of developments increase.
- 5 The Chairman of the Planning, Transport and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee be recommended to write to Mr Mike Gibson of South Eastern Rail to:
 - a. Establish how parish councils could access funding for improvements to rural rail stations;
 - b. Request that he take forward his suggestion to approach Network Rail regarding the possibility of expanding rail

- station car parks at Bearsted and Headcorn and look into the possibility of extending this to other rural rail stations;
- c. Request that he take forward his suggestion to reduce parking costs at rural rail stations such as Headcorn to discourage rail users from parking in residential areas.

6 The Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport and Development be recommended to ask Kent County Council for an update on the progress with the building of the footbridge replacing the level crossing at the foot of Bower Lane, Maidstone.

106. DRAFT REPORT OF THE REVIEW OF TRANSPORT IN MAIDSTONE - ALTERNATIVES TO USING A CAR

Councillor Springett presented the draft report of the review of Transport in Maidstone – alternatives to using a car.

During discussion the committee agreed the following:

- That further work needed to be carried out to consult with car users on how to reduce congestion in the town.
- It was agreed that any work carried out to ease congestion in Maidstone town should fulfil the council's duties under The Equalities Act (2010) and must include an Equality Impact Assessment.
- It was agreed that the information to parish councils regarding their powers and opportunities to assist them in the provision of transport services should be included in the revised Parish Charter.
- The committee discussed the use of Maidstone East railway station car park and whether all users were rail service users or whether they were shoppers or people working in the town.
- The following changes/checks to the draft report were discussed:
 - A recommendation be included in the report that a sub group be formed focussing on future modes of transport that would ease congestion in Maidstone, eg trams, river transport and monorail.
 - Recommendation 'A' in the report should include the maintenance of existing pedestrian and cycle routes at the gyratory system in the town as well as the creation of new routes for pedestrians and cyclist heading in and out of the town from west Maidstone using the A20 and A26.
 - The data on paragraph 6.6 be checked regarding the number of cycle journeys to work in Maidstone.

- Recommendation B should include details of the radial route mentioned in paragraph 6.7.5.
 - Recommendation C to include the following words at the end "to include details of proposed cycle routes."
 - A further recommendation be included after recommendation C to read:

"That the Head of Planning and Development, where possible, source Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy contributions from developers to enhance cycle facilities within the borough with a long term view of linking these routes."
 - In paragraph 6.9.2 the cycle parking should be identified.
 - The information regarding bus services in paragraph 7.1 should be checked for accuracy and quoted in just numbers not percentages.
- It was agreed that the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the committee should meet with the relevant officers regarding the possible inclusion of a review of the Park and Ride service and report back to the committee at their meeting of 16 December 2014.

RESOLVED: That

1. The draft report of the review of Transport in Maidstone – alternatives to using a car be noted;
2. The following amendments be made to the draft report:
 - a. That the Overview and Scrutiny Officer be asked to make the following changes and checks to the draft report on the review of Transport in Maidstone – alternatives to using a car:
 - b. That a recommendation be included in the report that a sub group be formed focussing on future modes of transport that would ease congestion in Maidstone, e.g. trams, river transport and monorail.
 - c. That recommendation 'A' in the report to include the maintenance of existing pedestrian and cycle routes at the gyratory system in the town as well as the creation of new routes for pedestrians and cyclist heading in and out of the town from west Maidstone using the A20 and A26.
 - d. That the data on paragraph 6.6 be checked regarding the number of cycle journeys to work in Maidstone.

- e. That recommendation B to include details of the radial route mentioned in paragraph 6.7.5.
 - f. That recommendation C to include the following words at the end "to include details of proposed cycle routes."
 - g. That a further recommendation be included after recommendation C to read:
 - "That the Head of Planning and Development, where possible, source Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy contributions from developers to enhance cycle facilities within the borough with a long term view of linking these routes."
 - h. That in paragraph 6.9.2 the cycle parking to be identified.
 - i. That the information regarding bus services in paragraph 7.1 be checked for accuracy and quoted in just numbers not percentages.
3. The following additional recommendations to be included in the final report:
- 1. That the Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport and Development be recommended to carry out consultation with car users to establish why they drive into Maidstone town and what would encourage them to use an alternative mode of transport to get into the town.
 - 2. That the Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport and Development be recommended to survey the users of Maidstone East railway station car park to find out their reason for using it to establish how many users were rail passengers and how many were not.
 - 3. That the Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services be recommended, as part of the Parish Charter, to include a section on the powers and opportunities parish councils have in the provision of transport services and capital equipment, such as bus shelters and real time transport information, and funding streams available to them.
 - 4. That the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Planning, Transport and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee meet with the relevant officers regarding the possible inclusion of a review of the Park and Ride service and report back to the committee at their meeting of 16 December 2014.

107. FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME AND SCRAIP UPDATE REPORT

RESOLVED: That the

- Future Work Programme attached as Appendix A be noted;
- List of Forthcoming Decisions attached as Appendix B be noted;
- SCRAIP update attached as Appendix C be noted.

108. DURATION OF MEETING

18:30 to 22:02