

Notes

of an informal meeting of

Scrutiny Committee members

held on Tuesday, 2 August 2022 at 7.00 pm

Virtual meeting

Streamed live on YouTube.

Open to the public, including the press

Present:

Councillors: Nathan Boyd (Chair), Jerry Avery, Paul Barrow, Ron Batstone (Vice-Chair), David Grant, Max Thompson, Eric de la Harpe, Ben Mabbett and Patrick O'Leary

Officers: Vicky Aston (Planning Infrastructure Team Leader) Harry Barrington-Mountford (Head of Policy and Programmes) Candida Mckelvey (Democratic Services Officer) Adrianna Partridge (Deputy Chief Executive – Transformation and Operations)

Guests: Cabinet members: Councillor Andrew Crawford (Finance) Councillor Debby Hallett (Planning Policy) and Councillor Judy Roberts (Development and Infrastructure and Didcot Garden Town)

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies from Councillor Hayleigh Gascoigne. Councillor Paul Barrow was in attendance as substitute.

2. Urgent business and chair's announcements

None.

3. Declaration of interests

None.

4. Minutes of the last meeting

Resolved:

The notes of the informal meeting held on 28 June 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

5. Work schedule and dates for all Vale and Joint scrutiny meetings

Committee reviewed the work programme. Committee were asked to let the chair know if there were any additions to the work programme.

The item on Central Abingdon Regeneration Framework would be followed up on with officers regarding the date scrutiny would expect to see the report.

6. Public participation

None.

7. Didcot Garden Town update

Didcot Garden Town was a joint scheme with South Oxfordshire District Council. Cabinet member for Didcot Garden Town introduced the report. The original 2017 delivery plan had been updated to make it more streamlined and therefore more deliverable. Officers had worked on this and had clarified responsibility of stakeholders for project completion. There was a list of projects and progress to date.

The Didcot Town Advisory Board was key to holding stakeholders to account on the progress of the listed projects, as residents now want to see action on these projects.

In discussion, the committee raised the following:

- Regarding Homes England funding, it was explained to committee by Cabinet member that Didcot Garden Town was one of the first garden towns in the scheme, and there had been initial revenue funding, but as the scheme matures, this would likely be stopped over time and the future funding could be in the form of capital funding that could be applied for. Berinsfield and Dalton Barracks were newer garden towns and were still subject to the initial funding.
- Committee discussed the removed projects, with Cabinet member explaining that some projects were removed due to difficulty with engagement and general organising of such projects, for example, work with engaging utility companies, who vary widely in how they work.
- Cabinet member informed that Vale had opted for green spaces projects, and a bid had gone out for Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIP). Having such plans was useful for the future of developments – if we had a plan in place, it would show the needs of, for example, new housing developments, and this would be evidence to secure these infrastructures in early stages of development.
- Cabinet member informed that the Business Advisory Board had been helpful for setting up local events and leisure activities.

The key message was that the updated delivery plan was much more deliverable, having been thoroughly reviewed by officers. There was a newly formed Didcot Garden Town team (who were within the wider Garden Communities team) to assist in the plan's delivery, and the focus was on accountability and ensuring projects are progressed and then completed by the relevant stakeholders.

Resolved:

Committee reviewed the new Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan and looked forward to receiving future updates on progress of the scheme's projects.

8. A34 diversions update

This was an update report from Vale officers. This had started as a Full Council motion in October 2019, asking scrutiny to look into A34 diversion routes. There was a report to scrutiny in November 2021 with attendance from a National Highways and an Oxfordshire County Council representative.

This report was not informed by National Highways, but was an update from council officers, and chair acknowledged all the work involved for them.

Cabinet Member for Planning Policy introduced the report. Officers had provided some additional detail in the report, based on the questions the committee had asked in the previous meeting

where this was discussed, in November 2021. On 12 July 2022, National Highways had a virtual meeting with officers and indicated that they would have more information in a month's time. Officers had repeatedly asked for further information since the scrutiny meeting. It was recommended in the report that a formal scrutiny recommendation could be made to the Council Leader, to liaise with County Council.

So far, National Highways had responded on two points:

Consideration of contraflow

Strategies in place to minimise disruption

Outstanding points to address were:

Risk assessment of diversions

Appraisal of options

Schedule of road closures over time, suggested the last 5 years.

A copy of review work – indication was that this would be completed in 1 to 3 years.

The committee were welcomed to ask questions. Cabinet member Councillor Andrew Crawford was present as proposer of the original motion. It was noted that no formal recommendations could be made this evening, but chair would flag questions and comments for the Council Leader's attention.

- Officers were hoping to receive further information soon (no named representative given), but it was out of the district council's hands, but they had been persevering. County Council had been helpful also.
- Councillor Crawford, when being asked by the chair to give his views, expressed disappointment in the response given from National Highways. He felt that cost benefit analysis was needed for contraflows, and the response from National Highways that contraflows cost too much, at £200,000, was not justified effectively, due to the lack of analysis of the overall financial setting and benefits.
- A member asked if anything could be done to mitigate diversions at district level, such as temporary lower speed limits.
- Councillor Crawford clarified that residents had more concerns about disruptive scheduled works, and that there was some understanding from residents over accident / emergency diversions that could not be helped. Head of Policy and Programmes added that a conversation was being had about both types.
- A member asked if there had been feedback from the original residents group as to whether things had improved. It was noted that the diversions had been scheduled for years and appear to have gotten worse only recently. Councillor Crawford said he had received contact but only to ask whether National Highways had responded.
- A member added that more detail was needed for contraflow, and that we should express frustration with the lack of response.

Resolved:

Chair of scrutiny will speak to Council Leader and Monitoring Officer regarding next steps.

The meeting closed at 7.55 pm

Chair:

Date: