

STRATEGIC OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES

**THURSDAY 30 JANUARY 2020
GIPPING ROOM, GRAFTON HOUSE
6.00 PM**

Present: Councillors C Allen, S Gage, J Gibbs, T Grant, S Handley, D Heaps, D Maguire, C Shaw, C Smart, E Harsant, R Pope, T Lockington and S Connelly (Substitute)

36. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillor Smith.

37. Minutes of Previous Meeting

It was RESOLVED:

that the Minutes of the meeting held on 2 January 2020 be signed as a true record.

38. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

39. To Confirm or Vary the Order of Business

It was RESOLVED:

that the Order of Business be as printed on the agenda.

40. OS/19/13 Highways England Update on the Orwell Bridge

40.1 Simon Amor, Head of Planning and Development, Highways England, and Roy Doe, Service Delivery Manager, Highways England, gave a presentation regarding the Orwell Bridge. The key points made were:

- The bridge was an important asset for Ipswich, but was very susceptible to high winds because of its location;
- Highways England fully appreciated the impact of closures on Ipswich but they had to close it when there was a cross-wind in excess of 50mph, or a wind in any direction of over 60mph to ensure road safety;
- The time taken to close the bridge had been reduced from 50 minutes to 20 minutes before high winds were forecast to hit;
- Separating high sided vehicles from other traffic would be difficult to achieve as there was no infrastructure to support this, no resources to enforce it and no welfare facilities for drivers who were not able to cross the bridge;
- There had been 18 closures, totalling around 5 days, due to wind over the past 7 years;
- The lower speed limit of 60mph had reduced the number of accidents by 30%.
- Communications about forecast closures had improved with better co-ordination with the Police, Suffolk County Council and Ipswich Borough Council.

40.2 Simon Amor explained that Highways England had commissioned a study by City University, which was a world expert in wind modelling, on the effect of high winds on the Orwell Bridge. The study had shown that there were a number of options available to allow the Orwell Bridge to stay open for longer. These options were:

- The Orwell Bridge could remain open in higher winds if the speed limit were temporarily reduced, for example, if the speed limit were 40mph the study had shown that the bridge could safely operate in winds of 70mph. The speed limit would however need to be observed and so additional signage would be needed and enforcement would need to be available, likely through the average speed cameras already installed;
- The nearside lanes on each carriageway could be closed, with the offside lanes benefiting from greater protection from the existing parapets. Closing the lanes would be difficult however as cones may be difficult or impossible to place in high winds and other measures were not easily available;
- The westbound carriageway could be closed, as this was more severely affected by high winds, with the eastbound carriageway left open.

Further wind tunnel testing would be required to ensure that the options were safe, and various practical arrangements would need to be made, before any of them could be implemented.

40.3 Councillor Pope asked whether the existing average speed cameras could be used to enforce a lower speed limit. Simon Amor explained that it was thought that this would be possible but this needed to be confirmed with the Safety Camera Partnership, Suffolk Roadsafe. Superintendent Matthew Rose, Head of Specialist Operations for Norfolk and Suffolk Police explained that he understood that the trigger speed for the cameras could be changed very quickly, although it was also important that drivers were educated about the need to slow down.

40.4 Councillor T Lockington noted that separating high sided vehicles appeared to have been discounted as an option owing to a lack of resources. Councillor

Lockington asked whether this was right considering the economic impact of closures on the town. Mr Amor replied that whilst resources to separate out high sided vehicles was an issue, the reason this was not a favoured option was that there was no infrastructure available to assist with the separation. In response to a further question from Councillor Lockington Mr Doe explained that width restrictions would not separate out unladen light vans which were as, if not more, vulnerable than HGVs to the effects of high winds.

