

PLACE AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 26 FEBRUARY 2024

Present: Cllrs Shane Bartlett (Chairman), Barry Goringe, Brian Heatley and Bill Trite

Apologies: Cllrs Andy Canning, Rod Adkins, Jon Andrews, David Shortell and David Tooke

Also present: Cllr Laura Beddow, Cllr Ray Bryan, Cllr Andrew Parry, Cllr Molly Rennie and Cllr Jane Somper

Also present remotely: Cllr Alex Brenton and Cllr Cherry Brooks

Officers present (for all or part of the meeting):

Jan Britton (Executive Lead for the Place Directorate), Jonathan Mair (Director of Legal and Democratic and Monitoring Officer), Tony Burden (Road Safety Manager), Jack Wiltshire (Head of Highways), Paul Rutter (Service Manager for Leisure, Arts and Cultural Services), Carl Warom (Climate and Ecology Policy Officer), Antony Littlechild (Sustainability Team Manager), Steven Ford (Corporate Director for Transformation, Innovation, Digital, and Environment), Matthew Piles (Corporate Director - Economic Growth and Infrastructure), Lindsey Watson (Senior Democratic Services Officer) and John Miles (Democratic Services Officer)

55. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 January 2024 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

56. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

57. Chairman's Update

There were no updates from the Chairman on this occasion.

58. Public Participation

Questions and statements had been submitted from members of the public. A copy of the questions and statements submitted and the responses to the questions provided, are set out at Appendix 1.

59. Questions from Councillors

There were no questions from councillors.

60. **20mph Policy**

The committee considered a report of the Road Safety Manager, which provided an opportunity to review the 20mph Policy in its first year of operation. In addition, it set out information on an ongoing review by the Department for Transport (DfT) and noted that there was potential for new national guidance on 20mph for England.

Councillors considered the issues arising from the report and during discussion the following points were covered:

- Link with the school streets pilot project and whether the implementation of a 20mph limit could be included within these schemes or considered around school sites generally. Further consideration of the issues around this would need to be undertaken
- Consideration of the position with A roads within 20mph schemes, how the national guidance was interpreted and whether this needed to be reviewed. Roads could be considered in sections, balancing the interests of different users of the area
- Applications were considered on an individual basis and specific circumstances discussed with communities. The policy did not exclude the consideration of 20mph schemes on A and B roads
- It was noted that new guidance was awaited from the DfT
- Consideration of the process used for review of applications and whether there was a role for a member of the scrutiny committee on the 20mph Panel
- The assessment criteria including reference to the mean speed being at or below 24mph and the use of a 20mph zone versus use of additional traffic management measures
- A request to consider the wording used in the 'Road user tips' section of the toolkit to reflect the increased use of electric vehicles and their silent running operation
- Information on how collisions information was provided to the council by Dorset Police
- The budget available for schemes and the link to the allocation of Local Transport Plan funding
- The need to review emissions data moving forward.

The Chairman provided a summary of the points raised and further action required as follows:

- Consideration to be given to whether the policy could be amended to include an automatic 20mph speed limit around school streets sites and the costs associated with this, with report back to a future committee
- To consider the possibility of a scrutiny member sitting on the 20mph Panel
- To review the wording used in the 'Road user tips' section of the toolkit to reflect the increased use of electric vehicles and their silent running operation

- To undertake a review of the inclusion of A roads within 20mph schemes, how the national guidance was interpreted and whether this needed to be reviewed, with report back to a future committee
- To consider the budget allocated for 20mph schemes and the link to the allocation of Local Transport Plan funding.

61. **Redlands Leisure and Community Park Update**

The committee received a report of the Service Manager for Leisure, Arts and Cultural Services, which provided an update on the Redlands Leisure and Community Park since management had been taken over by Active Dorset in November 2022. It was noted that the park had been well supported and that usage had exceeded expectations. It was a good example of partnership working with the community playing an active role in supporting and using the facility.

The committee considered the issues arising from the report and during discussion, the following points were raised:

- Financial issues including funding provided by Weymouth College as part of the exit agreement and the revenue budget forecast submitted by Active Dorset
- Property works undertaken
- Operational issues including the self-service booking system and key code access arrangements
- Detail of attendance levels which had increased
- Future plans for the 3G pitch and proposal to introduce a new second 3G pitch, for which a bid for grant funding was being submitted by Active Dorset
- The council continued to support Active Dorset.

The Chairman noted the successful operation of the park and offered congratulations to all involved.

62. **Grid Capacity Review**

The committee received and considered a report of the Climate and Ecology Policy Officer, which presented the findings from the Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Group inquiry into the impacts, challenges and opportunities of grid constraints and the associated reforms. The report included a set of recommendations for how the council could best position itself to mitigate the risks and exploit the opportunities with regard to how the network was planned, governed, invested in, reflected in the council's policy and decision-making and strengthening relationships with network operators.

