

Minutes of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 18 January 2007.

Present:

Members: Councillor Ken Browne (Chair)
“ Ray Sweet (Vice Chair)
“ John Appleton
“ George Atkinson
“ Gordon Collett
“ Jose Compton
“ Eithne Goode
“ Mick Jones
“ Katherine King
“ Joan Lea
“ Bryan Levy
“ John Whitehouse

Also Present : Councillor Martin Heatley, Portfolio Holder for Environment.

Officers:

Graeme Fitton, Head of Transport and Highways, Environment and Economy Directorate.
Jean Hardwick, Principal Committee Administrator, Performance and Development Directorate.
Malcolm Graham, Senior Safety Engineer, Environment and Economy Directorate.
Peter Samwell, County Highways Policy, Transport and Highways, Environment and Economy Directorate.
Ken Simons, Forestry Officer, Environment and Economy Directorate.
Estyn Williams, Group Manager, Road Safety Unit, Environment and Economy Directorate.
Paul Williams, Scrutiny Officer, Performance and Development Directorate
Philippa Young, Team Leader, Safety Engineer, Environment and Economy Directorate

Also Present: Charlotte Jay , representing SLOWer Road Safety Campaign (see public questions below).

1. General

(1) Apologies for absence

None.

(2) Members Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

Members declared personal interests as district/borough councillors as listed below:

Warwick District Council - Councillors Jose Compton and Eithne Goode.

Rugby Borough Council - Councillor Gordon Collett.

North Warwickshire Borough Council - Councillor Ray Sweet

Stratford District Council - Councillor John Appleton

(3) Minutes of the Meetings held on 9 November 2006

The minutes of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 9 November 2006 were agreed and signed as a correct record.

Matters Arising

Rugby Western Relief Road – Section 106 Funding

In reply to a question Graeme Fitton said that it was likely that the £2.5m S106 funding would be lost because approval of the Order for the Rugby Western Relief Road had not been received. He would, however, be reporting on this shortfall to Cabinet's 1st February 2007 meeting.

2. Public Questions Time

Charlotte Jay, on behalf of the SLOWer Road Safety Campaign, asked the following questions -

(1) The B4439 Old Warwick Road

The B4439 Old Warwick Road has now achieved the necessary status of 6 serious accidents (or more), which I understand is the criteria you use for it to be considered a priority in your reviews. These have all occurred in the past 5 months, since August 2006, causing numerous road closures for hours and the attendance of the Warwickshire Air Ambulance, can you provide me with a timeframe for when your review, following DfT Circular 01/2006 Setting Local Speed Limits, will be carried out as it is obviously only a matter of time before a further fatality occurs? I would like to present you with a detailed map showing the position of these serious accidents along the 2.1 mile

stretch of road in question, which as you can see in Appendix A, do not cluster in any one particular area, but due to the very nature of the road (blind junctions and bends, etc) affect the entire derestricted 60mph zone.

(2) Village Speed Limits Review

Thank you for your response to our questions raised at the last meeting Responded to via Philipa Young. I note that Philipa states 'the VSLR of A class roads is completed and villages on 'B' class roads are now being reviewed with works underway. Initial investigation into villages without 30mph speed limits on 'C' class roads has also commenced and the review of 'D' class roads will follow.' Due to housing developments causing growth in the area, particularly along the B4439 over the past few years, through barn conversions etc, and whilst ensuring the guidelines noted in DfT Circular 01/2004 are followed, we can show that this section of Lapworth fully qualifies as having village status and hence an automatic speed limit of 30mph. We would therefore like to know whether the review has already occurred for this section of Lapworth and if so what the outcome was, if not, when do you expect it to be reviewed and will we be able to see the results of the review at that time? I would like to put forward a further map (Appendix B) which shows the housing density in the area we refer to, taking the crossroads at Church Lane/Grove Lane as the centre of the village and justifies the start and finish of the 30mph speed limit where numerous houses cluster.

In reply to question 1 –

Philippa Young referred to the criteria for prioritising casualty reduction schemes and suggested that Old Warwick Road might fall within the route safety scheme and could be included in the review of B roads engineering schemes, which would be taking place in the next financial year. She undertook to write to Mrs. Jay in April to inform her of the position.

With regard to speed limits Philippa Young referred to Agenda item 5, Speed Management Strategy, and said that the Area Committees would be asked to comment on the strategy and that “community concern” would be included in the criteria for prioritising schemes.

In reply to question 2 –

Philipa Young said that the B4439 Lapworth Road would be included in the Villages Speed Limit Review. She would, however, welcome any other evidence that could be provided by Mrs. Jay to support the inclusion of this stretch of road in the review. Mrs. Jay said she would circulate Plan B, referred to above, to Members and officers, because she had forgotten to bring copies to the meeting.

Councillor Josie Compton supported Mrs. Jay's request for speed limits and referred to another serious accident that had occurred on the Old Warwick Road and said she hoped that this accident had been included in the total of recorded accidents along this stretch of road.

In response Philippa Young said that she was unsure whether this accident had been included in the statistics and whether it would raise the priority of this stretch of road because it needed to be assessed alongside other A and B roads. She would, however, ensure that this accident was included in the statistics when the priority assessment was being carried out and would report to a future meeting of the Committee when the schemes had been prioritised.

3. Street Lighting Hours of Operation

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director for Environment and Economy which provided information on the options for savings for the street lighting energy budget by switching off all (or selected) street lights after midnight.

The Chair referred to a revised recommendation, which had been circulated, and invited comments. The Chair added that during the “Speed Dating” exercise he had gleaned from young people their concerns about being out after dark, which related to fear of crime and the effects on climate change. He highlighted that this issue would be extremely controversial and that it was essential, therefore, that whatever decision was reached, that there was wide consultation and was supported by the majority of Warwickshire residents.

