

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT & TRANSPORT CABINET COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone. on Thursday, 17 March 2022.

PRESENT: Mr S Holden (Chairman), Mr C Beart, Mr I S Chittenden, Mr N J Collor, Mr D Crow-Brown, Ms M Dawkins, Mr M Dendor, Mr A R Hills, Mr M Hood, Mrs S Hudson, Mr D Jeffrey, Mr B H Lewis, Mr H Rayner, Mr A Sandhu, MBE, Mr D Watkins and Mr A Weatherhead

ALSO PRESENT: Mr D L Brazier (Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport) and Miss S J Carey (Cabinet Member for Environment)

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr S Jones (Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport), Mrs S Holt-Castle (Director of Growth and Communities), Mr P Lightowler (Interim Director of Transportation) and Ms E Kennedy (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

62. Election of Vice Chairman

(Item 2)

1. The chairman proposed and Mr Hills seconded that Mr Collor be elected vice-chairman of the committee.
2. Ms Dawkins proposed and Mr Hood seconded that Mr Lewis be elected vice-chairman of the committee.
3. Members voted on the election of vice-chairman.
4. It was agreed by majority vote that Mr Collor be elected vice-chairman of the committee.

RESOLVED that Mr Collor be elected vice-chairman of the committee.

63. Declarations of Interest by Members in items on the Agenda

(Item 5)

1. Mr Jeffrey declared, in relation to Item 9 (22/00022 - Active Travel Funding Tranche 2), that he had been employed by a business on one of the proposed active travel routes and that this had been disclosed in his Register of Interests.
2. No other declarations were received.

64. Minutes of the meetings held on 18 January and 18 February 2022

(Item 6)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings held on 18 January and 18 February 2022 were an accurate record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

65. Verbal Updates by Cabinet Members and Corporate Director

(Item 7)

1. Miss Carey gave a verbal update. She reminded the committee that her quarterly waste management briefing had recently been circulated to all members and noted that her environment briefing would be circulated soon, including a summary of Lord Deben's (Chairman of the Climate Change Committee) visit to Kent on 8 March. She highlighted the public response to the Solar Together collective buying scheme, which was open to households, small businesses and community groups, with almost 10,000 people registering interest in the scheme. She explained the scheme's benefits, which included reduced individual unit costs as a result of the collective buying model.
2. Mr Brazier gave a verbal update. He shared the intention to permit one day conditional road closures, for the purpose of street parties to celebrate the Platinum Jubilee. He noted that he had recently visited, with the Leader and Deputy Leader, the Thanet Parkway station which was under construction and is due to open in May 2023. He informed members that he had visited Dover for the ground-breaking of Dover Fastrack, Kent's first zero-emission bus service, which when complete in 2023 will connect Whitfield, White Cliffs Business Park, the town centre and Port. He concluded that he had attended the Prince Michael International Road Safety Awards in London.
3. Mr Jones gave a verbal update. He detailed the schemes delivered by KCC and financed through the Department for Transport's Safer Roads Fund. He confirmed that the A290 scheme in Ashford had received an award from Prince Michael of Kent for its contribution to road safety. He addressed the operational response to Storms Eunice and Franklin and noted that in excess of 1200 public enquires were received and responded to over the period. He reminded members that the public consultation for Plan Tree was open and that the Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan consultation had concluded, with officers subsequently analysing the feedback.

RESOLVED that the verbal updates be noted.

66. Decisions taken between Cabinet Committee Meetings

(Item 8)

1. Mr Brazier explained that he had taken key decision 22/00018 (Highway Rural Swathe Contract Maintenance Frequencies), which permitted two swathe cuts with tiered conservation cuts, between Cabinet Committee meetings in order to allow for a 1 April 2022 contract start date and contractors the time to mobilise.

RESOLVED to note that decision 22/00018: Highway Rural Swathe Contract - Maintenance Frequencies was taken between meetings of the Cabinet Committee in accordance with the process set out in the Council's constitution.

67. 22/00022 - Active Travel Funding Tranche 2
(Item 9)

RESOLVED to endorse the proposed decision of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport to proceed to consideration of alternative options for Thanet, Gravesend, and Folkestone Active Travel Schemes.

68. 22/00023 - Transport for the South East continuation of voluntary participation
(Item 10)

Mark Welch (Principal Transport Planner) was in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Brazier explained the proposed decision, the role of Transport for the South East and that the participant councils provided match funding, with the Department for Transport providing the main portion of funding. He informed the committee that the Leader of the Council would be the decision taker as Strategic Partnerships fell within his portfolio.
2. Mr Rayner asked how KCC ensured that it received representation proportionate to its large road network. Mr Welch confirmed that in addition to the main body, that KCC was part of a subregion study group alongside Medway Council and East Sussex County Council, which gave the Council further input into area specific investigations.
3. Mr Lewis asked whether the Council's financial contributions to Transport for the South East had improved transport outcomes for Kent and if it presented good value for money. Mr Watkins, as KCC's board member on Transport for the South East, reassured the committee that Kent's voice was heard and that the authority was appropriately represented. He explained the importance of the body's studies and stated that it proved good value for money. He noted the Department for Transport's preference for working with subregional transport bodies when building multi-authority encompassing infrastructure.
4. Mr Lewis moved and Ms Dawkins seconded an amendment to add "and at the same time investigate the setting up of a Transport for Kent body" to the recommendation.
5. Mr Rayner moved and Mrs Hudson seconded that the amendment be put. This was carried.
6. Members voted on the amendment. The amendment was lost.