It was highlighted that the review had been a useful exercise which had enabled the consideration of key issues, with discussion with both internal and external representatives. The review had identified a series of recommendations for progressing consideration of the issues. Thanks were expressed to all those that had been involved.

The Chairman highlighted the recommendations set out within the report and in addition requested an additional recommendation for continued annual scrutiny review of this area, a councillor webinar and visit to Canford Renewable Energy post May 2024 and for the briefing with MPs to be undertaken through a meeting, to allow councillors and officers to directly brief them on the issues and difficulties faced with the grid infrastructure and the issues raised during the review.

It was proposed by B Goringe seconded by B Heatley

Recommendation to Cabinet

That the recommendations of the Grid Capacity Task & Finish Group, set out within section 4 of the cover report to the Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee, on the council's future approach to the strategic risks and opportunities regarding the electricity network, be approved, subject to the following:

- i) That, in respect of recommendation 6, MPs be invited to a meeting to enable councillors and officers to directly brief them on the issues and difficulties faced with the grid infrastructure and the issues raised during the review
- ii) That an additional recommendation (7) be included – That the Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee monitor grid provision in Dorset and associated issues including emerging policy and regulatory reform, on an annual basis
- iii) That a councillor webinar be provided post May 2024 regarding grid capacity, including technologies and the future impact on planning and energy provision
- iv) That a councillor site visit be arranged post May 2024 to Canford Renewable Energy.

63. Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

Councillors reviewed the committee's work programme and noted items to be considered at the next meeting on 28 March 2024.

64. Executive Arrangements Forward Plans

Councillors considered the Cabinet Forward Plan, which the committee could use to identify potential areas for post decision review.

In addition, the committee noted the forward plan for the Shareholder Committee for Care Dorset Holdings Ltd and the Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence.

65. Urgent items

There were no urgent items.

66. Exempt Business

There was no exempt business.

APPENDIX 1 - PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Agenda item 5 – Public Participation

Questions received

1. Question from Andrew Davis

“Why doesn’t the Speed Policy take account of exceptional circumstance in allowing a 20 mph limit as in the case of the dangerous A350 that dissects Fontmell Magna?”

Footnote:

Dorset Highways take a narrow interpretation of the 2013 DfT Guide on Speed limits. This states applications for 20-mph should not be on roads where the movement of motor vehicles is the primary function, i.e. A roads. **BUT** the same DfT guidelines also states: ***(Para 84) Based on this positive effect on road safety, and a generally favourable reception from local residents, traffic authorities are able to use their power to introduce 20mph speed limits or zones on: - major streets where there are – or could be - significant numbers of journeys on foot, and/or where pedal cycle movements are an important consideration, and this outweighs the disadvantage of longer journey times for motorised traffic.***

Response provided at meeting

During the development of the policy Dorset Council Members made clear that it would not be appropriate to include a clause relating to the term exceptional circumstances, but they wished to see officers considering applications on a location-by-location basis within an agreed criterion.

The interpretation of the policy means that 20mph should not ordinarily be considered on roads which form the strategic backbone of the network or other main roads, catering for large good vehicles, bus routes and longer distance traffic, unless as per Paragraph 84 of the DfT Guide to Setting Speed Limits referenced above there is clear evidence of high levels of pedestrian and cycle movement or there is a potential for high levels of pedestrian and cycle movement if a 20mph scheme was introduced.

The priority criteria matrix at Annex A of the policy ensures that the current and potential active travel levels (walking and cycling) are considered.

2. Question from Peter Mole, Fontmell Magna Community Speed Watch

Almost 2 years ago I and others explained the dangerous road safety situation in Fontmell Magna where vulnerable pedestrians have to share the carriageway with

hundreds of speeding vehicles. We generally do not have footways. Our ancient roads including the A350 are not engineered or regulated to be fit for purpose.

Councillors complemented us on our well informed and articulate representations and declared "we must listen and act!".

I coordinate our Community Speed Watch Team. We did our most recent monitoring session on the A350 where children going to and from school, elderly dog walkers and others have to share the narrow road with hundreds of speeding vehicles each day. Alarming incidents including near misses with young children are too frequent and nervous people now use the car for village journeys of a few hundred yards or stay at home.

Any speeds much above 20 mph at the monitoring point are very dangerous as pedestrians and vehicles mix. There is currently a 30mph limit. We recorded over 20% of vehicles travelling at 35 mph or more which is 6 times the average level of offending at Speed Watch sites across Dorset. Each day hundreds of southbound vehicles traverse this point at speeds which would make them liable for prosecution. Children, the elderly and others are exposed to needless high risk. ROSPA estimate that in collisions child injuries treble when speeds are 30mph rather than 20 and the chance of death for adults increases eightfold. The statistics are shocking, and we do not wish a tragedy to be the trigger for remedial action.

Our request for a 20mph limit, supported by 5 out of 6 residents, has been turned down for reasons which would not be considered reasonable in the majority of local authorities in the UK today or pass informed third-party scrutiny.

You know our roads are not currently engineered or regulated to be fit for purpose. Across the UK 20mph policies have been introduced in the majority of local authorities which would address the shameful situation in Fontmell Magna. Will action be taken to ensure all road users who have to share the carriageway, including the most vulnerable, have their needs fully taken into account to prevent their current exposure to unreasonable levels of risk?

Response provided at meeting

We are grateful for the efforts of local Community Speed Watch teams because they are a crucial part of the road safety strategy demonstrated by the fact that last year, they provided evidence which led to 12,600 warning letters being issued to motorists. We encourage other communities to consider forming a group with further details being available on the Dorset Road Safety Partnerships website.

I can confirm that the needs of all road users using the network especially the most vulnerable are considered when a 20mph application or any other new highway measure is considered.

Recorded road traffic collision levels for the village of Fontmell Magna remain low with recent analysis showing that the new Speed Indicator Device has resulted in a reduction in speeds at the location in question.

Due to the constraints created by the geometry of some of our village roads it is not always possible to install significant highway improvements such as new footways. We take the issue in Fontmell Magna seriously and will continue to work with all partners to consider additional proportionate safety measures which includes working in partnership with Dorset Police to enhance their speed camera enforcement capability.

3. Question from John Roberts-Davies on behalf of Fontmell Magna Parish Council

This question relates to the policy in general and how it has been applied so far. Any references to our own previous application are intended as examples.

For an application to be rejected, as was the case in Fontmell Magna for example, on the grounds that the A350 is a “strategic” route, where the movement of vehicles is the primary function, is clearly not what is intended by government guidance, which presupposes fitness of purpose.

In the last ten years across the UK scores of dangerous primary routes have had 20 mph sections introduced, where risk management demonstrates this as the best form of risk containment.

The A350 is a prime example of risk to human life being above normal and reasonable levels, therefore risk containment is essential.

Rejecting any 20mph application simply based on Dorset Council’s chosen categorisation of a road within it, fails to meet Dorset County Council’s responsibilities under the Equality Act.

The Equalities Impact Assessment made by Mr Burden states in 12.1 of the report presented today that

The policy is directly aimed at having a positive impact on vulnerable road users including children and the elderly.

This starts at the application stage when Members, Parish and Town Councils are required to consider these concerns, and they will then form part of the evidence base for an application.

The potential benefits to vulnerable road users are considered throughout the process.

A grandmother walking her child from one part of the village to the school, along a road with very poor sightlines and no footway, where there is a serious risk of death or injury, would be right to feel let down by how this policy has been applied.

Residents of a village which is cut in two by such a road have an equal right to enjoy the outdoor environment, to access local businesses such as the shop or pub, to meet together at their village hall, or simply to walk their dog, without having to drive to do so.

They should not need to resort to using their car as a means of self defence in their own village.

People should not need to use their car as a means of self defence.

The primary purpose of a road should not be a label applied glibly along its entire length. Common sense says that at some points on any road, protection of vulnerable users could be the priority.

Will the council instruct the person responsible for ensuring the safety of all road users to investigate the problem and propose a solution?

Response provided at meeting

Dorset Council has introduced several 20mph safety schemes in previous years and the report clearly outlines progressive plans to install further schemes where appropriate.

The risk factors raised within this question are all matters that would be considered as part of a community's application together with understanding the impact of any speed reduction on the wider road network. To demonstrate how complex this work can be the Committee may find it useful to note that Wales have recently identified a detrimental impact that recent 20mph schemes have had on their rural bus route journey times and are in the process of considering reverting some routes back to 30mph.

Some residents living on or near to a main road within our village communities can be affected by severance and this issue is taken very seriously but because of the road geometry of many village environments it is not always possible to install highway improvements such as new footways to alleviate these difficulties.

Where highway improvements are technically possible, it is our duty to ensure that available funding is used for schemes where it will make the biggest impact and save the most lives. Each year Dorset Council receive many more requests for highway improvements than we can build and therefore we must prioritise schemes against an agreed set of Local Transport Plan goals.

The Road Safety Team will commit to reviewing this location with other Highway colleagues to consider whether any additional proportionate highway measures are technically achievable and will work with the newly formed Fontmell Magna Road Safety Group.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight that residents, businesses and visitors are invited to share their views on what they consider to be the big transport opportunities and issues across the whole of Dorset to shape the new Local Transport Plan. Details of how to get involved can be found on the council's website.