- 40.5 Councillor Grant asked whether more work could be done on alternative routes avoiding the centre of Ipswich when the Orwell Bridge was closed, either due to wind or an accident. Mr Amor said that further work could be done on advance signage and communications, whilst Graham Mateer, Head of Transport Strategy, Suffolk County Council, explained that whilst routes avoiding Ipswich town centre were available there were also significant issues with these.
- 40.6 Councillor Gage asked that diversion routes be considered in more detail, including Suffolk County Council doing works to potential alternative routes to make them suitable. Mr Amor noted that 55,000 vehicles used the Orwell Bridge each day and that no diversion routes would be able to cope with that volume of traffic. Councillor Gage commented that if a proportion of those 55,000 vehicles were prevented from coming through Ipswich by improving other diversion routes then those improvements would be justified. Mr Amor and Mr Mateer explained that making any significant difference to the alternative routes available would be very expensive and such works could potentially be national schemes.
- 40.7 Paul Simon, Head of Communications and Campaigns, Suffolk Chamber of Commerce, asked whether the Orwell Bridge remained the number one priority for Highways England East, whether it was a priority nationally and what the timescale for implementing a reduced speed limit in high winds was. Simon Amor confirmed that the Orwell Bridge remained the top priority for Highways England East and that it was important to Highways England nationally. Mr Amor explained that he expected that, subject to there being no issues around enforceability, temporary reduced speed limits could be introduced before the Winter of 2020/21.
- 40.8 Paul Simon asked whether additions to the parapets were still being considered by Highways England. Mr Amor explained that the parapets on the Orwell Bridge were an integral part of its structure and so additions to these might be very difficult owing to the stresses placed on the bridge; wind tunnel testing would be completed within the next 12 months and these would determine the amount of protection provided by the existing parapets.
- 40.9 Suffolk County Councillor West, Cabinet Member for Ipswich, Communities and Waste, noted that there was consensus that the proposal for temporary speed limits should be introduced as soon as possible and that all parties should work together to ensure that this happened. Councillor West commented that other work, for example, considering the parapets, should continue but should not delay the introduction of the temporary speed limit scheme. Simon Amor noted that there were statutory processes to be followed around reducing speed limits

but said that Highways England were keen to see the scheme implemented as soon as possible. Roy Doe noted that wind tunnel tests would also have to prove that reducing the speed limit would allow vehicles to run safely in higher winds.

- 40.10 Councillor Allen noted that there were also frequent closures of the Orwell Bridge because of accidents and asked whether more could be done to reduce closure times for other incidents. Superintendent Rose explained that a network of recovery operators, which had to meet high standards in terms of capacity and response times, assisted with keeping the Orwell Bridge clear. Superintendent Rose confirmed that police vehicles would normally tow any broken down vehicles off of the A14 to a place of safety if they were able to do so. Where there were crashes involving serious injury or death there would often be a longer road closure as investigation work needed to take place, and the damage was often also more severe.
- 40.11 Councillor P Smart, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change, noted that the Orwell Bridge was closing due to high winds more frequently, having closed 10 times since January 2018, whereas it had only closed 8 times in the 5 years before January 2018. Councillor Smart commented that this was likely to be due to climate change and that Highways England needed to plan for extreme weather becoming more common, although he agreed that the proposed temporary speed limit reductions would be a helpful measure in the short to medium term.
- 40.12 Councillor P Smart suggested that closing the more vulnerable Westbound carriageway to high sided vehicles might be easier than closing the Eastbound carriageway as most of the traffic would be coming from Felixstowe port where there were facilities for drivers. Mr Amor noted that there would also be heavy goods vehicles travelling from places other than Felixstowe but agreed to discuss the possibility with the operators of Felixstowe Port.
- 40.13 Councillor P Smart asked whether the service station on the westbound carriageway contributed significantly to accidents on the A14 and also suggested that if a further permanent reduction to the speed limit on the Orwell Bridge would reduce the time the bridge was closed due to accidents this ought to be considered. Mr Amor commented that service station slip-road, whilst short, did not contribute to many accidents. Most accidents on the Orwell Bridge were caused by drivers not paying sufficient attention to the road.
- 40.14 A resident noted that the Orwell Bridge was closed for maintenance at night and that the diversion route, which was used by a large number of HGVs, passed close to many homes and kept residents awake. The resident asked whether single carriageway closures and a contraflow could be used or if HGVs could be stacked rather than diverted. Mr Amor explained that bridge maintenance needed to be carried out and that overnight closures were far less disruptive to traffic. Introducing a contraflow was not practical as a certain width of carriageway was needed and even if it were possible to squeeze one onto the bridge the installation and removal of the barriers necessary to make a contraflow safe generally each required a full overnight closure.

