

Cheltenham Development Task Force Board Meeting

Item 65/15 (i)

Friday 17th July 2015 - 2.00pm – 4:00 pm
Pittville Room, Municipal offices, Cheltenham

Open Minutes of meeting

Present: Graham Garbutt (Independent Chair)
Cllr Andrew McKinlay
Cllr Vernon Smith
Simon Excell (sub for Nigel Riglar)
Robert Duncan
David Oldham
Stephen Clarke
Michael Ratcliffe
Diane Savory
Bernice Thomson

Other: Jeremy Williamson
Cllr Steve Jordan
Mike Redman
Howard Barber
Wilf Tomaney
David Roberts

No.	Item	Action
40/15	Apologies: Cllr Will Windsor-Clive, Jeff Brinley, Scott Tompkins, Nigel Riglar, Andrew North, Joyce Clifford, Cllr Chris Nelson, Amanda Lawson-Smith, Ross Simmonds, Chris Riley, Dorian Wragg and Tracey Crews.	
41/15	Declarations of Interest – Cllr VS and SE confirmed the same declarations of interest as recorded previously as sponsors of GLTB projects see item 46/15 and in relation to the TRO issues discussed under item 47/15 and 50/15. In light of the JCS update item 45/15 the Chair likewise noted an interest as previously as he chairs a neighbourhood planning group.	
42/15	Minutes of previous meeting 24/04/15 Open minutes – approved as accurate. Matters Arising - page 2 (item 25/15.1): the Chair asked Cllr SJ to provide an update on CIL under the JCS item 45/15 as referred to in the previous minutes. Also on page 2 (item 25.15.2): DS confirmed part of the £400k funding from the LEP was for a 'retail lab' in Cheltenham, which would make Cheltenham a centrifugal point for retail. Depending on progress by the next Board meeting in October, JW explained that there may be a proposal he could bring to that meeting for consideration.	

	<p>Confidential minutes – approved as accurate.</p> <p>Matters arising – page 4 (item 38/15): regarding parking issues relating to St Mary’s church, HB confirmed that there had now been agreement from the church to agree to no parking within the church curtilage, which the Chair congratulated both him and BT on their achievements in resolving a long running issue.. BT confirmed that one of the boundary walls was presently being re-built, and that the debate had been opened on whether another one could be reduced in height.</p> <p>Both the Open and Confidential minutes were otherwise accepted.</p>	
43/15	<p>Action Matrix and Matters Arising</p> <p>Items were either actioned, or on the agenda.</p> <p>Wider matters (item 25/15) - JW confirmed that a LEP sub-group would be meeting to look at progressing additional J10 traffic modelling works. RD confirmed first meeting date as 30th July 2015.</p> <p>Communications group quarterly update (item 35/15) – not yet done, but JW would pick up early the following week.</p>	
44/15	<p>Confirmation of confidentiality of items</p>	
	<p>Matters for information</p>	
45/15	<p>Wider matters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint Core Strategy <p>MRedman explained that the Examination was currently in progress; going slow but steady. There had been no ‘show stoppers’ but slightly negatively the Inspector had timetabled an extra session for Oct/Nov time, so some concerns around the examination timetable being in danger of slipping. Officers were hoping for informal findings coming out in November.</p> <p>Employment land had been a key item of debate and the Inspector seemed live to that and was considering quite actively. MR felt the Inspector may be mindful of safe-guarded land but was waiting for comments on that in due course. Evidence of quantum relating to retail land was being sought as well as additional reassurance around capacity in terms of economic versus housing requirements. The strategic housing assessment needed to ensure the methodology was broadly aligned for the County as a whole.</p> <p>The Inspector was asking for further assurance work to be carried out around the housing policy in terms of numbers. Re-assurance about a sufficient quantum of affordable housing need was also being sought, and viability.</p> <p>The controversial issue of gypsy traveller provision had been raised, and there was evidence of the quantum required being provided. Questions had been raised as to whether the Local Plan projections about provision coming from small sites were sufficiently robust and delivered what was required, on which further work was necessary.</p>	

