

PLANNING & TRANSPORTATION CABINET ADVISORY BOARD

Monday, 21 August 2017

**Present: Councillor Alan McDermott (Chairman)
Councillors Elliott (Vice-Chairman), Backhouse, Bland, Hamilton, Hills, Neve and Stanyer**

Officers in Attendance: Rosemarie Bennett (Parking Manager), Diane Brady (Civic Development Manager), Jane Clarke (Head of Policy and Governance), Lee Colyer (Director of Finance, Policy and Development) and Mike McGeary (Democratic Services Officer)

Other Members in Attendance: Councillors Basu, Podbury and Simmons

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

PT19/17 Apologies for absence were reported from Councillors Hannam, Rankin and Scholes.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

PT20/17 There were no declarations of interest made, within the provisions of the Code of Conduct for Members.

NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS WISHING TO SPEAK

PT21/17 The Democratic Services Officer advised that there were no other members of the Council who had registered their wish to address the Board, within the provisions of Council Meetings Procedure Rule 18.

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

PT22/17 The minutes of the Board meeting dated 10 July 2017 were submitted.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Board meeting dated 10 July 2017 be agreed.

PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION CABINET ADVISORY BOARD - WORK PROGRAMME

PT23/17 The Board received its work programme for the period up to 31 January 2018, which was based on the issues set out in the Council's Forward Plan.

RESOLVED – That the work programme be noted.

REVISED FIVE YEAR PLAN

PT24/17 Jane Clarke, the Head of Policy and Governance, reported on the outcome of a period of formal consultation with councillors, stakeholders and members of the public on the draft Five Year Plan.

Ms Clarke began by pointing to the successes already achieved in the current version of the Five Year Plan, which had first been approved in 2014 and which covered the period up to 2019. She added that the revised version of the Plan, which would be for the period 2017 to 2022, took account of the substantial changes within which local government currently operated, since

the first Plan had been approved. Ms Clarke said that the draft Plan also incorporated advice received from the peer challenge which the authority had invited the Local Government Association to carry out.

Appended to the report, Ms Clarke had summarised all of the representations made during the consultation period, within the three categories listed above. Ms Clarke also drew attention to Appendix E – the Equalities Impact Assessment. She advised that one issue of significance which this assessment revealed was concern over the lack of rural bus services, which the respondent said made it difficult for elderly and disabled residents to access Council services. Ms Clarke said that, while the Borough Council was not the responsible authority for bus services, this was an issue which was being discussed with the County Council and other agencies.

Members of the Advisory Board considered the report, the revised Five Year Plan and the recommendations. The only issue raised by members was made by Councillor Neve: he suggested that the word 'host' on page 42 – used as the Council's response to comments made by Mr Neilson – should in fact be 'hosting'. This was accepted by Ms Clarke, who said that this would be corrected.

RESOLVED – That the recommendations set out in the report be supported.

CRESCENT ROAD CAR PARK EXTENSION

PT25/17 Diane Brady, the Civic Development Manager, advised that RIBA Stage 3 (Developed Design) work had now been completed, resulting in the presentation of a proposal for an extension to the Crescent Road car park. She added that the scheme would provide 96 new parking bays, together with 26 cycling stands and space allocated for electric bikes for future installation.

Ms Brady said that, if the scheme were approved, it was planned to undertake refurbishment work to the existing car park structure, which would be co-ordinated alongside the proposed extension.

Ms Brady drew attention to two exempt appendices to the report: the first provided indicative budget costs and a demonstration of the payback period and the second set out the proposed project programme.

Rosemarie Bennett, the Parking Manager, set out how the proposed car park extension would support many of the objectives of the Council's Parking Strategy. She added that, alongside that, other initiatives would still be examined, such as park and ride schemes, as well as making best use of further technological advances in transportation.

Mrs Bennett added that the extension proposal was a sensible, practical response to a demand which already existed, made all the more significant because of three important factors: (i) the closure of the Union House car park; (ii) the displacement of on-street car parking due to a programme of improvements for residents in town centre parking zones; and (iii) the higher occupancy rates that Crescent Road already enjoyed, meaning that demand was at its highest at this location.