- 40.15 A resident commented that Highways England had agreed to look at whether wind baffles could be introduced and that residents had waited too long for this to be done. Mr Amor explained that the Orwell Bridge was a complicated structure and that installing baffles over 1.2km of bridge would create significant structural loading. Mr Amor repeated his hope that the vast majority of closures would be prevented by the introduction of temporary reduced speed limits by the winter of 2020/21.
- 40.16 Councillor Ellesmere, Leader of Ipswich Borough Council, asked whether a list of what needed to happen to introduce temporary reduced speed limits and give timescales for each piece of work. Mr Amor agreed to supply milestones to partners and explained that a stakeholder event was planned for early March to help ensure that implementation could be as swift as possible.
- 40.17 Councillor Gage suggested that Highways England be invited to attend the 9 July 2020 meeting of the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee to report on alternative diversion routes, their work on understanding and potentially amending the bridge parapets, and progress made on implementing the proposal for temporary reduced speed limits in high winds.

It was RESOLVED:

that Highways England be invited to attend the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 9 July 2020.

- 40.18 The Chair thanked all those who had attended to discuss the Orwell Bridge for their contributions and time.

41. OS/19/14 Annual Report of the Health Scrutiny Committee

- 41.1 Councillor Fleming reported that since her last update to the Ipswich Borough Council Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee the Suffolk Health Scrutiny Committee had met 5 times. Topics scrutinised included:
- Estates Strategies as they related to integrated care, and the national pooling of receipts from asset sales;
 - Sexual Health and Reproductive Services, particularly commissioning and access to services;
 - Performance of Non-Emergency Patient Transport;
 - The results of the Care Quality Commission's inspection of the Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust;
 - East Suffolk and North Essex NHS Foundation Trust Strategy;
 - Local progress on Health and Social Care Integration;
 - Delivery of Mental Health Services in Suffolk;
 - Home Care Procurement and links between Social Workers and NHS Staff.
- 41.2 Councillor Pope asked what the Health Scrutiny Committee had found in relation to the cuts to the School Nursing Service when scrutinising access to contraception in schools. Councillor Fleming reported that the committee had

- found that the reduction to the number of school nurses was now starting to be reversed.
- 41.3 Councillor Pope questioned how the Health Scrutiny Committee included Service User Groups and Patient Participation Groups in its work. The Business Manager for the Health Scrutiny Committee, Theresa Harden, explained that Healthwatch Suffolk represented the patient voice on the Health Scrutiny Committee.
- 41.4 Councillor Pope asked how many referrals had been made to the CAHMS and Emotional Wellbeing Hub, where these had come from, and what the average time taken to resolve or refer cases was. Councillor Fleming explained that a report covering this was expected at the Health Scrutiny Committee's 22 April 2020 meeting and that the information could be circulated to members of Ipswich Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 41.5 Councillor Gage noted that the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee was soon to consider an item on GP Provision in Ipswich and asked whether the Health Scrutiny Committee had identified parts of the NHS from which funding might be available to improve this. Councillor Fleming explained that Primary Care provision was due to be scrutinised by the Health Scrutiny Committee at its July meeting and commented that she would consider adding a briefing on property accounting to the work programme.
- 41.6 Councillor Gage invited Councillor Fleming to attend the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee's meeting on GP Hubs on 27 February 2020. Councillor Fleming agreed that it was important for the committees to work together to ensure that Ipswich's needs were met.
- 41.7 Councillor Gibbs noted that Dental Practices were increasingly withdrawing from providing NHS Services and suggested that the Health Scrutiny Committee might like to invite dentists or the British Dental Association to consider this. Councillor Fleming agreed to consider this further and report back to the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 41.8 Councillor T Lockington noted that Physical and Mental Health services were provided increasingly separately despite physical health often affecting mental health and vice versa. Councillor Fleming agreed that more joined up provision was important and that the Health Scrutiny Committee often asked questions on this issue.
- 41.9 Councillor Grant noted that some Sexual Health Tests which were available via post had been subject to delays and asked if this had been scrutinised by the Health Scrutiny Committee. The Business Manager for the Health Scrutiny Committee explained that this had been considered again at the committee's January 2020 meeting and that the number of tests available had been increased to help meet demand.
- 41.10 Councillor Shaw noted that there had been reports of whistleblowing being discouraged at West Suffolk Hospital which had provoked media interest and

