

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON 9 OCTOBER 2023 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.45 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Chris Johnson (Chair), Peter Dennis (Vice-Chair), Laura Blumenthal, David Cornish, Norman Jorgensen, Pauline Jorgensen, Charles Margetts, Alistair Neal and Marie-Louise Weighill

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Paul Fishwick

Officers Present

Neil Carr (Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist), Robert Curtis (Transport Planning Team Manager), Chris Easton (Assistant Director, Highways) and Matt Gould (Lead Specialist, Highways and Transport)

45. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

46. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

47. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

48. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

49. LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN 4

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 5 to 622, which provided details of the draft Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4).

Paul Fishwick (Executive Member for Active Travel, Highways and Transport) attended the meeting to present the report, supported by Matt Gould (Lead Specialist, Highways and Transport) and Rob Curtis (Transport Planning Team Manager).

The report stated that LTP4 was a statutory plan, required by the Transport Act 2000. LTP4 would be an important part of the authority's goal of making Wokingham Borough a net-zero carbon producer. LTP4 would support local priorities, including a prosperous economy, improving the quality of life for residents, reducing the environmental impact of transport, and the first stages in the transition to Net Zero for the Transport sector.

The draft LTP4 included a summary of background evidence and the outcomes of a public engagement exercise carried out in the spring of 2023. This included a survey seeking residents' views on transport in the Borough, how they travelled and their concerns about transport facilities. The most commonly raised concerns from residents were:

- the safety of children walking and cycling to school;
- maintenance of roads and footpaths in the Borough;
- a lack of travel options;

- current infrastructure was not cycle-friendly.

The report stated that the draft LTP4 set out a number of objectives under three main themes:

- Reduce environmental impacts – supporting the transition of the transport sector to carbon neutrality, including promotion of low emission vehicles.
- Grow the economy – working in partnership to protect and enhance strategic rail and road connectivity, service quality and facilities.
- Create healthy and safe places – reducing negative impacts associated with road transport including noise, emissions and injuries from accidents.

LTP4 also brought together a number of complementary transport strategies including the Bus Service Improvements Plan (BSIP) and the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP). It also aligned with the emerging documents such as the Local Plan Update and Council Plan and national and regional strategies. LTP4 included an Action Plan which set out the key interventions to be delivered during the plan period.

The Committee was asked to consider the draft LTP4 and make comments and recommendations to the Executive as appropriate. The draft LTP4 would be submitted to the Executive at its meeting on 30 November 2023. Following agreement by the Executive, the draft LTP4 would then be published for public consultation with the aim of seeking final approval by Council in the summer of 2024.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points, comments and questions.

Page 17 – “Earley, Woodley and Shinfield which includes the most urban areas of these towns where travel is largely directed towards Reading”. This statement was not consistent with Page 27: “Areas in and around Woodley, Earley and Shinfield about the Reading conurbation. Travel to Reading accounts for nearly a third of trips from these areas”. It was confirmed that these statements would be checked for consistency.

Active travel to schools was limited by the fact that many children could not get a place at a local school.

The map showing the Borough’s Towns and Parishes (Page 216) did not include Wokingham Town Council and Wokingham Without Parish Council.

Page 37 – improved cycling facilities were dependent on successful funding bids and/or S106 monies.

It was noted that tackling other infrastructure issues would help to achieve the LTP4 objectives. For example, another secondary school in the south of the Borough would help to reduce car journeys and help to promote more active travel in local communities. It was confirmed that work was ongoing with the LPU team on issues such as the future location of schools.

In relation to air quality, each of the air quality management areas in the Borough had its own action plan.

Members emphasised the crucial importance of aligning key plans and strategies such as LTP4, the Local Plan Update and the Climate Emergency Action Plan. It was also important to align with Government policy in order to successfully bid for grant funding.

Communication and engagement with residents was key in developing new initiatives such as 20mph zones. It was confirmed that this was a key objective for the My Journey team, working closely with the corporate communications team. Members felt that LTP3, for example, had not been well publicised among local communities. Ward Members were well placed to assist in the roll-out of communications on new initiatives.

Page 36 – “Consider E-scooter hire schemes” – Members highlighted current concerns amongst residents relating to E-scooters. This would need sensitive handling and effective communications, if and when it proceeded.

