

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3)
held at 2.30 pm on Wednesday, 18 December 2019

Present:

Members: Councillor J McNicholas (Chair)
Councillor M Heaven
Councillor T Jandu
Councillor R Lancaster
Councillor A Lucas
Councillor P Male
Councillor C Miks
Councillor B Singh

Other Members (by invitation): Councillor J O'Boyle
(Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration)

Employees (by Directorate):

Place R Haigh, G Holmes, C Knight, R Penlington, M Salmon,
N Small

Apologies: Councillor E Ruane

Public Business

26. Declarations of Interest

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

27. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting on 6th November 2019 were agreed and signed as a true record. There were no matters arising.

28. Trees and Development Guidelines Supplementary Planning Document

The Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) received a briefing note of the Deputy Chief Executive (Place) on the current position in relation to the draft Trees and Development Guidelines Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). A copy of the SPD was attached as an Appendix to the report and a copy of the report and associated Appendices that had been considered by the Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities at his meeting on 9 December 2019 (his minute 9/19 refers), was also attached.

The SPD was intended to provide technical guidance and support to the Green Environment policies set out in the Local Plan (2016) and also built on some of the policies included in chapters relating to Conservation and Heritage and Environmental Management. The SPD, developed by the Council's Planning Policy Team, would provide a comprehensive overview of the requirements for

applicants in the planning process where trees were involved. It is structured in a sequential order and covers supporting technical detail(s) around matters of:

- Land Surveys.
- Tree Surveys.
- Tree Constraint Plans.
- Arboricultural Method Statements.
- Capital Asset Value for Amenity Trees.
- Works to trees.
- Tree and root protection measures.
- Planting new trees.
- Accessing and moving around sites.
- Avoiding damage to trees.

The SPD continued to expand upon and support the green environment policies with the changes made to reflect the comments received through rounds of consultation on 8th August 2018 to 23rd September 2018 and 7 January 2019 to 18 February 2019, and which further augment the tree protection, tree conservation and other related policies. The continued technical support and guidance provided within the document would help all stakeholders to understand the Council's tree protection aims and objectives and help applicants to provide the correct information and assess the right areas where tree protection and planting measures would be required, as early as possible in the planning process. This would not only save time and money but would lead to stronger outcomes for green infrastructure in relation to planning decision making.

A final period of public consultation would seek formal representations to the SPD with all responses reviewed and the SPD updated if appropriate. The SPD would then be submitted to Cabinet for approval of its adoption, at the earliest opportunity in 2020.

The Board questioned officers, received responses, and discussed the following issues:

- The robustness of the consultation - publicised through the Council's Website, mail shots and email shots, including which groups responded.
- The need to ensure that developers include tree planting in planning proposals.
- Conditions on planning approvals relating to tree planting, to be enforced.
- Encourage maximising tree planting to meet the Council's aspiration of one tree for every Coventry citizen.
- The use of the SPD as a material consideration.
- Aspire to plant 2 trees for every tree removed during improvement works/planning developments in the City.
- The need to establish a comprehensive set of requirements to offer protection to existing forestry as astringently as there should be.
- In addition to trees protected by Tree Preservation Orders, options be explored to offer a form of protection to further trees.
- The need for the Authority to introduce a robust form of assessment of existing trees, for use when considering planning proposals/ developments.
- The need to tighten the enforcement process for tree protection.
- Reference needs to be made to the Urban Forestry Strategy.

The Board agreed that the appropriate Cabinet Member be asked to consider the responsibility for forestry matters being co-ordinated by one Cabinet Member. They further agreed that the following comments on the draft Strategy be submitted as part of the consultation:

- i) The need to establish a comprehensive set of requirements to offer protection to existing trees as astringently as there should be.
- ii) The need for the Authority to introduce a robust form of assessment and protection of existing trees that don't have Tree Preservation Orders, for use when considering planning proposals/ developments.
- iii) The need to tighten the enforcement process for tree protection.
- iv) The need to be prescriptive to developers on the number of new trees and planting required in new developments.
- v) Reference needs to be made to the Urban Forestry Strategy.

RESOLVED that the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3):

- 1) Notes the content of the report.**
- 2) Identifies the following comments on the draft strategy as part of the consultation:**
 - i) The need to establish a comprehensive set of requirements to offer protection to existing trees as astringently as there should be.**
 - ii) The need to introduce a robust form of assessment and protection of existing trees that don't have Tree Preservation Orders, for use when considering planning proposals/ developments.**
 - iii) The need to tighten the enforcement process for tree protection.**
 - iv) The need to be prescriptive to developers on the number of new trees and planting required in new developments.**
 - v) Reference needs to be made to the Urban Forestry Strategy.**
- 3) Identifies the following recommendations for the appropriate Cabinet Member:**
 - 1) That consideration be given to the responsibility for forestry matters be co-ordinated by one Cabinet Member given the Council's declaration of a Climate Emergency.**

29. Very Light Rail

The Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) received a Briefing Note that provided the background and current status of the Very Light Rail Project.

Coventry City Council (CCC) and Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council (DMBC) were in collaboration with partners to establish the West Midlands as a world-class business investment location by supporting urban public transport connectivity, developing significant supply chain opportunities and providing a focus for driving up skill levels, focusing on the development of Very Light Rail (VLR) Technology.

