

URBAN RENEWAL POLICY AND PERFORMANCE BOARD

At a meeting of the Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board held on Wednesday, 17 March 2010 at Civic Suite, Town Hall, Runcorn

Present: Councillors Hignett (Chairman), Morley (Vice-Chairman), Balmer, P. Blackmore, E. Cargill, Hodgkinson, Leadbetter, Nolan, Rowe and Thompson

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Murray and Polhill

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: M. Noone, C. Halpin, D. Cunliffe and S. Munikwa

Also in attendance: Councillors M. Bradshaw, D. Cargill, Lloyd Jones and Osborne

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

Action

URB52 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 6th January 2010 having been printed and circulated were signed as a correct record.

URB53 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

It was confirmed that one public question had been received.

As the question related to an item on the agenda it was agreed that the question would be answered under that item on the agenda (minute URB58 refers).

URB54 EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES

The Board considered the minutes of the meetings of the Executive Board, Executive Board Sub Committee, 3MG Executive Board and Mersey Gateway Executive Board.

RESOLVED: That the minutes be noted.

URB55 SSP MINUTES

The Board received the Minutes of the Urban Renewal Specialist Strategic Partnership held on 17th November 2009.

It was noted that as the Minutes were from November last year they were considered to be out of date. Clarification was sought as to how SSP's were reported to the appropriate Policy and Performance Boards. It was also requested that in future the Board receive the draft minutes of the SSP as soon as possible.

RESOLVED: That the Minutes be noted.

URB56 QUARTERLY MONITORING REPORTS

The Board received a report of the Chief Executive which detailed the Third Quarter Performance Management Report on progress against service plan objectives and performance targets, performance trends/comparisons and factors affecting services for:

- Highways, Transportation and Logistics;
- Environment and Regulatory Services;
- Health and Partnerships;
- Culture and Leisure;
- Economic Regeneration; and
- Major Projects

A member requested further information on grant funding for the 3MG scheme and it was agreed that a written response would be provided.

RESOLVED: That the Third Quarter Monitoring Report be noted.

URB57 IMPROVEMENTS STUDIES AND ACTIONS FOR VICTORIA ROAD, WIDNES, AND RUNCORN AND WIDNES TOWN CENTRES

The Board received a report of the Strategic Director, Environment, which provided the results of the study carried out by URBED consultants into the options for the regeneration of the Victoria Road area and the ideas which had been reviewed, discussed and researched to provide recommendations for future action.

The Board was advised that the consultants URBED & Partners had been appointed in March 2009 to consider options for the future of Victoria Road, Widnes. They had subsequently held a series of consultations with local

businesses to discuss the ideas which hopefully would lead to the improvement of the Victoria Road area. It was noted that the URBED report included three regeneration scenarios for the area.

The Board was further advised that in September 2009 a team of consultants, again led by URBED, was appointed to look at options for the future of Widnes Town Centre following the anticipated opening of the Widnes Shopping Park.

It was further noted that in October 2009 a grant of £53,000 had been made available by the Department for Communities and Local Government for improvement to town centres' retailing. The Executive Board Sub-Committee, at their meeting on 5th November 2009, agreed allocations of that grant to be split between Runcorn and Widnes, approximately 40% for Widnes and 60% for Runcorn, with a number of proposed town centre management schemes covering both towns, as set out in the report.

The Board received a presentation from Mr. J. Brown, URBED which set out the following:

- how the elements of the proposal would provide the area with a clear message, branding etc;
- the opportunities and possible benefits of being situated in the regeneration corridor between Manchester and Liverpool;
- the anticipated catchment figures for usage of the new shopping centre;
- the offer and benefits of shopping in Halton;
- the promotional work undertaken to date.

Arising from Members comments and questions the following was noted:

- that Widnes Town Centre had improved significantly over the last few years and that work was ongoing to regenerate the area, but Runcorn Town Centre required significant regeneration works;
- In Runcorn there was a need for additional parking, a greater variety of shops and a need for a more substantial night time economy; and
- Members requested that a seminar for all Members on the regeneration of Halton be arranged. It was agreed that this would be investigated.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the findings within the attached report be agreed by the Board; and
- (2) the possibility of a seminar on regeneration of Halton be explored.

URB58 WINTER MAINTENANCE SERVICE DELIVERY 2009/10

The Board received a report which reviewed the delivery of the Winter Maintenance Service so far during the 2009-2010 season and in particular, the response to the prolonged severe weather event in early January.