asked if the issue would be scrutinised. Councillor Fleming explained that Whistleblowing was being considered for an additional item at the April 2020 Health Scrutiny Committee meeting but that she understood that the issue was being investigated thoroughly.

41.11 The Chair thanked Councillor Fleming and Ms Harden for their attendance and participation.

42. OS/19/15 Annual Portfolio Holder Update - Planning and Museums

42.1 Councillor Jones introduced the Annual Update on the Planning and Museums Portfolio. Key points made were:

- There had been record numbers of visitors to museums as a result of a varied programme of high-quality exhibitions and events;
- The number of school visits had increased significantly, although unfortunately due to the high quality of the packs for teachers, less of these visits were now accompanied;
- The Museums Service had not achieved its income targets for hiring its venues and there was a need to be more entrepreneurial;
- Building Control had maintained good performance despite vacancies within the team. There had been a significant increase in the volume of work the team was doing since the Grenfell Tower Fire and two members of the team now held level six fire safety qualifications;
- Building Control Officers made proactive visits to houses of multiple occupation and challenged owners to improve their properties where necessary;
- The Planning Service continued to process planning applications promptly with just one major application going beyond the time limit. None of the Council's decisions had been overturned by the Planning Inspectorate;
- The Planning Service continued to encourage the owners of buildings on the Buildings at Risk Register to keep them safe and bring them back into use.

42.2 Councillor Gibbs noted that Ipswich's museums had been able to host significant works of art over the past few years and asked whether this was as a result of better relationships with national arts organisations. James Steward, Ipswich Museums Manager, explained that the Colchester and Ipswich Museums Service had built good relationships with many organisations and was a trusted museums service. Mr Steward noted that some people had been surprised by the quality of exhibitions in Ipswich and said that he hoped that people came to expect this high standard.

42.3 Councillor Pope asked what was being done to increase income through hiring museums spaces. Councillor Jones explained that a review was currently taking place to identify how income could be increased and a strategy would then be developed.

42.4 Councillor Gage commented that the visitor figures were very impressive and that staff should be recognised for their good work. Councillor Jones agreed and added that different types of people were also visiting, for example, the

Council had just won an award for its work with Job Centre Plus which brought unemployed people to the museums.

- 42.5 Councillor T Lockington asked whether the Council's Building Control Team could promote higher standards aimed at reducing the carbon footprints of buildings. Councillor Jones noted that the Building Control Team had to apply national standards but that suggestions could be made for greener ways of doing things. Gavin Whitman, Operations Manager - Building Control explained that thermal regulations were currently being consulted on.
- 42.6 Councillor Pope asked whether the Planning Service had been able to increase the amount of trees and green space in new developments and also promote native hedgerows. Martyn Fulcher, Head of Development, explained that in many cases officers had been able to persuade developers to retain or plant trees and that strong policies enabled the Council to push for on site provision of green space. A list of native hedgerow species was being added as part of the Local Plan revision which would help encourage the use of these in developments.
- 42.7 Councillor T Lockington queried whether the fact that no appeals had been allowed suggested the Council was too risk averse in its decision making. Mr Fulcher explained that developers were keen to work with the Council to avoid refusal and often modify proposals to make them acceptable.
- 42.8 The Chair thanked Councillor Jones and officers for their attendance and answers.

43. OS/19/16 Work Programme 2019/20

It was RESOLVED:

that the Work Programme for 2019/20, attached at Appendix 1 to report OS/19/16, be approved

The meeting closed at 8.25 pm

Chair