RESOLVED to endorse the proposed decision of the Leader of the Council to agree to:

1. Kent County Council continuing to participate in a non-statutory voluntary Sub National Transport Body (SNTB) for the South East, known as Transport for the South East (TfSE), at the cost, for the purposes, and with the membership, set out in the accompanying report; and

2. Delegate to the Corporate Director Growth, Environment and Transport to take, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, the actions necessary to implement the decision subject to the Council's decision-making procedures.

69. 22/00025 - Bearsted Road Improvement Scheme

(Item 11)

Lee Burchill (Major Capital Programme Manager) and Barry Stiff (Senior Project Manager) were in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Burchill gave a technical overview of the Road Improvement Scheme and confirmed that funding from the Department for Transport's National Productivity Investment Fund (NPIF) would cover a significant portion of the scheme's costs.
2. Mr Chittenden described his monitoring of the scheme's development, in his capacity as a local member. He raised concerns that there had been inadequate public notice that the plan for the scheme had changed, from a three-lane highway with a low retaining wall to a four-lane dual carriageway with a four-metre-high wall. He stated that there had been a lack of consultation on scheme, as it was proposed, and that the scheme as it stood would negatively impact the rural landscape adjacent to the road.
3. Mr Burchill confirmed that the proposed four-lane dual carriageway would ease future maintenance and ensured less disruption to traffic. Mr Stiff reassured members that extensive ecology surveys had been carried out and that the dual carriageway and three lane options were similar in overall footprint.
4. Mr Brazier and Mr Jones confirmed that they were satisfied with professional assurance received in relation to the scheme.
5. Mr Chittenden asked that further information related to the professional assurance received in relation to the scheme be shared with members and published. Mr Stiff agreed to share the scheme's ecology and other advisory reports with members following the meeting.
6. Mr Chittenden moved and Mr Lewis seconded a motion "that the Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee recommend that the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport investigate and ensure that all investigations, consultations and reports including landscaping and planning in relation to biodiversity are in place and prior to proceeding with the work it is brought back to this committee for final recommendation."

7. Members voted on the motion. The motion was lost.
8. The chairman moved “that the Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee endorse the proposed decision of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport to give approval to:
- i) Adopt The Bearsted Road dualling scheme shown on Drg. No. 70040984-SK-0086 for development control, land charge disclosures and implementation;
 - ii) Retain the current scheme for widening Bearsted Road to three lanes scheme shown on Drg. No. 70040984-SK-0087;
 - iii) Delegate the decision to decide which of the two scheme options (Drg. No. 70040984-SK-0086 or Drg. No.70040984-SK-0087) is delivered to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment & Transport under the Officer Scheme of Delegations following the views of this Committee and after prior consultation with the Cabinet Member;
 - iv) Give authority to enter into the appropriate land, development and funding agreements and the award of the construction contract, and all other acts and consents and any subsidiary contracts required to allow the scheme to be implemented;
 - v) Delegate to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment & Transport under the Officer Scheme of Delegations following prior consultation with the Cabinet Member, any further or other decisions as may be appropriate to deliver the Bearsted Road scheme;
 - vi) Confirm that other decisions in Record of Decision 18/00026 remain extant.”
9. Members voted on the motion. The motion was carried.

RESOLVED to endorse the proposed decision of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport to give approval to:

- i) Adopt The Bearsted Road dualling scheme shown on Drg. No. 70040984-SK-0086 for development control, land charge disclosures and implementation;
- ii) Retain the current scheme for widening Bearsted Road to three lanes scheme shown on Drg. No. 70040984-SK-0087;
- iii) Delegate the decision to decide which of the two scheme options (Drg. No. 70040984-SK-0086 or Drg. No.70040984-SK-0087) is delivered to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment & Transport under the Officer Scheme of Delegations following the views of this Committee and after prior consultation with the Cabinet Member;
- iv) Give authority to enter into the appropriate land, development and funding agreements and the award of the construction contract, and all other acts and consents and any subsidiary contracts required to allow the scheme to be implemented;
- v) Delegate to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment & Transport under the Officer Scheme of Delegations following prior consultation with the Cabinet Member,

any further or other decisions as may be appropriate to deliver the Bearsted Road scheme; and

vi) Confirm that other decisions in Record of Decision 18/00026 remain extant.

70. 22/00026 - Heritage Conservation Strategy
(Item 12)

Lis Dyson (Heritage Conservation Manager) was in attendance for this item.

1. Miss Carey gave a verbal overview of the key decision and read a statement prepared by Mr Ridgers, KCC's heritage champion and chairman of the Heritage Member Working Group, which spoke of the importance of protecting Kent's historical artefacts and infrastructure, with the strategy acting as the Council's guide in this regard.
2. Ms Dyson addressed the response to the public consultation, which had been overwhelmingly positive. She noted that whilst still positive, the policies relating to metal detecting on the KCC estate aspect of the strategy were less popular. She confirmed that a new strategic aim had been added in relation to climate change, as a result of the consultation.
3. The chairman emphasised the importance of strengthening planning in relation to heritage buildings.
4. Mr Lewis asked whether there were any plans to involve school children in heritage. Ms Dyson confirmed that many of KCC's heritage sites had school visits, which were impacted by the pandemic. She confirmed that a full range of school visits would be facilitated from April 2022.

RESOLVED to endorse the proposed decision of the Cabinet Member for Environment to agree to adopt the revised Heritage Conservation Strategy.

71. 22/00029 - Solar Farm
(Item 13)

Jonathan White (Project and Operations Manager) was in attendance for this item.

1. Miss Carey explained the purpose of the key decision and reminded members that it would be funded through the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme. She highlighted the tight timescale of the proposed decision, which was a result of contractual and funding deadlines. She confirmed that the solar farm would save KCC more than £760,000 a year in energy costs. Reassurance was given that a report would be brought to the committee, addressing the spending of KCC's £20.6m Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme grant, including the net impact on carbon reduction and energy use.
2. Mr Rayner asked whether there was flooding mitigation on the solar farm. Mr White confirmed that flooding mitigations were in place, with the panels 1.2m above ground level.

3. Mr Chittenden asked if the solar farm had been connected to the national grid and why some warranties were only 2 years. Mr White confirmed that the solar farm was connected to the national grid, that all panels and inverters were new, and that warranties were dependent on specific pieces of equipment, with the contactor warranty period lasting for 2 years followed by the manufacturer warranty.
4. Mr Hood asked whether the Council could renew the lease on the solar farm's land. Mr White confirmed that there was the potential to renew the lease at the appropriate time.
5. Mrs Hudson asked whether the solar panels were sourced from ethical suppliers. Mr White confirmed that whilst the panels were produced in China, due diligence had been carried out to ensure that the manufacturer was not involved in forced labour practices in Xinjiang.

RESOLVED to endorse the proposed decision of the Cabinet Member for Environment to:

1. Support the purchase, by Commercial Services Kent Limited, of the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV), via the deployment of £14.415M of Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) Funding (see decision 21/00034 for further details on PSDS Funding).
2. For the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport in consultation with the Director of Infrastructure and the Corporate Director of Finance, to transfer the necessary PSDS funding to Commercial Services Kent Limited for the purchase of the SPV, subject to:
 - the terms and conditions of the PSDS grant being met;
 - the technical, legal, and due diligence conclusions being acceptable to KCC;
 - and that the remaining funding for the project can be secured.
3. Delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport to take relevant actions, including, but not limited to, entering into contract and other legal agreements as required to arrange and deliver this project.

72. Green Economy - Prospects and Opportunities

(Item 14)

1. Miss Carey introduced the report and welcomed the committee's steer on further areas for consideration within the scope of the green economy.
2. Mrs Holt-Castle detailed the existing support and advice services that KCC offered to small to medium-sized enterprises. She confirmed that the 3 key carbon areas under investigation were: domestic housing; institutional buildings; and transport. She noted that the report would also be discussed by the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee.

3. Members highlighted the following areas for further investigation and consideration by the Cabinet Member and Cabinet Committee:
 - a. The chairman suggested green energy storage and security
 - b. Mr Hood suggested sustainable mass transport solutions
 - c. Mr Watkins suggested green skills, supply chains and housing
 - d. Mr Hills suggested green power solutions for the fishing industry
 - e. Ms Dawkins suggested green manufacturing and tidal energy
 - f. Mr Lewis suggested green food production
 - g. Mr Collor suggested high paid green job creation

RESOLVED that the current and planned activity to support the development of the green economy in Kent be noted.

73. Risk Register

(Item 15)

Jody Catterall (Risk Manager) was in attendance for this item.

1. Ms Catterall gave a verbal overview of the Risk Register, including Growth, Environment and Transport's two corporate and eleven directorate risks. She asked the committee for suggestions or amendments to the Register.
2. Mr Jeffrey asked that transport risks and the impact of significant public transport disruption be incorporated into the Risk Register.
3. Ms Dawkins asked that the cost of living be factored into the Risk Register.

RESOLVED to note and comment on the risks presented.

74. Performance Dashboard

(Item 16)

Rachel Kennard (Chief Analyst) was in attendance for this item.

1. Ms Kennard gave a verbal summary of the fourth performance dashboard of the 2021/22 financial year, which included the period up to December 2021. She confirmed that of the 19 key performance indicators within the remit of environment and transport, 15 had been RAG rated green, 3 amber and 1 red. She stated that this reflected good overall performance and that recruitment challenges, vacancies and staff sickness had been notable factors in the red rating.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

75. Work Programme

(Item 17)

RESOLVED that the work programme be noted.