The Board was advised that last winter (2008-2009) was described as the coldest winter for over a decade with the heaviest snowfall for 18 years. In January this year, the Met Office was describing the UK as having the severest weather for decades and the most prolonged spell of freezing conditions across the UK since December 1981. Although these harsh winters had occurred back to back, the Met Office affirmed that these events were part of the normal regional variations that take place and that the natural variation of climate meant that the UK would continue to see these spells of colder weather at times.

These conditions had presented significant challenges to the Council in keeping the highway and transportation networks open and safe, and in minimising disruption to business and local services.

It was noted that in June 2009, the Board accepted a report on Halton's 2009/10 Winter Maintenance activities. The report set out the requirement and operational procedures contained in the Winter Maintenance Plan, a summary of operations undertaken that season, and details of national salt stock shortages. It also referred to additional funding that had been made available by Halton and St. Helens PCT and how it was intended that this allocation would be spent. The Board also resolved to increase gritting of footpaths around schools.

The Board was advised of recent changes to the plan and operations that had been implemented for the current year and these were set out in the report including the following:

- revisions to National Code of Practice for Highway

- Maintenance – Winter Service;
- Halton’s Winter Maintenance Plan;
 - winter service operations – December to January;
 - salt supply issues;
 - impact on Gritting Operations;
 - winter maintenance budget;
 - Halton and St. Helens PCT contribution to gritting;
 - grit storage bins;
 - implications for highway maintenance and repairs;
 - future winter service arrangements; and
 - business continuity – other Council services.

It was noted that the following public question was submitted to the Board:

“Why is Southward Avenue omitted from your gritting programme, it is the only road in and out of the estate, the heavy snowfall in January meant that people did not have access to employment and other services, all that was need that your gritting vehicles crossing over the busway to do the necessary work, there is too much emphasis on Castlefields, they have gritting bins, we need them insitu for next winter, you are making Windmill Hill into a ghetto, and ratepayers are being ignored. Absolute disgrace”.

In response it was noted that the questioner had requested a written response and it was agreed that this be sent as soon as possible.

It was noted that an invitation had been extended to members of the Safer Halton Policy and Performance Board (SHPPB) for them to attend the meeting. The Chairman of the Board invited the Members present to address the Board. In doing so the following was noted:

- concerns had been raised regarding the safety of pedestrians on footpaths; and
- SHPPB Members asked that they be invited to the June meeting of the Board when the provision of grit bins would be looked at in detail.

Arising from Members comments and questions the following was noted:

- the difference in the cost of grit across different local authorities and the different grades and treatments that were available be explained to the Board;
- that some of the local registered social landlords had indicated that they would be willing to fill grit bins if the Council provided them. It was noted that strong partnerships had been formed with many local

agencies over the severe weather conditions and that this would be looked into at the next briefing session;

- that secondary schools had been prioritised over primary schools due to the proximity of examinations for students;
- that due to the paving area around Somerfield/Co-op in Runcorn Town Centre being privately owned there had been issue with the area being gritted and it was agreed that a letter be sent to the owner.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report be noted;
- (2) a report, which reviews the benefits, logistics and cost implications in relation to the deployment of grit bins be brought to the next meeting of the Board.
- (3) a written response be provided to the questioner; and
- (4) a letter be sent to Somerfield/Co-op re: Gritting of pavement areas around the shop in Runcorn Old Town

URB59 HIGHWAY CAPACITY ISSUES - MURDISHAW ROUNDABOUT

The Board received a report of the Strategic Director – Environment, which advised Members of the extent and likely cause of congestion on the Murdishaw Avenue arm of the Murdishaw Roundabout, to consider the likely impact of the Linnets Football Club on traffic flows and road capacity, and to explore potential options for improving capacity.

The Board was advised that recent traffic surveys and observations had shown that highway capacity problems were occurring on the Murdishaw Avenue arm of the southern expressway – Murdishaw Avenue – Chester Road junction. Queues were experienced during the morning peak. These queues and the consequent delays along with the potential for rat running to adjacent residential areas, had been the cause of concern for some time.

Following specific concerns expressed by one of the elected Members for the area, Officers were recently requested to investigate the extent of the problem and report back on potential solutions.

It was noted that these issues were brought further into focus during the consideration of the proposal to

upgrade the existing sports ground to house the Runcorn Linnets Football Club. Whilst considering the application, it was not considered necessary to demand traffic flow information, as the applicant had stated that match traffic would be on Saturday afternoon and Tuesday evenings, which were outside of the morning peak period when the problem was most significant. It was agreed that the Chairman of the Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board and Development Control Committee would meet together with officers in order to agree a scope to address the traffic flow concerns in the surrounding area to Halton Sports.

The Board was further advised that a local safety scheme had been implemented at the roundabout in 2004. This scheme was designed to address a number of issues, including excessive speeds on the approaches and high circulatory speeds and loss of control/weaving incidents.

