

MINUTES
of the
CHELMSFORD POLICY BOARD
held on 29 September 2022 at 7:00pm

Present:

Councillor I Fuller (Chair)

Councillors H Ayres, K Bentley, D Clark, G B R Knight, R Massey,
R J Poulter, A Sosin, A Thorpe-Apps, N Walsh, R T Whitehead
and T N Willis

Also present: Councillor M J Mackrory

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Gulliver, Pooley and Roberts. Councillor Roberts had appointed Councillor Bentley as his substitute.

2. Declarations of Interest

Members were reminded that they must disclose any interests they knew they had in items of business on the meeting's agenda and that they must do so at this point on the agenda or as soon as they became aware of the interest. If the interest was a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest they were also obliged to notify the Monitoring Officer within 28 days of the meeting. Any declarations are recorded in the relevant minute below.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting on 14 July 2022 were confirmed as a correct record.

4. Public Questions

There were two statements made by members of the public related to Item 6 on the agenda. These had not been submitted in advance but the Chair was happy for them to be made at the meeting.

The Policy Board heard that the two members of the public had lived in Boreham for a while and held concerns related to the proposals from National Highways in item 6. They informed the Policy Board that they were not against the principle of widening the A12, but that their concerns were related to an expected increase in traffic through the village of Boreham. They felt that the closure of Junction 20A on the West side of Hatfield Peverel would lead to increased traffic on the Boreham main road and that due to the open nature of the road, traffic always travelled at a high speed. The Policy Board heard that physical traffic calming measures would have a better effect, than speed limits which were unlikely to be enforced.

The Policy Board also heard that Junction 20A could be redesigned and remain open to southbound only traffic, resolving the concerns raised. Points were also raised regarding to previous consultation exercises by National Highways which had not used accurate data. They felt that residents had responded to misleading information and therefore the consultation was flawed. The Policy Board also heard concerns that as the process had reached this stage, National Highways would probably now feel it is too late or expensive to reconsider the proposals.

The Chair thanked the members of the public for their statements and noted that the Council, as detailed in the report, shared their concerns about the impact on the residents of Boreham. It was also noted that, other points would be picked up by the officer's presentation during Item 6. It was also agreed to switch round items 5 and 6 for the benefit of the public attending.

5. Chelmsford Cathedral Precinct Enhancement Plan

The Policy Board considered a proposed plan for the enhancement of the Chelmsford Cathedral Precinct. As well as providing improved paving materials and street furniture, new public spaces and improved routes, the scheme would enhance the cathedral's ceremonial and the public park functions and deliver an enhanced public realm, as the next step after the works currently being carried out to Tindal Square.

The Policy Board were informed of the history of the site and its importance to Chelmsford's City Centre. It was noted that the churchyard was maintained by the City Council and the report and presentation detailed the current issues with the site and the improvements in the concept plan.

In response to questions from members, officers informed the Policy Board that;

- Some trees would be removed as part of the plans but there would be a net increase in tree numbers after the completion of the enhancement.
- New landscaping and tree selections would be decided upon with possible climate change issues in mind.
- The design work costs to date had been funded 50/50 with the Cathedral.
- The costs of the enhancement would also be met as a partnership going forward, with initial costs being estimated at £600k, however it was felt this would increase with the current financial climate. It was noted that funding was not being sought yet and would be sought at a later stage once more detailed designs were agreed. It was also noted that as the Cathedral was a charity, other funding routes would be opened as a result.
- Benches would be positioned and designed to minimise rough sleeping in the churchyard itself.

RESOLVED that the Chelmsford Cathedral Precinct Enhancement Plan be endorsed and that the Director of Sustainable Communities, in consultation with the Cabinet Members for Sustainable Development and Greener Chelmsford, be authorised to progress the detailed design of the scheme.

(7.42pm to 7.56pm)

6. A12 Chelmsford to A120 Widening Scheme – Development Consent Order Draft Local Impact Report

The report to the meeting set out the Council's draft Local Impact Report (LIR) which detailed the officers' views of the likely impact of the A12 Chelmsford to A120 Widening Scheme Development Consent Order (DCO) on the Chelmsford area. The DCO had now been accepted by the Planning Inspectorate and, as well as considering the LIR, the Policy Board was requested to approve the necessary delegations to enable the Council to participate in the forthcoming Independent Examination.

Officers informed the Policy Board that it was not an application to the City Council but one from National Highways direct to the Planning Inspectorate, as a host authority the City Council had an opportunity to comment. It was noted that the scheme itself would cost around £1bn and was a significant one to the Highways network, including the rationalising of junctions and the widening to 3 lanes on key sections of the A12. It was noted that in total 15 miles of the A12 were affected, although only a short section in Chelmsford. Within the Council's boundary it included key safety improvements in addition to improving traffic flow. The Policy Board heard that one key area of concern for the Council was the relocation of the Hatfield Peverel junction, currently Junction 20a and 20b, to the north side of the settlement leading to an increase of traffic turning left to go through Boreham, coming from the Maldon direction. Officers felt this would have a determinantal impact on residents in Boreham and that mitigation would need to be targeted as part of a comprehensive package, perhaps speed cameras or physical chicanes. The Policy Board also heard that officers welcomed the new Paynes Lane walking, cycling and horse riders bridge, but felt the design could be improved and would be raising this.

The Policy Board heard that a Local Impact Report, which was detailed at Appendix 1 would be submitted to National Highways ahead of the 4th November deadline. It was also noted that the next steps would take place across 2023 with a decision scheduled before the end of 2023.

In response to questions from members, officers informed the Policy Board that;

- There were no proposals for 3 lanes to the South of Junction 19, only to the North East.
- It was unfortunate that the Chelmsford bypass had not been included on the initial schemes.
- They were unaware if the proposal was one which may be sped up by Government following recent announcements.
- The proposals had been put forward to not just improve traffic flow but to improve safety too. It was noted that the A12 itself had gone through a wide array of changes in the last 50 years with varying standards of safety along it, it was hoped these proposals would consolidate safety to a high standard all along the A12.
- The existing short slip road, leaving Hatfield Peverel southbound had been an accident site but specific stats had not been provided in the proposals.
- They agreed that it was disappointing works associated with the Beaulieu development to Junction 19 had not aligned with the DCO proposals.

The Policy Board agreed with the approach being taken by officers and noted that the concerns raised for residents in Boreham were of importance when representations would be made by the Council. The Policy Board considered that creative mitigation approaches should be highlighted in the Council's final response.

RESOLVED that

1. the draft Local Impact Report set out in Appendix 1 of the report to the meeting be approved and that the Director of Sustainable Communities in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development be authorised to finalise the Local Impact Report to enable its submission to the Planning Inspectorate; and
2. the Director of Sustainable Communities and his appointed officers be authorised to respond on behalf of Chelmsford City Council on all matters relating to the Independent Examination for the development and subsequently thereafter.

(7.08pm to 7.41pm)

7. Chelmsford Policy Board Work Programme

The Board received the latest version of its Work Programme for 2022-23. Officers informed the Board that the next meeting was on 3rd November and the Chelmsford Garden Community item was currently scheduled for then subject to the necessary work being finalised. It was noted however that if the Gt Leighs Masterplan was ready, then the work programme may be amended. Officers clarified that only one of the two items would be considered at a meeting though, due to the significance of each item.

RESOLVED that the latest Work Programme of the Board be noted.

(7.57.pm to 8pm)

8. Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting closed at 8pm

Chair