Statements received

1. Statement from Ian Vaughan-Arbuckle – Councillor Langton Matravers Parish Council with specific responsibility for Highways

Now that 20 mph has been approved through the centre of Langton Matravers, the Parish Council wish to thank the Place and Resources Committee and others in

Dorset Council for the way the 20mph policy was designed and implemented. Tony Burden, the Road Safety Officer, who was responsible for implementing the detailed policy, deserves particular thanks for the calm and even-handed way he managed matters. No query was too much trouble so that applicants felt their interests were receiving prompt and appropriate consideration throughout a protracted period. The approval of this policy will make a huge difference to both the safety and quality of life of those who live in the village. Thank you.

2. Statement from John Adlam

Comment

It appears that the Dorset Council (DC) 20mph policy and implementation procedures are significantly at odds with the County's Local Transport Plan 3 commitments and national standards. All people should be free to choose their mode of transport and to move safely across and alongside all DC highways passing through villages and built up areas. This is not the case to date.

The policy and implementation should support communities when:

- Safety risks have been identified.
- Residential properties front the highway.
- Footways are absent.
- Schools, shops, businesses, amenities and services are adjacent to and/or directly dependent on pedestrian access via the highway.
- There is an absence of safe pedestrian thoroughfares directly resulting in an increased use of motor vehicles for community travel in lieu of cycling or walking.
- The highway fails to meet current safety design standards for its designated or actual use.

Safety improvements should be risk managed and include, singularly or in combination (but not be limited to), highway realignment, footway construction, traffic calming measures, injury reducing speed limits (20mph), and signage where feasible. Where overall safety risk cannot be mitigated the reasons should be stated by DC and all road users alerted by DC to heightened or sustained risk.

Background

Dorset's historic strategic road network is compromised in parts by outdated design and persistent use of modern means of transportation including silent electric and heavy goods vehicles. In parts single carriageways (including designated strategic routes) have insufficient width for large vehicles to pass. In villages where this occurs, where highways do not include footways, there are poor sight lines and speed restrictions exceed 20mph, it is invariably not safe for pedestrians without the introduction of mitigating safety measures.

National standards are unequivocal and compelling when it comes to highway safety. Highways England states its ambition to ensure that its major roads are more dependable, durable and most importantly - safe. It works hard to make sure that its road network is:

- Free flowing - where routine delays are infrequent and journeys are reliable.

- Safe and serviceable - where no-one should be harmed when travelling or working.
- Accessible and integrated - so people are free to choose their mode of transport and can move safely across and alongside its roads.

3. Statement from Dilys Gartside – 20sPlentyforDorset campaign coordinator

A year after introduction of its policy on 20mph speed limits, proportionately just a handful of Dorset residents have jumped through the criteria hoops set down by Dorset Councillors to achieve a 20mph limit on their streets. Many thousands of residents, whose parish or town council have attempted to clear these hoops, have either tripped or failed to jump clear and learned they do not qualify for safer streets and yet, ironically, these are the folk whose cry for help is the most urgent.

In summer 2022, residents campaigned successfully for the new policy to be inclusive of category A and B roads since these are the arteries of many Dorset villages and essential routes for all people to get from A to B. Perhaps the most justified case is that of FONTMELL MAGNA whose village street happens to be categorized as A350. Its residents must use that main street to exit front doors and to get to the village’s amenities, without the safety barrier of a footway nor visibility due to bends. Sharing that space with a high volume of heavy and ever increasingly wider vehicles which take up more than their safe share of road space is enough to deter most residents from walking or cycling or scooting their journey and often have to move home to live elsewhere. Yet, their application for slowing speed on their village street was declined by Dorset Council, thus ignoring DfT guidance that: ‘the needs of vulnerable road users **MUST** be fully taken into account when setting speed limits’

Given the known causal links between muscle inactivity and the major health risks such as obesity, diabetes, osteo-arthritis, heart disease and dementia which affect us more as we age and the desperate needs of our financially failing Health Service to meet these ever increasing demands and the soaring costs of adult social care which are crippling this country, every councillor must take responsibility for bold action in combating this down spiral. Vibrant communities are seen to flourish in those towns and cities whose councillors have had the vision to lead from the top and introduce 20mph in places where people must mix with motors.

I suggest that Dorset Council is failing its people with the complexity of its current 20mph policy and that its funding could be spent far more effectively by rolling out wide area 20mph starting with places where the people are already shouting out for slower traffic speeds.

Duration of meeting: 10.00 am - 12.15 pm

Chairman

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