

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3)
held at 2.30 pm on Wednesday, 4 November 2020
(Meeting held remotely)

Present:

Members: Councillor C Miks (Chair)
Councillor L Bigham
Councillor M Heaven
Councillor T Jandu
Councillor R Lancaster
Councillor B Singh

Other Members (by invitation):

Councillor J O'Boyle (Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration)
Councillor P Hetherton (Cabinet Member for City Services)

Employees (by Directorate):

Law and Governance G Holmes, M Salmon

Transportation and Highways J Seddon, N Small

Apologies:

Councillor G Hayre
Councillor P Male
Councillor E Ruane
Councillor R Ali (Deputy Cabinet Member for Public Health and Sport) (invited Member)

Public Business

8. Declarations of Interest

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

The Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) noted that Councillor Bigham was a City Council representative on the West Midlands Combined Authority Transport Delivery Committee.

9. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 23rd September 2020 were agreed as a true record.

Further to minute 4/20 headed 'Employment, Skills and Training', the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) noted that the information that they had requested relating to the breakdown of unemployment data and Kickstart Scheme placements, had been circulated to Members.

Information had also been circulated relating to the 'Gigafactory' and Members were advised to direct any questions they may have on the matter to Steve Weir, the Council's Head of Economic Growth.

10. **Very Light Rail Progress Update**

The Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) received a Briefing Note and Presentation of the Director of Transportation and Highways that provided an update on the progress of very light rail (VLR).

Since the last briefing to the Board in December 2019, significant progress on VLR had been made with vehicle assembly underway at NP Aerospace. The vehicle would now be ready for Factory Acceptance Tests to commence in December 2020 and would move to Dudley in February 2021 to undertake 8 weeks of Site Acceptance Testing - the Dudley Innovation Centre Test Track facility and a workshop was currently under construction. The innovations and design within the vehicle were subject to Patent Applications which were currently underway. A key aspiration for the project was to ensure the product developed the manufacturing capability within the region, this would be key to the manufacturing strategy for both the vehicle and track form.

The Board noted that TDI had sourced 67% of the supply chain for the prototype vehicle from the UK.

Significant progress has been made on the track workstream. Since May 2020, significant work has been undertaken to reach an agreed concept to take forward to detailed design. The concept to be progressed was approved at the end of September 2020 and was now in the detailed design phase, expected to be complete by May 2021. Once the design had been approved, component testing would be initiated.

The track concept was subject to a Patent Application and this was underway.

In order to build a Test Track of the new trackform to initiate integrated system testing, further funding was required for which a bid to the DfT was being developed to put forward a case for £8.8m investment to achieve Proof of Concept and progress the route workstream.

Coventry City Council continued to progress the route workstream to develop the first route to University Hospital Coventry and Warwickshire. Utilities and drainage surveys were underway to assess route alignment options and the team were about to commission a package of work to progress the outline design concept. In addition, further feasibility work to explore a potential extension to Ansty Park, had been commissioned as a Park and Ride facility which could increase the Benefit to Cost Ratio of the proposed first route. Funding to continue progress on the workstream was also required and would form part of the DfT bid due to be submitted in late January 2021. To support the submission to DfT, an outline Economic Impact Assessment (EIA) detailing the benefits that VLR would deliver, through enabling R&D, mobilising a new manufacturing sector in the region and providing an attractive affordable rail based system for small cities, had been commissioned.

In parallel to the above, the Authority were progressing work to develop and confirm city-wide transport objectives and future transport needs, taking into consideration last mile solutions (such as cycle super-highways and e-scooters) and how this would integrate with VLR. A VLR network plan would be developed over the coming months.

