



Place Overview
Committee

3 September 2020

10.00 am

Item

3

Public

**MINUTES OF THE PLACE OVERVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 3
SEPTEMBER 2020
10.00 AM - 12.35 PM**

Responsible Officer: Sarah Townsend
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Present

Councillor Joyce Barrow (Chairman)
Councillors Andy Boddington, Julian Dean, Rob Gittins, Paul Milner (Vice Chairman),
Dan Morris, Pamela Moseley, Paul Wynn and Nicholas Bardsley (Substitute) (substitute
for William Parr)

62 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Simon Harris and William Parr. Councillor Nick Bardsley was in attendance as a substitute for Councillor William Parr.

63 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

Members were reminded that they must not participate in the discussion or voting on any matter in which they had a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest and should leave the room prior to the commencement of the debate.

There were no Disclosable Pecuniary Interests declared.

64 Minutes of the Meeting held on 6 March 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 6th March 2020 were confirmed as a correct record.

65 Public Question Time

Three questions were received from members of the public.

From: Peter Clare, Member Selattyn and Gobowen Parish Council

Mr Clare's question related to significant development adjacent to inadequate, poorly maintained and often dangerous single track lanes. A full copy of the question and response provided is attached to the web page for the meeting and also attached to the signed minutes.

From: Martin Latham, Hengoed Lanes Group

Mr Latham's question related to the lanes of Hengoed having been subject to a huge increase in the volume and weight of traffic, due to the granting of planning permission and who was responsible for paying for the repairs to the damage caused on these lanes. A full copy of the question and response provided is attached to the web page for the meeting and also attached to the signed minutes.

From: Ms Janet Cobb, Restoring Shropshire's Verges Project

Ms Cobb's question related to whether Shropshire Council would consider splitting the Highways contract and bringing the Highways contract for country lanes back 'in house' to be managed locally. A full copy of the question and response provided is attached to the web page for the meeting and also attached to the signed minutes.

66 Member Question Time

One question was received from Councillor Ruth Houghton.

Councillor Houghton was in attendance to ask her question in relation to how the Council proposed to address the issues of litter, damages to verges and paths, parking in field gateways preventing farmer access and dogs off leads around livestock within Shropshire's beauty spots following the easing of the lockdown across the Country. A full copy of the question and response provided is attached to the web page for the meeting and also attached to the signed minutes.

67 Agricultural Vehicles and Rural Roads

The committee received the report of the Assistant Director of Infrastructure which reviewed the impact on the highway network in relation to agricultural vehicles and rural roads and recommended opportunities for future review.

Mr Mark Barrow (Director of Place), Mr Steven Brown (Head of Transport and Environment), Ms Karen Collier (Regulatory Services Operations Manager), Ms Clare Featherstone (Culture, Leisure and Tourism Manager), Mr Ian Kilby (Head of Planning Services), Mr Steve Smith (Assistant Director of Infrastructure) and Mr Andy Wilde (Interim Head of Highways) were in attendance on behalf of Shropshire Council to present this item.

Mr Paul Brereton (Farmer from Market Drayton), Mr Mark Taylor (Director of Farming for Yareal UK Ltd), Mr Robert Newbery (West Midlands Regional Director, National

Farmers Union (NFU)), Mr Thomas Price (Farm Safety and Farm Transport Policy Advisor, NFU), Mr Rod Lake (Traffic Management Advisor, West Mercia Police), Miss Charity Pearce (Assistant Policy Officer, Police and Crime Commissioner) and PC Tim Viner (West Mercia Police) were in attendance for this item, having been invited as guests.

The chairman of the committee introduced this item explaining that she had received numerous complaints concerning agricultural vehicles and damage to the countryside and heritage sites, particularly, damage to verges, highways, blocked drains, stones and mud in the road not being cleared up. Several photographs were displayed supporting these concerns.

During the discussion and responding to questions from the committee, it was explained:

- 46% of Shropshire's road network is considered to be rural road and as Shropshire is a largely rural county with a thriving agricultural sector, it is impacted by the issue of agricultural vehicles on rural roads far more than other local authorities.
- The issue of maintenance of rural roads is considered to be a national issue with approximately 15.67% of all unclassified roads being considered in need of repair. Shropshire has 16% of unclassified roads needing repair.
- Many rural roads are narrow historic lanes, which have not been designed and constructed to meet modern needs and as agricultural equipment has evolved over the years, growing both heavier and wider, an overrunning of verges in order to allow vehicles to pass on these highways is often seen.
- Mr Brereton raised concerns regarding the speeding of tractors on both rural roads and A and B roads, the exceeding of the maximum weight of tractor and trailer combinations, the young age of tractor drivers, the using of mobile phones whilst driving agricultural vehicles, the width of farm vehicles and the inappropriate use of lights on the front and top of tractor cabs.
- It was noted that in 2018 there were approximately 230,000 vehicles involved in road accidents in the United Kingdom. Of these, approximately 500 were agricultural vehicles.
- West Mercia Police commented that educating the farming, contracting and local communities was extremely important as whilst the policing of Shropshire roads was a priority, there were not enough police officers to police all of the roads all of the time. They also stated that various agricultural campaigns and policies were in place to address issues such as mud left on the road by agricultural vehicles. It was noted that West Mercia Police would put together a programme in which they would engage with the farming community, particularly Shropshire Young Farmers and the agricultural colleges.
- Operation SNAP is an initiative whereby members of the public can report and submit digital footage showing potential traffic offences that they have witnessed, and this also included agricultural vehicles. The footage is then looked at by the police and appropriate action taken, including prosecution. It is well publicised on the internet and Facebook.
- The NFU commented that illegal and illegitimate movements and activities concerning agricultural vehicles were in the minority and that in their experience, contractors operated highly skilled professional businesses, were well trained and experienced and generally used up to date, modern and well-

maintained equipment. They explained that information regarding the law was regularly communicated to members.