	<p>The strategy on urban extensions had been largely accepted but later findings would confirm. Cllr SJ reinforced the fact that not much decision making was being carried out in parallel.</p> <p>In relation to employment land RD highlighted that Nathaniel Litchfield & Partners had taken the national figures and averaged them; not reporting anything specific for Gloucestershire, which is why Athey Consulting's report did not align. Also, in relation to GCHQ surprise was expressed around the inclusion of a 5% reduction (ie national average) rather than an anticipated expansion.</p> <p>Cllr SJ explained that consultation on the Cheltenham Town Plan was taking place up until 3rd August, and that phase 1 of the Local Plan looked at sites within the Borough and whether the allocation should be housing / business land. MRedman stressed that the Local Plan consultation started on 2nd June and closes on 3rd August – with two formal public consultation events during the interim, so comments could be fed back in as the process goes along.</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LEP Strategic Economic Plan <p>On behalf of the infrastructure group DS relayed thanks to all the business people who have provided a strong voice for Gloucestershire. Cllr SJ explained that having got the SEP in place it was now largely about doing the background work to ensure that what's been pledged by the Government actually happens in terms of jobs.</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • J10 <p>SE explained that a new working group had been set up, and would be meeting on 30th July, and would be chaired by Mike Dawson, Chief Executive at Tewkesbury BC. Traffic consultants for North West Cheltenham had come forward and said that a four-way junction at J10 was not required (as per the views they had previously provided to the JCS) - so all subject to the Inspector's decision. In response to a query by the Chair as to whether the Inspector's view would be changed if there was consensus agreement to the safe-guarded land, SE confirmed it had not been modelled and therefore the trigger point was unknown. JW stressed that one of the first things at the meeting on 30th July would be to commission a piece of work to determine the trigger point.</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cheltenham Plan - covered within the update on the JCS above. 	
46/15	<p>Cheltenham Spa Railway Station – update</p> <p>JW made reference to his update report which, to some degree had been superseded by a letter from the Under Secretary of State Claire Perry MP to Alex Chalk MP – copies of which were tabled for info. JW flagged that First Great Western was taking responsibility for submitting the updated Strategic Outline Case to GLTB early in August 2015.</p>	

	<p>JW highlighted under item 4.3 of the update concerns about an early implementation of any restrictive parking practice as that could potentially have a negative impact upon the station and long term modal shift. SE suggested JW send something via Chris Riley who would ensure its inclusion within the consultation. Action: SE would ensure Nigel Riglar was made aware of the sensitivity of this particular issue and frames any instructions to avoid restrictions being implemented at an inappropriate time.</p>	<p>SE</p>
<p>Matters for consideration</p>		
<p>47/15</p>	<p>Cheltenham Transport Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GCC Cabinet paper and implications <p>JW had previously circulated a link to the GCC website and papers for the Cheltenham Transport Plan being considered by Cabinet on 22nd July. Cllr VS declared an interest so SE explained that the decision being taken on 22nd July was firstly to ratify the process to accept the TRO recommendations from January 2015 with the exception of the Boots Corner scheme. The second part of the recommendation was for Nigel Riglar to announce changes through the TRO with the exception of the closure of Boots Corner, and thirdly for Nigel Riglar to undertake a review to ascertain the impact of those changes and consider the long term effect of the Boots Corner options.</p> <p>SE confirmed that the LSTF would fund £600k towards the cost of change to the inner ring-road, and that any overspend would be addressed through the County's capital programme. JW explained that if the County's recommendations receive approval the Albion Street changes would take priority and would take place from October 2015 - February 2016. The second priority would be to make Oriel Road two-way and would start Easter 2016; then once both elements were complete an analysis of traffic movements would take place, to include both Royal Well / Boots Corner.</p> <p>MRatcliffe stressed concerns about the proposed delay in implementing changes to the highway at Boots Corner, and quoted text from a formal question he had posed to GCC cabinet on behalf of Cheltenham's Chamber of Commerce. The delay in the Boots Corner scheme had been received negatively by the retail and investment community within Cheltenham, and he asked if Cabinet would assess the financial risk to the many current and planned projects. MRatcliffe was considering asking a supplementary question about what had suddenly changed to necessitate such delay in implementing changes to Boots Corner, and what were the obstacles?</p> <p>SE was unable to provide further information other than to reiterate that the TRO Committee had received representations and objections to what had been proposed and those had been fully reflected to Cabinet and highlighted in the paper now available and on which Cabinet would make a decision on 22nd July. He felt it was a balanced report in that Committee had received all representations.</p>	

Cllr SJ felt the initial TRO recommendation was a good compromise, and unless a trial of the Boots Corner scheme took place, it would never be known what the impacts of that would be. His concern was that there had been a political consensus in Cheltenham that this was a good thing but that consensus appeared to be breaking down, putting things at risk. Most of the population were in favour, but those with concerns had been listened to albeit not all the retail sector he felt. Cllr AMcK followed on by saying it was very disappointing, not least because the County had signed up to partner the Borough in this work. A partial solution with promises about the rest would mean at best the entire process would have to be repeated. He thought the County was in a precarious position, and running the risk of being accused by businesses in the town of knowingly undermining the business of the town. He too had thought the TRO Committee's recommendation had been a sensible compromise, so before the following Wednesday's meeting there was need to lobby hard about reverting to the original decision of TRO Committee.