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

- To secure the track concept, non-disclosure agreements had been put in place and the circulation of information limited, whilst the patent for the track concept was in the application stage.
- The bid for £8.8m investment to achieve Proof of Concept and progress the route workstream, was being submitted in January 2021 - the timescale for the outcome of the bid was unknown at present.
- Sufficient funding was in place for the track concept and building of the track which had been developed by officers with expertise in the field. A Utilities Co-ordinator had also now been employed.
- Plans were in place to ensure the continuation of the project should any delay occur in the receipt of Dft funding.
- There was much interest from industry in the proposals which it was anticipated would generate further funding to support the project.
- A test track from Coventry Rail Station to Bull Yard was proposed but was progressing through a process for placing track on the public highway. This installation would demonstrate how the scheme would fit with the street scene.
- As part of the City of Culture, a Transport Innovation Exhibition would be held which is was hoped would include a Very Light Rail cab mould.
- Important to make the proposals visual to the public and businesses as there was much interest in the project.
- Optimal alignment for the first route from the City Centre to the University Hospital Coventry and Warwickshire was currently being worked up. The second route would be to Ansty Park.
- Dudley had already moved to form the Innovation Centre and Coventry joined them to enable a test track to be created. The joint relationship provided opportunities for joint funding, the use of expertise in the automotive sector, a centre for the building of the vehicle, and cost savings to the authority for progressing the project.
- The scheme would not only provide an innovative transport system but also an economic scheme that would create employment opportunities.

RESOLVED that the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) supports the on-going delivery of the Very Light Rail Programme and has no further recommendations for the Cabinet Member for Jobs and regeneration.

11. **Coventry Local Air Quality Action Plan**

The Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) received a report and Presentation of the Director of Transportation and Highways that provided the Board with an update on the Coventry Local Air Quality Action Plan.

The City Council is under Ministerial Direction, issued in February 2020 and entitled Environment Act 1995 (Coventry City Council) Air Quality Direction 2020, to implement the local plan for NO2 compliance.

A Full Business Case for the local plan is to be submitted to the Secretary of State by 31st October 2020 as draft, subject to the Cabinet's approval in December 2020, to enable JAQU to instigate their internal review processes ahead of submission of the final Full Business Case.

Schedule 1 of the Direction set out the detailed package of measures that the Minister was instructing the City Council to implement and reflected the Council's preference not to proceed with a Clean Air Zone. The package of measures included a segregated cycle route between the city centre and Coundon, engagement measures with schools, businesses and local communities aimed at encouraging active and sustainable travel, and a series of highway schemes aimed at reducing congestion and facilitating dynamic traffic management on the routes into the city centre from the west. This included Holyhead Road, where NO2 levels were at their highest.

The Government had provided £24.5 million in grant funding for the implementation of this package, in addition, the Council had secured a further £5.8 million in grant funding from the West Midlands Combined Authority's Transforming Cities Fund for the B4101 Spon End scheme, which formed one of the highway schemes within the package.

Engagement work undertaken on the A4600 corridor in 2018-20 had resulted in increased active travel and mode shift. In schools, car journeys for school travel reduced by 8.5%, transferred to walking, cycling and scooter. Local residents reduced single occupancy car trips by 11%, with an increase in walking and bus trips of 9%.

Other projects that complemented this package included the installation of one of the most extensive networks of electric vehicle charging points in the country, with around 250 charging points installed to date and funding being secured for a further 100. The Council had also worked with National Express and Transport for West Midlands to secure funding for ten electric buses, which began operation in August 2020. The project includes the installation of solar panels and battery storage at the bus depot to enable the power used to run the buses to be generated on site. Further, the Council has secured funding from Highways England for the E-Fleet project, and was in the process of procuring 70 electric vehicles, mostly vans, that would operate as part of the Council's fleet, but would also be available for local businesses to borrow and trial on a "try before you buy" basis.

The main Local Air Quality Action Plan was approved by Cabinet on 21st July 2020, following which officers had been working on the delivery programme of the package with significant progress made, summarised as follows:

- The Coundon Cycle Route had been to consultation, and was approved by Cabinet Member for City Services 7th September 2020. Preparatory works were underway, and a substantive start on scheme construction was

programmed for November 2020 with the first phase of the scheme to be open in mid-2021.

- The impact of COVID-19 upon the operation of schools and businesses had meant that the original plan of starting the engagement programme in September 2020 had been delayed. The engagement programme would fully commence in early 2021 and run to March 2024, beyond compliance, to ensure behaviours were embedded for the longer term.
- Balfour Beatty had been appointed as the programme manager for highway schemes works and design work had commenced. Once detailed designs were prepared, there would be consultation with local communities which would provide an opportunity for a review of the proposals and any amendments to the package of measures to be made. Substantive changes to the package would require to be submitted to Government as a variation to the package that the Council has been directed to deliver, and any such submission would need to have a robust evidence base demonstrating that the amended local plan would still achieve compliance with NO2 legal limits within the shortest possible time.
- The target date for delivery of the measures outlined in the local plan was March 2024, although the infrastructure measures were planned for construction in advance of that date with the Coundon Cycle Route being completed in mid-2021 and the remaining highway measures by late 2021 or early 2022. The timetable was dependent upon the successful completion of a range of statutory processes including land acquisition and Traffic Regulation Orders, as well as on the outcome of the consultation in early 2021.

In summary, the City Council was making good progress with the delivery of the package of measures contained in the local plan, in line with the Ministerial Direction. There were significant risks to the programme for delivery, and there may be a need to request approval from Government for changes to the package as the design and consultation progresses on individual schemes. The submission of the Full Business Case did, however, represent a significant milestone in the delivery of the Local Air Quality Action Plan.

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

- Members welcomed any modal shift to different ways of taking journeys other than motor vehicles
- Heavy goods vehicles using the North side of the City were encouraged to use appropriate routes and not minor/residential roads. Work continued with businesses, including SAT NAV companies, to direct drivers appropriately. Cross boundary work with other Local Authorities and participation in cross boundary consultations was undertaken. This work and monitoring was ongoing.
- Engagement work would be undertaken with businesses and schools to obtain information about employee and pupil travel choices and to look at options for modal shift. Work would include looking at Businesses company vehicles and pool cars etc for environmentally friendly options.

- Engagement work with communities would include encouraging the use of cycle routes and walking, to improve air quality and promote health.
- Formal monitoring of air quality was taken through Air Quality Monitoring Stations in the City that automatically monitored levels. Additional monitoring was in place in other areas e.g. Ball Hill. A network of infusion tubes was also monitored regularly.
- Petrol and Diesel vehicles were to be phased out with manufacturers working on alternatives.
- The Local Air Quality Action Plan Full Business Case would be submitted to Cabinet on 1st December 2020. Work on junction 7 of the Ring Road, Upper Hill Street, Holyhead Road and Spon End would begin with the consultation in early 2021, with construction commencing later in 2021.
- National Express monitored the performance and operational parameters of their electric buses – buses were charged overnight to provide power for buses to operate without the need for recharging during their shift.
- The design process for improvements to air quality on the Foleshill Road would include anything that would include the flow of traffic. Important not to divert traffic to create other flow/air quality issues.
- Cycle routes would be considered anywhere across the City.

The Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration indicated that the Board that work on air quality and traffic flow initiatives across the City were progressing well. The Air Quality Action Plan had met the Government Direction and avoided a clear air zone being imposed. There was a great deal of work being undertaken to fit with major green economy proposals across the City with a joined-up approach to many schemes and projects.

Members requested that a report be submitted to a future meeting of the Board relating to the work undertaken with schools to gather information about their travel preferences and proposals to encourage modal shift. They also requested that they be provided with the web link to future Cabinet reports as they were published.

A Briefing Note on the Board's consideration of the presentation would be prepared for consideration by Cabinet when they received the Local Air Quality Action Plan Full Business Case Report in December 2020.

RESOLVED that the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) notes the presentation and briefing note and made no further recommendations to Cabinet Members.

12. **Work Programme 2020/2021**

RESOLVED that the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) notes the Board's Work Programme for 2020/2021 and that the item originally intended for this meeting relating to 'Two Friargate' will be re-scheduled to a future meeting of the Board once planning permission has been acquired for the development.

13. **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.