- Mr Taylor commented that compared to years ago, there was a lot more traffic on the roads, including the minor roads. In terms of the amount of movements of agricultural vehicles and particularly tractors, this has reduced as they had become larger over the years.
- It was felt that the size of agricultural vehicles could be quite intimidating, particularly when passing them.
- The importance of Section 106 (S106) agreements as a means of making improvements to the highway network was discussed, particularly routeing plans to mitigate traffic impacts when new buildings are proposed and the provision of passing places in rural areas.
- It was suggested that farmers could help prevent damage to highways by retaining more water on their land by the planting of trees and having better dug ditches. This would stop some of the water, particularly from flash flooding, from going onto the highways and causing damage.
- It was noted that Shropshire Council's Code of Practice for agricultural vehicles on rural roads required updating. The NFU commented that they would be happy to be engaged with this.
- In response to a question, West Mercia Police confirmed that if a tractor was found to be exceeding the speed limit, this would be dealt with as if a car was caught speeding.
- Concerns regarding damage to heritage sites should be reported to the Council's Historic Environment Team by calling 0345 678 9000 or emailing: historic.environment@shropshire.gov.uk
- Both the Police and the NFU indicated that they were happy to be involved in any working liaison group that were to be set up between themselves and the Council.
- English Heritage had been invited to attend the meeting but had sent their apologies. A statement was read out on their behalf which stated that incidents of substantial damage to national important heritage assets by agricultural vehicles appeared to be rare, especially considering the number of movements they make. The most common form of damage was down to vehicles (of all types) striking the counties many protected bridges.
- The Director of Place asked whether the NFU would be willing to issue an advice note addressing some of the issues that had been raised particularly regarding speed, local stewardship and damage to hedgerows. He also suggested that priorities for passing points and signage be flagged up in Place Plans so that resources such as the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) could help support the potential development of them.

RESOLVED:

1. That Shropshire Council set up a liaison group with West Mercia Police and the National Farmers' Union of England and Wales (NFU) to consider matters regarding agricultural vehicles and rural roads.
2. That Shropshire Council's Code of Practice for agricultural vehicles on rural roads be updated.

It was agreed that Shropshire Council would provide the administration for the liaison group and act as Chair. Councillor Bardsley and Mr Brereton indicated that they

were interested in being part of this group. The importance of members of the public knowing who they could contact should they have any issues was emphasised.

The Chairman of the Committee thanked everyone who had taken part in this item and for their attendance.

68 Biodiversity

The committee received the report of the Regulatory Services Operations Manager which provided an overview of the ecology work carried out by Shropshire Council's Regulatory Services, including how the team supports the Council to discharge its statutory biodiversity duty.

Ms Karen Collier (Regulatory Services Operations Manager), Ms Clare Featherstone (Culture, Leisure and Tourism Manager) and Ms Sue Swales (Ecology Team Leader) were in attendance to present this item.

During the discussion and responding to questions from the committee, it was explained:

- The Ecology Team provides ecology expertise to a broad range of services and projects which have an influence over biodiversity with partnership working being a key feature.
- A member of staff had been seconded into the Task Group of the Climate Change Action Group.
- A Green Infrastructure Strategy had been commissioned by the Council's Planning Policy Department as part of the Local Plan Review with the Ecology Team providing expert strategic and technical support throughout the process. The Strategy can be accessed by clicking on the following link:
<http://shropshire.gov.uk/media/15654/green-infrastructure-strategy-main-report.pdf>
- The Environment Bill which is currently in its passage through Parliament requires the mapping of Nature Recovery Networks and the production of Local Nature Recovery Strategies in order to identify where there is really good habitat, including wetlands and woodlands, and where restoration efforts need to be targeted in order to increase the amount of habitats.
- A question was asked regarding Rad Valley / Kingsland Valley between Longden Road and Kingsland in Shrewsbury. It was explained that this area is greatly valued in terms of its biodiversity and is part of the natural green corridor. It has had a number of planning permission requests, all of which had been turned down. It was explained that this was both a planning issue and a biodiversity issue and that legislation and national and local planning policies would be applied when addressing any planning application that was received.
- A Member commented that they wanted to consider Biodiversity Net Gain and particularly how it would be implemented, and the processes involved, at a future committee meeting. The Chairman stated that she was happy with this.

RESOLVED:

That the report of the Regulatory Services Operations Manager be noted and that the topic of Biodiversity remains on the Committee's Work Programme.

69 Work Programme

The committee considered its proposed work programme for the remainder of the municipal year. The following points were raised:

- That an examination into the effectiveness of the customer service part of the highways reporting system be considered. The Overview and Scrutiny Officer confirmed that this was due to be considered at the 28th January 2021 meeting.
- That the Director of Place provide a written report on the Shrewsbury Shopping Centres agenda item due to be considered at the 5th November 2020 meeting.

RESOLVED:

With the submission of a written report on the Shrewsbury Shopping Centres agenda item at the 5th November 2020 meeting, the committee’s work programme for 2020-21 was noted.

70 Date/Time of Next Meeting of the Committee

Members noted that the next meeting of the Place Overview Committee was scheduled for 10.00 am on Thursday, 5th November 2020.

71 Exclusion of Press and Public

The meeting of the Place Overview Committee ended at this point and therefore, this item was not considered.

72 Exempt Minutes of the Last Meeting

The Chairman stated that the exempt minutes of the Place Overview Committee meeting held on 6th March 2020 would be considered at the next meeting of the committee.

Signed (Chairman)

Date: