

PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

MONDAY, 14 NOVEMBER 2022

PRESENT: Councillors John Bowden (Chairman), Greg Jones, Maureen Hunt, Sayonara Luxton, Shamsul Shelim, Leo Walters, Mandy Brar, John Baldwin, Gurch Singh, Jon Davey and Parish Councillors Margaret Lenton & Pat McDonald

Also in attendance: Councillors Phil Haseler, David Hilton (Virtually), Gurpreet Bhangra (Virtually) and Donna Stimson (Virtually)

Officers: Oran Norris-Browne, Chris Joyce (Virtually), Tim Golabek (Virtually) and Ben Crampin (Virtually)

ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN

A motion was put forward by Councillor Luxton to elect Councillor Bowden as Chairman for the remainder of the municipal year 2022/23. This was seconded by Councillor Hunt.

A second motion was put forward by Councillor Davey to elect Councillor Walters as Chairman for the remainder of the municipal year 2022/23. This was seconded by Councillor Baldwin.

A named vote was taken on the first motion that was put forward and seconded, which was Councillor Luxton's motion.

Election of Councillor Bowden as Chairman for remainder of municipal year 2022/23 (Motion)	
Councillor John Bowden	For
Councillor Greg Jones	For
Councillor Maureen Hunt	For
Councillor Sayonara Luxton	For
Councillor Shamsul Shelim	For
Councillor Leo Walters	For
Councillor Mandy Brar	Against
Councillor John Baldwin	Against
Councillor Gurch Singh	Against
Councillor Jon Davey	Against
Parish Councillor Margaret Lenton	No vote recorded
Parish Councillor Pat McDonald	No vote recorded
Carried	

AGREED: That Councillor Bowden be elected as Chairman for the remainder of the municipal year 2022/23.

Councillor Davey's motion was not voted upon due to the first motion passing.

Councillor Baldwin asked if the newly elected Chairman was going to forgo his Special Responsibility Allowance, in the wake of a 10th cabinet member being appointed. Oran Norris-Browne, Democratic Services Officer, said that this was the Chairman's decision, and it was not a matter for the panel members to discuss.

A motion was then put forward by Councillor Shelim to elect Councillor Taylor as Vice-Chairman for the remainder of the municipal year 2022/23. This was seconded by Councillor Luxton.

Discussions then took place as to whether or not Councillor Taylor could be nominated as she had given her apologies for the meeting. Oran Norris-Browne confirmed that this was allowed as she was still a panel member. Councillor Baldwin raised a point of order and asked how the panel could nominate someone without them being present to accept the nomination. It was stated that this was allowed, and subsequently Councillor Davey received confirmation from Councillor Taylor that she was happy to be elected via telephone communication. This ended the debate.

A named vote was taken.

Election of Councillor Taylor as Vice Chairman for remainder of municipal year 2022/23 (Motion)	
Councillor John Bowden	For
Councillor Greg Jones	For
Councillor Maureen Hunt	For
Councillor Sayonara Luxton	For
Councillor Shamsul Shelim	For
Councillor Leo Walters	For
Councillor Mandy Brar	Abstain
Councillor John Baldwin	Abstain
Councillor Gurch Singh	Abstain
Councillor Jon Davey	For
Parish Councillor Margaret Lenton	No vote recorded
Parish Councillor Pat McDonald	No vote recorded
Carried	

AGRED: That Councillor Taylor be elected Vice-Chairman for the remainder of the municipal year 2022/23.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Taylor.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

All Panel Members declared an interest in agenda item 7 as all of their Wards were at risk of flooding.

ACTIONS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

All actions had been completed in June 2022.

MINUTES

AGREED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held 21 June 2022 were a true and accurate reflection.

CALL IN - DRAFT ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGEPOINT IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Councillor Davey who was one of the three Councillors who had called in the Draft Electric Vehicle ChargePoint Implementation Plan began by reading out the reason provided within the report as to why they had decided to call in the decision.

Councillor Baldwin who was the second of the three members that called in the decision, stated that he was present at cabinet when the draft plan was passed, and he had listened closely to the debate. He added that the previous Lead Member for Transport & Infrastructure had said that any future policy that came forward, would be informed by the data from the trial. He said that no data was present, and that cabinet had not been informed sufficiently to approve the draft plan.

Councillor Baldwin expressed concern that when the draft plan went out to public consultation in the future, the public would be commenting on a plan that did not have the full facts and data that were required to give sufficient feedback. Instead of asking residents to comment on evidence-based suggestions, he said it appeared that the Council were asking residents what the policy should be instead.

Councillor Baldwin said that going forward, the strains on the revenue budget, which were already tight, could only be offset if capital receipts were converted into revenue flows, such as CIL contributions. The figure quoted in the report was between £250,000 and £500,000. He was astonished that cabinet unanimously agreed to the draft policy. He said that the report needed to include further data from the trial and be referred back to cabinet for reconsideration. He said that it was an example of bad policy that would negatively affect the borough for years to come.

Councillor Singh who was the third member of three who signed the call-in, expressed his concern over the lack of detail that was present within the draft report that went to cabinet. He said that the Council had an obligation to achieve the best value for money. He wished for the report to go back to cabinet with the correct data, to be reconsidered.

Councillor Singh said that this decision would impact residents for the next 10-20 years and the fact that this power had been delegated to just one officer and one councillor, was greatly concerning. He added that there was no mention of covering costs through CIL payments, although did acknowledge the struggles of the borough financially.

Councillor Davey said that there were roughly 150,000 people within the borough and potentially around 50,000 vehicles. 500 permits had been issued for electric vehicles. This equated to 1% of vehicles within the borough being electric. He enquired about the use of hydrogen energy, instead of electric.

Councillor Davey said that no traffic regulation orders had been made, and therefore that issue would need to be sorted out. He said that if the suppliers were installing the planned works at their expense, they would be looking to make the best profit and not care about the borough's needs.

Councillor Davey said that with the threat of blackouts and 5G technology, why was hydrogen energy not being looked at. He also expressed great concern over air quality within the borough. He said that hydrogen cars would be lighter and therefore would produce less pollution. He also said that the borough was meant to be a borough of innovation and that they should be attracting companies such as River Simple to build their factories within the borough.

Councillor Haseler, Lead Member for Planning, Parking, Highways & Transport, firstly stated that hydrogen cars could one day play a key role in transport, however the borough were currently following Government guidance around the cut-off point of 2030 for fossil fuel vehicles. He then read out an extract that he gave to cabinet in October 2022, when the draft plan was agreed. This was done to provide members who did not attend cabinet, some clarity over the details of the report.

Chris Joyce, Head of Infrastructure, Sustainability & Economic Growth, said that there would be a consultation and policy document available to those taking part in the consultation. Therefore, consultation would not be based solely on the report that went to cabinet. The intention would be to share this with all members for comment before it went to public consultation. He added that no policy was being made at this point, and instead consultation would occur to get the views of many.

Chris Joyce said that he was happy to work with the Chairman in regard to bring a paper to the panel after the public consultation had ended. He added that the cost to residents for charging was an impossible thing to predict. Principles could be set out, within the plan, but it would be difficult to predict the cost. Existing resources would be used for the consultation process, with the only opportunity cost being the time of officers. However, Chris Joyce noted that this time would be well spent due to it being a key goal within the Corporate Plan and for Central Government.

Chris Joyce made reference to the point raised about the Council potentially owning and maintaining the infrastructure. He did not recommend this as it would potentially cause a significant increase on internal capabilities. The risk could outweigh the reward in doing this. In response to hydrogen, he noted that it would play a key role in the future, but it did not play a role currently. Electric vehicles played a better role currently in reducing the carbon output. Air quality was noted; however, it was outside of the scope for the panel's decision.

Chris Joyce said that the consultation was an opportunity to let all members have their say on the draft report. If the panel voted for the plan to go back to cabinet, then this would potentially elongate and delay the process further.

Councillor Walters asked about hybrid cars and whether or not these would be included within the plan. He also expressed concern about what he had heard from Los Angeles where increased use of electric vehicles had added a greater strain on the grid. Chris Joyce explained that there were 2 types of hybrid vehicles. One was electric and could plug in to the EV charging points that had been proposed and the other was recharged via the petrol engine. He acknowledged the concerns that members had about greater strain on the grid, however he said that smart charging was to be encouraged, where charging occurred at non-peak hours.

Councillor Hunt said that she had listened carefully to both Councillor Baldwin and Councillor Davey's points and agreed with their concerns over a potential lack of data being made available for the public to consider. She also asked why hydrogen vehicles were not being focussed upon more. Chris Joyce replied by saying that there was currently not much of a market for hydrogen vehicles, however in the future if the market grew, then the borough would certainly look into this.

Councillor Shelim asked for some clarity over what the process was for the draft plan.

Councillor Haseler provided this clarity and stated that once members had commented, it would go out for public consultation. Once this had ended, a final paper would be made and presented back to cabinet for final approval. Councillor Shelim thanked Councillor Haseler for clarifying the process.

Councillor Baldwin questioned what the mechanism was for allowing members to discuss a post-consultation paper. Chris Joyce said that the consultation material would be shared with members before it went out to public consultation for their comments and feedback on the contents of the document and questions that will be asked to the public. It would be shared with members in the same way as it had been in the past.

Councillor Baldwin then asked for clarity as to what cabinet had actually agreed to with regards to the next steps of the draft paper. Chris Joyce confirmed that cabinet had delegated

authority to himself and Councillor Haseler to carry out the process that he had just discussed. The process was finalising the plan based upon the consultation feedback and then a paper would be written with the final policy document attached, for cabinet to approve.

Councillor Davey said with regards to AUX, he felt that the Council would have to find a lot of the money itself. He said that if the members were able to see more detail before it went to public consultation, then he would be happy. He also added that there was a cost to this, even though it may be less than if an external entity was used.

Councillor Singh said that he was concerned about how the draft plan had been put together. He asked when the draft plan had been put together. Tim Golabek, Service Lead for Transport & Infrastructure, said that early engagement began in Spring 2022. After that, options were discussed about moving forward and the draft plan had been worked on over the last 3-4 months.

Councillor Singh said that the trial sites had been chosen by Chris' predecessor in 2019 when a climate emergency had been declared. He asked if the LEVI funding had been completed and submitted to Central Government. Chris Joyce said that innovative solution applications would potentially reopen early 2023, but it had not yet been applied for as Central Government had not yet asked local authorities to come forward.

Councillor Singh asked what the deadline was for completion of AUX funding. Chris Joyce said that there was no specific deadline, and the last application was made in 2019. With the plan adopted, he said that the borough would look to maximise opportunities on offer from the government for the borough. The most appropriate pot of money would be applied for, if and when the final plan was approved by cabinet.

Chris Joyce questioned the relevance of these points towards the decision that was made by cabinet and called-in by the three members.

Councillor Singh asked if Councillor Haseler would be willing to bring the paper before the panel before it went back to cabinet. Councillor Haseler said that he did not see the point in this as members would have ample opportunity to provide comments and feedback and that this would not be productive.

Councillor G. Jones asked if residents would have a choice of electricity suppliers when it came to EV charging. Councillor Haseler said that the Council would enter into agreements with various suppliers and that a choice would likely not be on offer.

Councillor G. Jones said that this could result in negative impacts on house prices due to the availability of electricity in various areas. Councillor Haseler said that he understood the point being made, however this was a hypothetical situation. Chris Joyce added by saying that consistency of electric prices would be important and focussed upon.

Parish Councillor Margaret Lenton asked if villages would be included in this and what impact this would have on the planning process. Chris Joyce said that the packages on offer would be a mix of both urban and rural offerings, so all areas would be covered. EV charging points had also been incorporated into building regulations going forward too.

Councillor Brar asked how many suppliers were being looked at and why had it taken the borough since 2019 and beyond to work on the plan. Chris Joyce said that the plan had been developed as a result of the Government's push to have a plan and outlined a few projects that had occurred around the borough with EV charging so far. 12 suppliers had been engaged with to inform them of the plan and procurement would be discussed on an individual project base.

Councillor Brar asked if the rural areas were going to be included within the plan. Chris Joyce confirmed that they were included.

Councillor Baldwin asked if funding had been committed too and sites had been identified in 2019, why was it only being looked at now in 2022. Chris Joyce said that he could not comment on things that had occurred before he had joined the Council. Since joining he had been moving things forward and stated that changes within the structure of the Council and Covid-19, were probably factors that had played a role in this.

The Chairman stated that EV charging points were currently present at various petrol stations around the borough. He added that the main railway went through Maidenhead which now had overhead electrical cables to power the trains. When the brakes were in use, the particles would contribute to the air pollution that had been discussed within the meeting. He said that 52% of power generation was currently done through gas.

Councillors Davey, Baldwin and Singh then summarised their positions following the discussions that had taken place during the meeting. They agreed that it was satisfactory that members were consulted before the public consultation occurred and if it was felt that the public had not been listened too, then the panel were able to call-in the decision back to the panel once more.

Councillor Haseler then summarised his position as Lead Member.

A motion was then proposed by Councillor Davey for the Place Overview & Scrutiny Panel to take no further action, but with the draft paper being shared with all members and the 2 co-optees on the Panel, 7 working days prior to the commencement of the public consultation. This was seconded by Councillor Singh.

A named vote was taken.

Call In - Draft Electric Vehicle Chargepoint Implementation Plan (Motion)	
Councillor John Bowden	For
Councillor Greg Jones	For
Councillor Maureen Hunt	For
Councillor Sayonara Luxton	For
Councillor Shamsul Shelim	For
Councillor Leo Walters	For
Councillor Mandy Brar	For
Councillor John Baldwin	For
Councillor Gurch Singh	For
Councillor Jon Davey	For
Parish Councillor Margaret Lenton	No vote recorded
Parish Councillor Pat McDonald	No vote recorded
Carried	

AGREED UNANIMOUSLY: That the Place Overview & Scrutiny Panel to take no further action, but with the draft paper being shared with all members and the 2 co-optees on the Panel, 7 working days prior to the commencement of the public consultation.

RESIDENT SCRUTINY TOPIC SUGGESTION - RIVER THAMES SCHEME AND FLOOD RELIEF IN WRAYSBURY

Prior to the discussions on this item, the Chairman adjourned the meeting for a 5-minute comfort break at 21.00. The meeting resumed at 21.05. Councillors Baldwin, Luxton and Walters along with Parish Councillors McDonald and Lenton left the meeting at this time and took no further part in it.

The panel considered the resident scrutiny topic report on the River Thames scheme and flood relief in Wraysbury.

Chris Joyce provided a brief introduction to the report and stated that the River Thames scheme had been discussed many times during meetings in RBWM and encouraged the panel to focus more on developing a scope on the Datchet to Hythe End Flood Improvement Plan and challenge the process of both the borough and the Environment Agency.

Councillor Davey said that there needed to be some work within that area and that if any works occurred, then Councillor Larcombe be included on them due to flooding being fundamental to him and residents within his ward of Datchet, Horton and Wraysbury.

Ben Crampin, Flood Risk Manager, said that the Datchet to Hythe End Flood Improvement Plan was currently with the Environment Agency and was going through their programme network. The first stage of this was for the plan to go through the strategic outline case. This had been and will be shared through various channels such as through the Flood Liaison Group. Following March 2023, engagement would then start with Ward Councillors at some point after the Local Elections in May 2023. Public consultation would also then occur.

Chris Joyce said that Ben had done a lot of good work such as delivering short term improvements, which would hopefully alleviate the flood risk within the borough.

Councillor Singh asked for further detail on the quick wins that had been discussed.

Ben Crampin said that there were currently 3 projects that were underway. One regarded the Wraysbury Drain and its risks, which Councillor Larcombe was heavily involved in. The 2nd was the Datchet Barrel Arch, which the borough were working closely with the Parish Council. The third was a project to identify the feasibility of installing a flat valve to alleviate the flood risk towards Datchet. These were ongoing investigations.

Councillor Singh expressed concern over the £50 million that had been commissioned by the borough in the past. He wished for reports to come before the panel to show what was being done to protect residents and their possessions from flooding. He expressed concern over the political issues that may be caused by this.

Chris Joyce said that this was the reason for the recommendation that had been put forward within the report, so that the panel could really add some value to the scheme.

Councillor Hunt asked if the £10 million was going to just be for short term improvements. Chris Joyce said it was not and that it was for the whole programme including both short term and long-term things.

Councillor Brar said that £50 million was originally committed and questioned why it was now only committing £10 million? She also asked if this scheme would be extended to other parts of the borough. Chris Joyce said that the £50 million commitment pre-dated his time at the Council, and it had also been discussed many times at borough meetings, so he would not discuss it now. The scheme was a capital programme, but it did not prevent the borough from bringing forward other flood alleviating projects across the whole borough.

Councillor Davey said that discussing the scheme before May 2023 would not be beneficial due to it potentially becoming a political discussion. He asked for it to be discussed post May 2023.

Chris Joyce asked if it was worth the panel nominating a panel member to lead on creating the scoping document in conjunction with officers. Councillor Singh asked for clarity. Oran Norris-Browne offered this after discussing with the Chairman and he stated that this was to be discussed in the work programme section offline.

Councillor Hunt asked for clarity around the wording of the recommendation made by officers. Chris Joyce provided this and all members understood.

Councillor Davey, Councillor Singh and Councillor Hunt nominated Councillor Bowden to lead on the recommendation. He accepted this.

ACTION: Councillor Bowden to complete scoping document on the Datchet to Hythe End Flood Improvement Programme.

AGREED UNANIMOUSLY: That the Place Overview & Scrutiny Panel notes the report and develops the scope for an alternative future item to scrutinise the Datchet to Hythe End Flood Improvement Programme being developed by the Environment Agency and the Council.

WORK PROGRAMME

As it had passed 21.30, the Panel agreed to discuss the work programme offline via email.

AGREED UNANIMOUSLY: That the last agenda item titled 'Work Programme' be addressed offline via email.

The meeting, which began at 7.00 pm, finished at 9.35 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....