It was noted that generally, the operation of the roundabout had improved with the introduction of circulatory area from 2 lanes to 1, but capacity had been reduced, which resulted in queues in the morning.

The Board was advised that a possible solution to these queues may be to restore the Murdishaw Avenue approach to 2 lanes with separate turning markings, with a corresponding widening of the circulatory carriageway, downstream of this entry.

It was noted that as queue lengths increased, so did the pressure on drivers to take chances entering the roundabout and although not recorded by the policy as a factor, it was believed that many of the incidents stemmed from waiting drivers looking at the circulatory traffic flows and anticipating the behaviour of the driver in front. It was therefore considered worthwhile to install a barrier on a trial basis, monitoring accidents over 12 months, to block the view to the right for drivers travelling towards the roundabout from Murdishaw Avenue, to prevent this happening. The barrier/blocking would extend to within one car length of the give way line.

The Board was advised that restoring the circulatory area to two lanes immediately downstream of the Murdishaw Avenue access, would allow the Murdishaw Avenue approach to be widened to two dedicated lanes, as this side of the roundabout was not a particular problem area before the 2004 scheme. The Murdishaw Avenue access had been identified as an accident cluster site and had already been

scheduled to be considered as a local safety scheme for measures in 2010/11, so it was possible that a scheme could be implemented using existing budgets during the coming financial year.

The Board was further advised that, in addition, to the above analysis by Council officers, AOne+ were currently carrying out traffic assessments in the area on behalf of the Highways Agency, relating to the potential replacement of the A56 Bridge over the M56 motorway. The Council was awaiting their final traffic data and modelling results.

The report also set out a number of additional options which had been considered, as detailed in the report. The Board was advised that, in the short term, it was considered that the proposal discussed in the report should be progressed, as the preferred option, and that a detailed evaluation of its feasibility be carried out, with a view to its implementation during the next financial year. It was also proposed that the Highway Agency proposals should be studied in detail by Council Officers, to check where there would be any reduction in delays as a result of any of the agency schemes.

Finally, it was proposed that the outcome of these studies be conveyed to Elected Members for the area and the Chairman of the PPB.

Councillors D. Cargill and Lloyd Jones had attended the meeting as Ward Councillors and were invited to address the Board by the Chairman. In doing so they raised safety issues relating to the installation of a visibility barrier. It was noted that a safety audit would be taken before installation of the barrier and it was agreed that the Board be provided with examples of successful similar screen usage to that suggested.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the proposal discussed in Section 3.7 of this report should be progressed, as the preferred option, and that a detailed evaluation of its feasibility be carried out, with a view to its implementation during the next financial year, subject to feasibility, safety, and affordability constraints. Such a scheme would include widening of the Murdishaw Avenue approach and eastern side of the circulatory carriageway to two lanes, and installing visibility barriers on a trial basis;
- (2) the Highways Agency proposals should be studied in

detail by Council Officers, to check whether there will be any reduction in delays as a result of any other Agency Schemes;

- (3) the outcome of these studies be conveyed to the Elected Members for the area and the Chairman of this Board so that they will be aware of whether a scheme or safety measures can be progressed and when; and
- (4) the Board be provided with examples of successful similar screen usage to that suggested.

URB60 WIDNES WATERFRONT NWDA PERFORMANCE PLAN

The Board received a report of the Strategic Director, Environment which gave an update on the Widnes Waterfront North West Development Agency (NWDA) Performance Plan for the financial year 2010/11.

The Board was advised that for NWDA Schemes that lasted more than one year, it was a requirement of the scheme approval that the delivery organisation, in this case Halton Borough Council (HBC), prepared an Annual Performance Plan.

It was noted that in the last financial year up to March 2010, it was likely that £1,450,000 of NWDA would be claimed. This was only slightly less than originally anticipated. The main NWDA funded achievements from April 2009 to March 2010 were set out in the report and further details were contained in Section 2 of the draft Performance Plan 2010/11.

The Performance Plan was for the 5th and final year of the NWDA Funding Programme. The Plan must be agreed with the NWDA before new expenditure was incurred for which the grant would be claimed.

The Performance Plan summarised what the Widnes Waterfront Scheme was intending to achieve in 2010/11.

The Board was advised that the Performance Plan would also enable the Widnes Waterfront Programme Manager to review the progress and activity in the Widnes Waterfront as part of the monitoring and evaluation progress.

It was noted that key projects identified for 2010/11 were Project Appraisal, the HIVE Leisure Development and

Programme Evaluation.

RESOLVED: That the Annual Widnes Waterfront
NWDA Performance Plan for 2010/11 be endorsed.

Meeting ended at 8.43 p.m.