Mrs Bennett acknowledged the point made by a number of groups that alternative modes of transport might obviate the need for additional car parking space. However, she said that the evidence was very much that

alternative modes of transport were some years away from general acceptance and use, stressing that the matter had to be addressed at this point.

A number of people had registered to speak on this issue as follows:

Jane Fenwick spoke in her capacity as the Chair of the Town Forum's Transport Working Group. She said that the extension proposal for Crescent Road was premature, as the authority had not yet decided whether to proceed with a new civic development (and the resultant loss of both the Great Hall and the Mount Pleasant Avenue car parks).

Mrs Fenwick also referred to the Council's car park occupancy report, which had said that there was significant capacity within the Borough Council's other town centre car parks to accommodate the additional 96 spaces proposed. Mrs Fenwick believed that the proposal would also lead to an exacerbation of the existing congestion problems in this area of the town; she also felt that it would work contrary to some of the Council's 'healthy Borough' aspirations, through its adverse impact on air quality and healthier lifestyles.

Mrs Fenwick encouraged the Council to refocus its investment not on parking for polluting personal vehicles but on future transport methods, where 'dial up' vehicles, cycling, walking and improved public transport systems would be the norm.

Finally, Mrs Fenwick asked why the plan in Appendix A did not include the Town Hall car park yard within the red line boundary and also what was the fate of 30-33 Crescent Road, buildings which were in that boundary.

Jennifer Hemming spoke next; she addressed the Board in her capacity as representative of the Calverley Park Gardens Residents' Association. Mrs Hemming said that the Residents' Association had been formed principally to try and address the issue of traffic congestion and flow, adding that the extension proposal would greatly worsen the situation. Mrs Hemming added that KCC had now accepted the Residents' Association assertion that the existing traffic flow around the Carrs Corner roundabout presented some hazards for pedestrians, which needed to be addressed. Mrs Hemming said that, by approving the extension scheme – and adding to the problems of traffic flow – the dangers to pedestrians would only become worse. She therefore urged the Borough Council not to proceed with this scheme.

Paul Mason, representing the Tunbridge Wells Bicycle Users' Group, spoke next. He said that the unwelcome result of the proposed car park extension would be to create yet more congestion in the town centre. Mr Mason added that, of even greater significance, the authority was ignoring technology and behaviour that would see people moving to driverless vehicles and healthier means of travel far more quickly than the Council would see any return on its investment.

Mr Mason urged the Council to abandon these proposals, cut its losses and, if it wished to invest funds of a similar magnitude, to do so in park and ride schemes or in good quality cycle paths.

Ms Brady and Mrs Bennett responded to some of the points made: (i) Ms Brady said that the red line boundary on the site plan merely indicated the extent of the Council's original acquisition of the land and buildings, within

one land title; (ii) Ms Brady also advised that, should the Council proceed with a planning application for this proposal, it would be required to provide evidence on traffic generation and congestion; (iii) Mrs Bennett emphasised that, while it was accepted that other transport modes would emerge, the demand for additional spaces was immediate and, with other initiatives to improve residents' parking, it was a demand which would only increase.

Members of the Advisory Board considered the report and its appendices and raised the following issues:

- The Chairman, Councillor McDermott, sought confirmation that the town currently had over 1,200 free, on-street car park spaces, a figure which the authority would like to see reduced in order to provide improved facilities for residents. Mrs Bennett confirmed this to be the case.
- Councillor Stanyer said that he had been in favour of the extension proposals when they had first been discussed in February; having heard the compelling case put forward, he reiterated his support for the scheme. Councillor Stanyer added that there were additional restaurants being established in the town centre, as well as a new cinema complex within RVP, all of which would add to the night-time economy, where residents would be expecting to find car parking facilities easily available.
- Councillor Neve drew attention to recommendation (1) and asked whether the Cabinet report referred to (where approval had been given to the developed design phase) had been published. Mr Colyer, the Director of Finance, Policy and Development, confirmed that this had been published and provided Councillor Neve with a copy;
- Councillor Hamilton said that she was in favour of the proposal, but added that she also accepted that modes of transport would change. She felt that, at the point where car park use reduced significantly or even became redundant, the buildings would lend themselves to an alternative use. Councillor Hamilton also asked for confirmation that the proposed extension work would be undertaken at the same time as the maintenance work on the existing structure. Ms Brady confirmed that this was the intention.
- Councillor Elliott said that he was already an electric bike user and that he welcomed the proposed inclusion of space within the extension for the future installation of electric bikes. He asked why these were not planned for immediate installation. Ms Brady advised that it was to be a future provision on the basis that this would increase incrementally, according to demand.

Councillor Elliott said that he was in favour of the proposed scheme, particularly from the perspective of providing sufficient car parking spaces for the many visitors to the town from the rural parts of the Borough and from across the border in East Sussex.

- Councillor Backhouse asked about charging points for electric vehicles, specifically whether the electricity would be provided free of charge. Mrs Bennett said that, where charging points were currently

provided, this was free for users under a part-funding scheme agreed with KCC.

Councillor Backhouse asked how many electric vehicle bays would eventually be provided within the scheme. Ms Brady made the distinction between bays for electric cars/vehicles and bikes. She said that there would be some provision for cars/vehicles within the refurbishment of the existing structure, adding that this would increase in both sections of the car park, according to future demand.

- Councillor Neve referred to one of the 'project cost plans' set out in exempt Appendix A, specifically the "all spaces at full capacity" assumption that had been made in arriving at the payback period. He felt that this should be amended, to take account of alternative space usage scenarios.

Councillor Neve said that, while he accepted some of the business case being made for the extension, he would feel happier if this item were deferred until such time as a decision had been made on whether the authority proceeded with a replacement civic development in Calverley Grounds. There was no support expressed by any other Advisory Board member for a deferral.

- Councillor Bland asked if it were planned to widen some of the bays in the existing car park, as part of the maintenance work and, if so, how many bays would be lost as a result. He also asked whether it had been estimated how many on-street parking spaces were being lost as a result of the improvement of facilities for residents.

On the widening of some bays, Ms Brady said that this was being looked at, as one particular option, but that the overall reduction in the number of bays had not yet been determined. On the issue of the displacement of on-street vehicles, Mrs Bennett advised that, within residents' parking zone C alone, there would be approximately 320 spaces no longer available for non-residents. She added that this figure would increase over the coming 18 months as other resident zones were improved.

Mrs Bennett also advised that the problems associated with pavement parking would be tackled, under another initiative set out in the Parking Strategy, which would add to the displacement of further vehicles.

- Councillor Hamilton expressed sympathy with the concerns raised by the individuals and groups who had spoken at the meeting. Bearing that in mind, she asked what the cost impact would be if the scheme were delayed. Ms Brady said that funding for the refurbishment work had already been approved and that this work would still proceed. She added that, if the maintenance element of this proposal took place at a different time from the extension project, it would be more costly for the authority.

RESOLVED – That the recommendations set out in the report be supported.

(NOTE: Councillor Neve asked that it be recorded in the minutes that he favoured deferral of this action and he did not support the majority view; he therefore abstained from the above consensus opinion.)

URGENT BUSINESS

PT26/17 The Democratic Services Officer advised that there were no additional items for the Board's consideration which had arisen since publication of the agenda.

DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING AND SCHEDULED ITEMS

PT27/17 It was noted that the next meeting of the Board was scheduled to take place on Monday 2 October at 6.30pm, when the following items would be discussed, based on the current Forward Plan:

- Linden Road car park redevelopment
- Ashdown Forest mitigation policy
- Borough Landscape Character Assessment 2017 supplementary planning document

NOTE: The meeting concluded at 7.25 pm.