Page 34 – “...we support improvements to interchange and access at Twyford station”. It was expected that the station would become busier following the commencement of Elizabeth Line services. More frequent bus and cycling links would help to prevent the increased use of cars causing congestion and parking issues. It was noted that the diagram on Page 30 indicated a more frequent level of bus services to Twyford station. Could land around the station be used to improve access and parking facilities?

Page 42 “Roll out of School Streets” (reducing traffic outside schools at the start and end of the school day). Feedback on School Street initiatives could be reported to the Committee for scrutiny and comment. Consider the use of traffic cameras to support safer routes to school.

Page 42 – no mention of closing Wokingham town centre to through traffic. If this was a long-term aspiration it should be flagged in order to promote debate on the issues. It could be included as a marker in the LTP4. This could be widened to include other town centres such as Twyford. Other long term aspirations could include reference to the railway bridges on Finchampstead Road and the rights of way which had been closed off following the opening of the A329M.

Large organisations such as supermarkets should be included in the conversation about cycling – provision of improved facilities e.g. cycle racks at supermarkets. The My Journey team could develop a conversation with Sainsburys, Tesco, Waitrose, etc.

There were two railway stations adjacent to the Borough boundary – Crowthorne and Green Park. The Council should be engaging with Network Rail and neighbouring councils to ensure that any issues around parking and connecting bus services were being addressed. It was confirmed that these discussions were taking place.

LTP4 was about priorities for the future of transport in the Borough. As well as stating what choices had been made it should explain the choices which haven't been made and the reasons why. What was learned from LTP3? What will be done differently in delivering LTP4?

More clarity was needed on the status and function of the Southern Distributor Road – was it a bypass or a distributor road? Was it intended to cope with all types of vehicle including HGVs? Officers confirmed that the road was designed to be a distributor road capable of taking all types of vehicle.

Page 22 – 2.8 stated that, overall, traffic volumes had not increased...despite the growth in population. This was not consistent with Page 76 which stated that there will be additional movement linked to population growth.

The documents referred to “tourist” destinations in the Borough. Perhaps “visitor” was more accurate, e.g. the Henley Regatta and Festival in Remenham or visits to Dinton Pastures and the other country parks.

Information on some of the charts/maps, e.g. Page 236/237 was difficult to read and should be addressed.

The issue of traffic noise was a concern for residents, e.g. people moving into the Borough. LTP4 focussed on the noise impacts from the M4 – other locations causing concern should be addressed.

The documents did not mention the impact of aviation which did generate traffic, e.g. residents travelling to Heathrow/Gatwick for work or travel. Longer term there could be an impact from the building of new runways.

LTP4 Draft Consultation Questions

The Committee considered the draft consultation questions set out at Agenda pages 401 to 403. Members made the following comments.

About You (Q1 to 4) – age, gender, postcode, disability – why were these four characteristics chosen and not others, e.g. household income?

Q5 – Do you believe the LTP should be updated? What was the point of this question? Were residents qualified to answer?

Q6 – Which of the three themes is most important? Were residents qualified to answer? Plain English – would residents know what a High Quality Travel Corridor was? Were residents expected to read and understand the draft LTP4 in order to answer the consultation questions? Was this realistic?

Consideration should be given to engaging with local schools, perhaps with a separate questionnaire for pupils. This would engage children and young people and result in more family discussions about the future of transport in the Borough, including the key themes. It was confirmed that the My Journey team would look at developing a survey for local schools.

Following on from the schools point, other WBC consultations had resulted in limited responses from the 18 to 24 age group. Officers should consider how to engage with this demographic, perhaps by discussing with other councils who had been more successful.

The consultation would have links to the LTP4 Action Plan and supporting documents. Would residents take the time to read the detailed documents in order to make informed responses to the consultation?

LTP4 broke the Borough down into four areas – could responses using postcodes allow analysis broken down into the four geographical areas?

There should be a clear statement of purpose for the consultation and how the feedback would be used. What happens with the consultation feedback if only a small number of replies are submitted?

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Paul Fishwick, Matt Gould and Rob Curtis be thanked for attending the meeting to present the report on LTP4 and answer Member questions;
- 2) Member comments and suggestions (set out above) be fed into the development of the draft LTP4 prior to its submission to the Executive in November 2023;
- 3) Chris Johnson attend the Executive meeting on 30 November 2023 to present the Committee's views on the draft LTP4.

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