During discussion the following comments were noted –

- (1) Members supported the revised recommendations but highlighted the controversial nature of this issue, which they said should not be underestimated.
- (2) That whatever the decision the light pollution from Birmingham and Coventry was enormous as compared to that produced by this county.
- (3) That young people’s fears and concerns should be taken on board.
- (4) That the issue was not necessary saving money or energy but that light pollution was a big issue.
- (5) That Members’ local knowledge would have an important and influential role in this consultation exercise.
- (6) That Members should have an open mind on this issue for the purpose of the consultation exercise.
- (7) That parish councils should be consulted in connection with them being responsible for footway lighting and advice offered to them about how to make their lighting more effective.
- (8) Some Members expressed opposition to the proposal, which they considered was based on saving money and referred to the public’s “fear of crime” which was an important factor in this debate.
- (9) That the County Council’s budget would be better spent on making its lighting more efficient than switching lights off.
- (10) That the Police should be included in the consultation and their views obtained.

Following further discussion the Committee:

1. agreed that further consideration be given to the principle of a reduction of up to 50% in street lighting levels when traffic flows are low and in suitable locations.
2. requests that the Police, Safer Neighbourhood Groups, CDRPs, local councils and residents (including older people and members of the Youth Parliament) are actively engaged in consultation before any reduction in street lighting hours of operation be implemented.
3. requests that following the undertaking of appropriate risk assessments each Area Committee identify those lights for which the hours of operation could be reduced with a limited number in each area being identified for trials, following consultation with local Members.
4. asks that the Officers –
 - (a) circulate the draft consultation document to all Members of the Committee before undertaking the consultation exercise.
 - (b) following the consultation exercise report back to the Committee before reporting to Cabinet.

4. Update on Maintenance of Highway Trees in Warwickshire, Verge Parking and Verge Maintenance

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director for Environment and Economy which updated Members on progress, following the report to the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 17 January 2006 on highway trees, and provided additional information on verge parking and maintenance.

The Chair proposed that recommendation (1) of the report be amended by the deletion of the words (after the comma) “and that Members consider appropriate funding for sustaining highway tree stock through replacement planting.

During discussion the following comments were noted –

- (1) That the creation of hard verges where appropriate was acceptable and welcomed but did not contribute and was contrary to the Local Transport Plan (LTP) targets.
- (2) That planning guidance restricted the number of parking places for developments and this had caused problems where there was dense development.
- (3) That damage to grass verges was of concern and parking on the verges restricted the ability to cut the grass.
- (4) Concern was expressed about creating hard verges and the impact on drainage of surface water.
- (5) That requests for verge parking could be dealt with by Area Committees provided that funding could be found or by developers contributions.
- (6) Concern was expressed that there was no budgetary provision to fund replacement highway trees.

Graeme Fitton, in response to Members' comments, said –

- (1) The Area Committees would be able to agree to hard verges but this could not be funded through the LTP budget and unlikely to be funded through the Safer Routes to School budget.
- (2) If house owners requested hard verges then this would be allowed provided that they paid for the costs of the work.

In reply to a question Ken Simons said that a County Council Tree Strategy was currently being formulated, in consultation with the district/borough officers. He added that some districts already had a tree strategy but the work that was being undertaken was to ensure that the County Council Strategy did not conflict with the districts' strategies.

The Committee –

- (1) Noted the progress on inspecting and maintaining highway trees and supports the current review of arrangements in the former Agency areas.
- (2) Recommended that Cabinet formally adopt the approach for dealing with requests to facilitate verge parking, as detailed in paragraph 5.1 of this report.

5. Speed Management Strategy.

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director for Environment and Economy. The report outlined the proposed draft Speed Management Strategy, for consideration by this Committee and ultimately Cabinet following the Committee's decision made at its meeting on 9 November 2006.

During discussion –

- (1) The Chair proposed that the criteria for prioritising schemes should include local communities' views.
- (2) Members considered that residents' views were most important in the prioritising of schemes.
- (3) Concern was expressed about the lack of new Government funding to review speed limits on A and B roads.
- (4) Members considered that the Strategy should be brought back to this Committee following consultation with the Area Committee and before reporting on to Cabinet.

The Committee –

- (1) agreed that the draft Speed Management Strategy should be submitted to the five Area Committees and to Warwickshire Police for comment.
- (2) asked the officers to submit a revised draft, which takes into account the views expressed at this meeting, by Area Committees and by Warwickshire

Police for consideration by this Committee prior to its ultimate submission to Cabinet.

(3) supported the officers' view that in April 2007 they should commence the technical parts of the review of the speed limits on A and B roads requested in Circular 1/2006.

(4) asked the officers to circulate to Members the proposed criteria for prioritising speed limit requests to include community views.

6. Warwickshire Rural Strategy – Nomination of Members to Working Group

The Committee agreed, having considered the report of the Strategic Director for Performance and Development to appoint Councillors John Appleton, Eithne Goode and Ray Sweet to join a new Warwickshire Rural Strategy Working Group

7. Future Work Programme and Items Relevant to the Work of this Committee

(a) Provisional Items for Future Meetings

The Chair invited comments on the work programme and suggestions for future items, which he said would be brought to the next meeting and scheduled for discussion first on the agenda as a substantive item. He asked that all suggestions be channelled through the party spokespersons and that the issues be strategic in nature rather than local issues.

The Committee agreed that the –

- (1) party spokespersons be asked to bring forward suggestions for strategic issues for consideration by the Committee.
- (2) future work programme be scheduled first on the agenda of the next meeting as a substantive item for discussion.

(b) Forward Plan Item

The Committee noted the Forward Plan items relevant to the work of this Committee.

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Chair of Committee

The Committee rose at 11:50 p.m.