

HIGHWAYS PANEL MEETING held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 7pm on 8 SEPTEMBER 2014

Present: Councillor A Walters (Chairman)
Councillor J Salmon (Uttlesford District Council)
Councillors S Barker, R Gooding, J Lodge and S Walsh (Essex County Council).

Officers in attendance: J Pine (Planning Policy/DM Liaison Officer), A Rees (Democratic Services Support Officer), R Long (Highways Liaison Officer – ECC), M Row (Design Engineer – ECC) and D Sprunt (Principal Transportation Co-ordinator – ECC).

Also present: Gareth Bevan, Jan Durkin (Access Walden), Diana Frost (Hempstead Parish Council), John McAdams, Councillors Cheetham, Knight and Oliver (UDC).

PUBLIC SPEAKING

Mr McAdams, Mrs Frost, Councillor Knight and Councillor Cheetham all made speeches to the Panel, summaries of which are appended to the minutes.

HP9 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Freeman (UDC), Councillors Sullivan and Townsend (UALC) and the Assistant Director Planning and Building Control.

Councillor Barker declared a non-pecuniary interest as a district councillor for The Rodings.

HP10 **MINUTES**

The minutes were signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

HP11 **UPDATE ON CAPITAL AND REVENUE SCHEMES APPROVED**

Verbal Update on Wenden Road and Great Chesterford Cycleways

The Principal Transportation Co-ordinator said the Wenden Road cycleway consultation was nearly over following a delay in the process. The next stage of the process would begin at the end of September or the beginning of October and then the County Council Cabinet Member would need to sign off the scheme. If there were any changes to the scheme following any objections, they would be put into the final scheme. Work was likely to start at the beginning of the next financial year.

In response to questions by Councillor Lodge, the Principal Transportation Co-ordinator said that any objections would be put into the report which would be submitted to the Cabinet Member for decision. Councillor Lodge would be able to view the report and provide his own comments before it was submitted to the Cabinet Member. The draft version of the Uttlesford strategy for cycling provision was due to be published this week and would include the Wenden Road cycleway.

The Great Chesterford cycleway was also being assessed as part of the Uttlesford strategy. It was possible that some schemes would have to be de-prioritised depending on what funding was available at the time. This was because certain funding would only be available for certain types of scheme. It was only worthwhile trying to obtain European funding for schemes which cost over one million pounds due to the time it would take in order to obtain funding. Additionally, funding would only be available for a maximum of 60% of the project's cost.

Mr Bevan said he was disappointed that the cycle path could be de-prioritised. Was it possible to move funding from one area of the budget to help the scheme progress?

Councillor Barker responded by saying there was already a funding shortfall and money could not be reallocated from one project to another. It would be important to look at the Uttlesford strategy objectively and act based on its recommendations. The projects which were the most feasible should be progressed and holding an extra Highways Panel meeting should be considered in order to discuss the strategy.

Councillor Lodge said it was important that the Council looked to obtain the maximum amount of Section 106 funding possible from housing developments to ensure that infrastructure adequately supported residents.

In response to Councillor Lodge, Councillor Barker said it was not always possible for developers to provide the maximum level of Section 106 contributions for a particular site. In these instances the Council had to prioritise certain aspects of the Section 106 contributions.

Update on Capital and Revenue Schemes Approved for 2013-14

The Highways Liaison Officer outlined the following schemes:

(i) The Street, Takeley – Traffic calming

There had been a meeting with the Parish Council, as well as the district and county councillors for Takeley. The Parish Council had indicated which parts of the scheme it wanted to see progressed.

The Design Engineer said the scheme was progressing well. UK Power Networks (UKPN) would begin their work at the beginning of October. The main part of the scheme would begin in the New Year.

The Highways Liaison Officer said it was difficult to provide an exact cost, as there were a number of potential variables. However, the quote of £20,000 from the UKPN was significantly less than expected.

(ii) Design works for new footway – Bellrope Meadows across the recreation ground

In response to a question by Councillor Barker, the Highways Liaison Officer said that although the footway was on private land, the footway connected two residential areas and had been brought to the attention of the Panel by the Parish Council. It remained up to members to decide whether funding was allocated for the scheme.

(iii) Relocation of solar powered VAS sign – Bran End, Stebbing

The initial speed survey showed that the site did not meet the criteria for a VAS sign. A County Council member said the figures obtained were not representative of average speeds and a new survey was due to be completed by late September.

Summary of Schemes Approved in 2014-15

The Highways Liaison Officer said that although the entire budget had been allocated, there were top-up funds available if schemes went over their estimated cost. The scheme at London Road's junction with Station Road in Wendens Ambo was now estimated to cost £15,500 instead of £10,500.

Councillor Barker said that there was currently no way of knowing the exact cost of schemes. It was possible there were many schemes which had been completed under budget of which the Panel would not be aware.

In response, the Highways Liaison Officer said she had raised the issue before and it was possible that the actual costs of schemes would be available at a future meeting.

HP12

POTENTIAL SCHEME LIST

Summary of Feasibility Studies for consideration in 2014-15

The Highways Liaison Officer said although the entire budget had been allocated, there was still funding available for feasibility studies. Members discussed funding three feasibility studies for casualty reduction schemes.

(i) B1008, Barnston to North End – Signage and minor carriageway widening

In response to comments made by Councillor Barker, The Highways Liaison Officer said she had raised the issue of the scheme's location as it did not appear to be within Uttlesford, although this had been disputed.

Councillor Walters suggested that if the scheme was shown to be in Uttlesford then funding should be allocated in order to complete a feasibility study.

(ii) B1256 j/w Chelmsford Road just north of A120 Dunmow south turnoff – Design works for improvements at the Hoblongs junction

In response to comments made by Councillor Barker, the Design Engineer said damage caused to signs at the junction would be looked at.

The Principal Transportation Co-ordinator said changes to road signage were being picked up following a decision by the portfolio holder.

(iii) B184 Springwell Road, north of Saffron Walden – Design works for improved signage and carriageway

Members agreed to allocate funding for a feasibility study.

The Highways Liaison Officer said that other schemes could not yet be allocated funding. In response to a question by Councillor Barker, the Highways Liaison officer said the resurfacing of Byways 30 and 31 in Debden and Byway 36 in Wimbish could be completed in stages.

The Panel agreed to fund the following schemes from capital:

Location	Scheme	Cost
B1256 j/w Chelmsford Road just north of A120 Dunmow south turnoff	Design works for improvements at the Hoblongs junction – feasibility study	£4,000
B184 Springwell Road, north of Saffron Walden	Design works for improved signage and carriageway – feasibility study	£4,000

The Panel agreed to fund the following scheme from capital provided it was within Uttlesford:

Location	Scheme	Cost
B1008, Barnston to North End	Signage and minor carriageway widening – feasibility study	£3,000

The Highways Liaison Officer said that the Rangers were still carrying out work to a high standard and completing requests quickly. They were currently prioritising vegetation removal works.

Revenue Expenditure Items

The Highways Liaison Officer said money had been allocated for six speed surveys. The survey in Wendens Ambo would begin shortly, as it was necessary to wait until the school term had begun in order to produce accurate survey results.

Members agreed funding could be allocated as and when requests were received by the Highways Liaison Officer.

HP14

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Councillor Lodge asked what could be done about road signage following Mr McAdams' presentation.

Councillor Walters said that a scheme of that size would be very difficult to organise. The Rangers were a two man team and they would over extend themselves if they were to provide training to a large number of volunteers.

The Highways Liaison Officer added that a number of road signs were in de-restricted areas that the Rangers, and by extension the public, would not be able to deal with. The best course for progression was to contact parish councils as they had public liability insurance

The meeting ended at 8.20pm.

PUBLIC SPEAKING

Mr McAdams

Mr McAdams read the following statement to accompany his PowerPoint presentation. "Mr Chairman, members of the Panel, thank you for giving me the opportunity of making this presentation to you this evening. Our road signs are disappearing and many that are not are in a very sad state of repair. I took some photos, some of which I am going to show you now, all of which I found quite disturbing.

I thought our Rangers deserve some support so I met with Councillor Lodge to discuss the idea of co-opting the help of some of my Rotarian friends. He suggested that I present this idea to the Panel. Since we had our meeting I've realised that given the enormity of the task, even if all our members helped, we wouldn't be able to make much of an impact. I would like to present to you this evening another approach.

Before doing so I felt that it was important for me to establish the cause of the problem. Is it because; ECC following the budget cuts of 2010 have cancelled or severely reduced hedge and tree trimming contracts? Is it because; ECC, after 4 hard winters since 2010, have had to divert their resources to repairing road surfaces at the cost of trimming hedges and trees? It's probably a combination of both so that now ECC and our Rangers, whilst doing a brilliant job, are now totally overwhelmed with circa 8,000 road signs to maintain annually in Uttlesford alone.

ECC should commit to trim hedges and trees as a matter of urgency. Then let's support our Rangers by asking the community for help. After all we are being encouraged to be a part of the 'Big Society'. So please get us involved. Appoint 'Community Volunteer Rangers'. After all community volunteers in other public sectors are very successful, with a bit of training and equipping there's no reason why we cannot support the Rangers in what they do.

The Uttlesford Community Rangers could be enlisted by Uttlesford's Town and Parish Councils; between 2 to 4 per Parish, dependent upon the size of the Parish, with more in the towns; we are talking circa 200 volunteers. This represents less than ½% of the Uttlesford adult population. Our Rangers could train and supply us with the appropriate equipment, including Hi-Vis vests which could have 'Uttlesford Community Rangers' printed on them. We would report to our own Town or Parish Councils, who in turn would report to the Local Highway Panel.

If this approach were to be accepted by the Panel the next step could be to persuade ECC to trim the hedges and trees. Obviously funding has to be found but in the longer term by using volunteer Rangers, savings could be made which could then go toward the trimming work. Local Highways Panel to appoint and train the Community Rangers. Create a partnership between ECC, Local Highways Panel and the Community. Prioritise this and roll it out a model for the nation.

The problem isn't just in Uttlesford, it's over the entire country. Whilst we have one road sign that is obscured then our lives are at risk. ECC and Uttlesford please take the lead. Thank you for listening to me."

Mrs Frost

Mrs Frost said that Councillor Walsh had attended the most recent Hempstead Parish Council meeting and given an update on the proposed footpath. The Parish Council was satisfied that progress was being made and was happy with the report Councillor Walsh presented at the meeting.

Councillor Knight

Councillor Knight said that for over 10 years she had been approached by Carver Barracks about the lack of facilities around the site. The site was poorly connected to other areas and there was no bus service to and from the site. One solution was to provide a cycle path that went past Carver Barracks, Thaxted as well as Saffron Walden. Schemes such as this often had such a great cost that they were instantly dismissed as being too expensive, however the scheme could be completed in stages. This would make the scheme more manageable. Both the Council and the County Council needed to look at funding they could allocate themselves in addition to looking at other funding opportunities such as those available from Europe.

Councillor Cheetham

Councillor Cheetham said Jack's Lane in Takeley and Little Canfield had become unnegotiable due to damage caused to the road by off-road vehicles and motorbikes. Although she was grateful that the Council had referred the road to the Secretary of State for downgrading, the process could take up to three years if someone objected. Given the road's use by off-road vehicles this was highly likely. The road was no longer usable and was in need of remedial works to bring the road up to standard.