

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4)
held at 10.00 am on Thursday, 7 July 2022

Present:

Members: Councillor L Bigham (Chair)

Councillor N Akhtar (Substitute Cllr R Singh)
Councillor R Bailey
Councillor G Hayre
Councillor A Hopkins
Councillor S Keough (Substitute Cllr M Heaven)
Councillor C Miks (Substitute Cllr T Khan)
Councillor R Thay
(Shadow Cabinet Member)

Other Members: Councillor P Hetherton, Cabinet Member for City Services
Councillor G Lloyd, Deputy Cabinet Member for City Services
Councillors D Welsh, Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing

Employees
(by Directorate):

Law and Governance V Castree, G Holmes

Streetscene and Regulatory Services D Butter, S Newall, C Styles

Transportation and Highways C Knight (Director), R Little

Apologies Councillors M Heaven, T Khan and R Singh

Public Business

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

It was noted in relation to Minute 4 below that Councillors R Bailey and C Miks were Members of the Planning Committee.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 31 March, 2022 were agreed as a true record.

There were no matters arising.

3. **Highways Asset Management Programme - Scheme Assessment Process**

The Cabinet Member for City Services introduced the item.

In response to a number of enquiries from ward Councillors, the Leader referred an item to the Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board to demonstrate and clarify the process for Highway Maintenance scheme selection. The Scrutiny Board considered a Briefing Note the Highways Asset Management Programme. At the meeting the Director of Transportation and Highways highlighted the following:-

- In January 2016, Cabinet approved the Council's Highways Asset Management Policy and Strategy documents. These documents set out at a strategic level the approach the Council takes to its provision of Highway Maintenance.
- The use of asset management principles had been applied for many years in Coventry to ensure appropriate investment with longer term planning and this process was set out in detail within the Highways Infrastructure Asset Management Plan which was published in 2016.
- Every year during December and January the Council's Highway Maintenance Technical Services engineers, working with the Asset Management Engineer prepare a draft programme of schemes for approval at Cabinet. The schemes are presented as part of the Transportation and Highway Maintenance Capital Programme in March each year.
- The Asset Management Engineer maintains a Forward Works Programme (FWP) holding information against every road and pavement in Coventry regardless of current need for treatment.
- The Forward Works Programme was a key tool in managing the process.
- There was no legal threshold regarding the maintenance of the highway. Local thresholds had been agreed based on case law and claims against Local Authorities.
- The priority was to ensure the highway was safe for all users.
- There were two programmes of work; preventative maintenance and planned maintenance.
- Preventative maintenance, which involved a thin surface overlay was not always the most aesthetically pleasing option but can provide a cost effective way to extend the life of the highway.
- All local authorities faced a challenge to maintain pavements. The cost per square meter of maintenance was significantly higher than carriage way works due to the work generally needing to be done by hand.
- A JCB pothole probe was being used on highways to free up staff to work on the pavements. Officers were monitoring and evaluating the performance of the JCB pothole probe.
- The Government had tested and rated the Council's approach to asset management and had recognised the approach as good and the Council had received the full amount of incentive funding.
- The Council would need to consider how to prioritise pavement repairs within the priorities.
- There were around 600 miles of road and 1000 miles of pavement in the City. Coventry had an unusually high number of concrete flagstone pavements at around 40%. These flagstones were not designed to take the

weight of vehicles crossing them which happens frequently in some areas to either to access gardens for parking or due to two wheeled on street parking in narrow roads.

- It was important to maintain footpaths as they supported the Council's objective to get people active across the City.

The Scrutiny Board asked questions and received responses on a number of issues, including:-

- Where concrete flagstones were like to be driven on, flagstones were replaced by tarmac, but it would not be financially viable to replace all the flagstones across the City. In some areas, where cars park two wheels on the pavement, the row of flagstones nearest the kerb had been replaced with tarmac.
- Root encroachment was an issue in some areas. The team worked with the tree inspector to see if the roots could be removed. Sometimes a kerb lift would be installed around tree roots to future proof the work. In other cases, areas around the tree were left open or tarmaced, or a resin based solution, which were flexible and could accommodate the growth of the roots were used.
- In terms of safety, the system used to prioritise the work is objective and based on the data collected.
- Different areas of the City look different dependent on when the neighbourhoods were built. In terms of making neighbourhoods more liveable, then one would need to look at other parameters as well regarding maintenance work.
- Most of Coventry's evolved roads are built on a poor subbase. If they fail, they need to be reconstructed which involves taking the ground back down by around 1 meter. A full reconstruction of a short road in the City would use 20% of the annual maintenance budget.
- The strategy is to do repairs as efficiently as possible.
- Concerns were raised about the quality to reinstatement works by utility companies.
- Notifications from Councillors and the public inform the data on which repairs and maintenance are prioritised and as a result Highways Inspectors visit sites when concerns are raised about defects.
- Unadopted roads are not the Council's responsibility. There were processes where the owners can be force to do the work or where by the Council could undertake the works and recharge for them.
- People illegally driving over pavements without a dropped kerb was managed by an enforcement officer.
- Work was being done to see how people could be encouraged to install dropped kerbs. Where there were schemes being delivered in areas, residents were contacted and offered a discount on the work whilst teams were in the area.
- The Council work with Legal to enforce illegal pavement crossings - however- people do have a common law right of access to their property so cannot unreasonably refuse. As a last resort the Council could do the crossing and then recharge occupant. Bollards have only been used where access was unsafe.

- The policy limits the width of a dropped kerb to 2.7m. which can go up to 3.6m where street narrow.
- Concerns were raised about the impact of reduced parking on streets where too many people drop their kerbs.
- Drives need to be permeable and the drainage system maintained.

The Scrutiny Board welcomed all the work undertaken in this regard.

RESOLVED that the Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4):-

1) Note the Briefing Note and appendices

2) Recommend that the Cabinet Member for City Services be requested to explore options to review dropped kerb pavement crossings. This is to include working with to make the application process easier and the works cost effective when timed with scheduled works in the programme.

4. Consultations on Supplementary Planning Documents - i) Draft Biodiversity Net Gain ii) New Residential Buildings Design Guide

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities introduced the item.

The Scrutiny Board considered a Briefing Note and presentation which outlined the consultation on i) Draft Biodiversity Net Gain Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) ii) New Residential Buildings Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) introduced by the Cabinet Member. Officers were looking to identify more sites in the City with significant biodiversity and a report will go back to the Cabinet Member meeting.

Issues covered in the presentation included:-

- The definition of an SPD
- A summary of biodiversity net gain (BNG) which was introduced in the Environment Act 2021.
- The biodiversity value of sites would be established using a recognised metric.
- Enhancement should be provided on-site but where this is was impracticable off-site projects were required.
- The SPD provided details of how the Council would require all developments to deliver BNG
- Contributions for off-site projects would be used to directly benefit Coventry sites
- An increasing network of suitable sites was being established within the city
- Sites would be managed for a minimum of 30 years and would be accessible to the public
- If the BNG mechanism and network of sites was not agreed future resources were likely to be lost to Coventry
- Design Guidance for New Residential Developments was outlined and superseded the 1991 residential design guide.

- It brought together where applicable principles of design guidance for Sustainable Urban Extension (SUE) sites and the Ancient Arden Design Guidance, in order to deliver consistent standard of design guidance across the city for new residential proposals.
- It would introduce a requirement for applicants of schemes over 50 units to articulate the design process to embed and ensure contextual responsiveness
- Example key themes included:
 - Bringing into residential policy an expectation to meet national space standards throughout
 - The introduction of an expectation of private external amenity space provision in new build apartment schemes where possible.
 - The introduction of new principles of delivering positive frontages to waterways and green space.
 - Provided guidance in the accommodation of cycle and refuse/recycling storage in new build development.

The Scrutiny Board asked questions and received responses on a number of issues, including:-

- The onsite delivery of BNG was the preference. However, if this could not be delivered on site, the development of a biodiversity plan would give the City Council control as to where the offset was delivered. It was important to get the plan in place as one of the proposals within the Environment Act was that biodiversity credits could be spent anywhere across the Country.
- BNG mechanism seeks to ensure not an overall lost of wildlife from Coventry or Warwickshire. There was an intention to use upcoming legislation and an incoming local nature recovery strategy to create a new green infrastructure for Coventry which provides sites across the whole of the City.
- It was suggested that Councillors and members of the public be encourage to record with Warwickshire Records office what biodiversity there is in the City. There could also be a call out of potential biodiversity sites.
- Green routes and walls could contribute to the biodiversity figures.
- The wording of some of the principles in the Design Guidance for New Residential Development SPD had been amended at the Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities meeting.
- Concerns were raised that some of the wording in the principles was ambiguous and would enable developers to minimise their contributions. Members asked that it was made clear that full details in relation to some of the principles were available in other documents.
- The ratio of open space to development was covered in the Open Spaces SPD.

RESOLVED that the Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4):-

- 1) Note the presentation at Appendix 1**
- 2) Note the draft SPDs at Appendix 2: and**
- 3) Identify the following comments for inclusion with the consultation responses:**

- **Biodiversity Net Gain**
 - Green space should be maximised within developments
 - The public and Councillors should be encouraged and enabled to report areas and pockets of biodiversity are in the City.
 - Developers should be encouraged to protect biodiversity on development sites where possible
 - Green walls and green roofs should be considered as options to increase biodiversity in areas where there is limited floor space

New Residential Buildings Design Guide

- On Principle 6 – ensure that housing need in an area, in terms of size of properties, is also taken into account rather than “highest density possible”
- On Principle 6 – “generous green infrastructure” needs to be cross-referenced to the green space SPD so it is clear what is required.
- On Principle 7 – this needs to be more specific and clarify that mix of uses means including local centres in large developments

5. Work Programme and Outstanding Issues 2022/23

The Scrutiny Board considered the Work Programme for 2022/23.

RESOLVED that a date be scheduled to considered residents parking schemes and that dropped kerb applications be added to the Work Programme.

6. Any other items of Urgent Public Business

There were no other items of urgent public business.

(Meeting closed at 12.10 pm)