The Coventry VLR Project would deliver a very light weight mass transport rail solution comprising a modern battery-operated vehicle and innovative track system that was relatively simple and cost effective to construct. The integrated system would be tested at the Dudley Very Light Rail National Innovation Centre (VLRNIC) and once proof of concept was achieved, the first route most likely to be taken forward in Coventry was a route linking the railway station with the main hospital in the city, a route of some 7km. The programme consisted of 3 projects all focussing on the development of VLR technology in the West Midlands - a world class business investment location:

1. Coventry VLR Vehicle and Track Research & Development (R&D)
2. Dudley Very Light Rail National Innovation Centre
3. Coventry VLR First Route
4. Vehicle Research and Development

WMG had been commissioned by CCC to lead and procure the services of a vehicle design specialist to design and oversee the build of the Coventry VLR vehicle. WMG appointed Transport Design International (TDI) in June 2018 and were supporting the design work with research focused on batteries, electric powertrain, charging, materials, light weighting, Finite Element Analysis, and the regulatory pathway for this novel vehicle. The vehicle design was well advanced and was signed-off at a Design Review Panel Meeting on the 6th August 2019. The design activity was now focused on detailed design of all components such as the car body, bogie, high voltage battery, and interior.

Manufacture of the vehicle was due to commence in early 2020 through to November 2020 when factory acceptance testing would take place. The vehicle was scheduled for delivery to the VLRNIC site, in Dudley, in Autumn 2020 for initial performance testing and acceptance, which would be complete in Spring 2021. The vehicle would then need to be tested on the new track form which was programmed to be available from Summer 2021 to commence integrated system testing.

WMG had been commissioned by the Council to lead and procure the services of a track innovation partner to design the innovative trackform with the specification for the track summarised as follows:

- Develop a light weight, shallow form track system of modular design that could be exported to other towns and cities across the UK and globally.
- Have minimal impact on below road surface utilities, taking advantage of the modular design to allow future utilities access.

The procurement of the innovation partner was due to be concluded in January 2020 and a 14-month programme to develop the track design would follow. Once designed and factory tested, a 325m test track would need to be installed at Dudley VLRNIC for integrated system testing to take place. Work to complete the VLRNIC in Dudley in time for performance testing from Autumn 2020 was underway, with the construction of the Retaining Wall (required to support the Midland Metro Extension and create the footprint for the site) commencing in October 2019. Two potential corridors had been assessed for feasibility, economic benefits and costs to be delivered as the first route: City Centre to Warwick University via the railway station; and Railway Station to University Hospital Coventry and Warwickshire (UHCW). These routes connected major employment

sites, development sites and potential strategic park and ride sites with the city centre and the railway station, which was under redevelopment as a major transport interchange. The feasibility work indicated that the UHCW route would yield the greatest benefits and was therefore most likely to be taken forward for implementation for the first route. Subject to the success of the first route, the network would be expanded and include links to strategic locations such as University of Warwick, Jaguar Land Rover and HS2 interchange.

The Board questioned officers, received responses, and discussed the following issues:

- Light rail vehicle – simple design, light, £5m cost, will carry 250 people maximum.
- Light rail track – light, £8m cost, surface installation and low maintenance.
- Easy removal (approx. 90 minutes) and reinstatement of track section, for utilities maintenance.
- No timetables or booking to use system – will run regularly to enable passengers to use quickly and easily.
- Phasing and timeframe - project well on target: R & D Phase January 2019, Year 2020 - track design, vehicle construction, test track, demonstrator vehicle, Spring 2025 First Route Phase
- Business case – preparation underway, based on realistic costs and delivery.
- Examples of light rail options worldwide – specific to individual countries within their identified funding. Not comparable to the model Coventry needs to deliver within its budget.
- Environmental considerations – light rail offers low carbon emission travel
- Single driver operation of vehicle – additional driverless carriages can be coupled
- Track assessed for load bearing capabilities – light rail vehicles and car weights acceptable, work was continuing on heavy good vehicle weights which had proved more challenging
- Coventry were leading on very light rail – DfT on board with project and other cities across the UK were aspiring to Coventry's lead.
- First route – Rail Station to City Centre to University Hospital
- Challenging legislative process which was outdated and lengthy - DfT aware and that Coventry was making representations to look at ways to progress the process.
- Cross political party support countrywide for this transport option – low costs, low maintenance, low carbon emissions.
- Risks of project identified and managed.
- Investigating 5G for delivery of the digital autonomy.

RESOLVED that the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3):

- 1) Notes the progress made to date on the development of a Very Light Rail Project in Coventry.**
- 2) Supports the continued development of the Very Light Rail Project in Coventry.**

3) There were no further recommendations for the Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration.

30. Outstanding Issues

There were no outstanding issues.

31. Work Programme 2019/2020

The Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) considered the Work Programme for current municipal year and noted the scheduling of issues for consideration at future meetings of the Board.

RESOLVED that the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) notes the Work Programme for 2019/2020.

32. Any other items of public business which the Chair decides to take as matters of urgency because of the special circumstances involved

There were no other items of public business.

(Meeting closed at 4.20 pm)