JW explained that he had been directly approached by the Brewery, as they are ploughing £30M into their scheme and now they were reading in the press about there not now being a trial. Other developers were likewise extremely concerned about the impact of this decision. JW was aware that a letter to GCC with twenty plus businesses behind it would be issued later that day. The current recommendation had stirred up significant concern from the business community.

BT had received a lot of representation from the West End where residents and business feel like second class citizens, and feel Boots Corner currently creates a barrier to the town. The Minster was the most important building in Cheltenham, but like an island, cut off from the rest of the town. It was accepted that the economic argument would carry the strongest voice but other more social/environmental projects going on in that part of town would also be affected by the closure of Boots Corner being delayed. As part of the Lower High Street Group RD had noted enthusiasm coming through on the back of increased footfall being promoted, but now the whole thing was being put in doubt.

In response to a comment made by SC regarding Boots Corner possibly causing increased traffic in College Road, the Chair stressed the importance of having an experimental scheme was to identify specifically the impacts of such a scheme. SE reinforced the process for a decision being taken, and in response to a query by the Chair, confirmed that funding being available was not an issue.

MRa stressed that once Blackrock gives the 'go ahead' to the Beechwood scheme after 22nd July decision, it would in turn encourage other known major retail investors coming forward, and so Boots Corner would become even more important as investors and retailers will want clarity about the town's economic development. However, the current situation did not provide them with any confidence.

	<p>The Chair felt the TRO managed to balance concerns by some residents. The Task Force had been trying to develop an integrated programme for the town, so a deferral was very damaging to investment. Stopping the momentum at this point was really unacceptable and he felt that the Task Force should not allow the situation to go unchallenged. DS felt it was very unfortunate that the negativity had taken over the positivity, and reinforced the need to maintain confidence in the business community and among new investors. WT explained that when the initial modelling was done a lot had been said about implementing the road changes in one fell swoop, and that modelling in Albion Street was based on the assumption that the Boots Corner scheme would be in place, so was nervous about phasing if it was done over an extended period. The Chair believed there was a risk in having an incomplete programme, so would be urging GCC to take out any deferral and promoting sequential installations with monitoring throughout the process.</p> <p>JW had suggested a redrafting of the existing proposals so the recommendations were phased to allow sufficient time for unambiguous impact assessments to be made. He felt a steer on the timeline and commitment to a trial would quite easily resolve the situation and help bring the business community back on board.</p> <p>The Chair proposed writing to Cabinet on behalf of the Task Force explaining that whilst there were understandable concerns among some residents; consideration was also needed in providing investors in the town with some degree of reassurance, which is what the TRO Committee's recommendation had done.</p> <p>SE welcomed such a letter but noted that given the timescales that it would need to be submitted by Monday 20th July at the latest.</p> <p>WT had spoken to Joyce Clifford (of the Gloucestershire Review Panel) as they were keen to consider plans for the junction changes being proposed from a design perspective. He had also been liaising with O/S Committee on cycling / walking as the Director for Walk 21 Group had taken him around some randomly chosen sites that she had some serious concerns about walking round Cheltenham, particularly pedestrian movements around many of the junctions. Cllr AMcK highlighted what Blackrock had said during their earlier presentation, which was that if Albion Street did not go ahead there was a good chance they would not go ahead with the Beechwood development. MR stressed that he did not think GCC understood the serious ramifications for Cheltenham and importance for future investment of the town. As far as DS was concerned she could not understand, and thought that the County was risking the economic development of the town. The Chair assured Board members that his letter to the Cabinet via Cllr Vernon Smith will take on board all points their comments and would include statements about protecting John Lewis' interests and the point BT had made about businesses in Lower High Street. Action: GG/JW to draft letter as discussed then post to SE to ensure Cabinet receive it before 22nd July.</p>	<p>GG urgent</p>
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<p>48/15</p>	<p>• Lower High Street</p> <p>BT explained there had been two meetings since the Task Force last met, and there was now a smaller group looking at the consultation process. In addition to the circulated report she raised several issues, including the desirability of some early 'wins' to build confidence in the community:</p> <p>(i) the toilet block in St George's Square, essential to hold off leasing the building as it was central to the area being considered for improvement (as previously agreed by the Task Force);</p> <p>(ii) property related issues in that the Council may explore the building by the bridge, which had potential links from the Honeybourne Link to the far western end of the High Street. Both issues were acknowledged by the Chair, who recalled previous mention being made of a flower / fruit and veg seller possibly utilising the toilet block to increase animation of that space. He likewise saw the Winston Churchill Gardens as being an underused facility in the town, and felt the only entrance via a narrow alleyway should be made more inviting. He saw some of the alleyways as high quality spaces, with potential to raise the environmental quality of the whole. MR felt sustainability was the key issue, and by improving ownership in that area it would help raise overall quality in the long term. HB tabled an illustrated list of key objectives for both schemes.</p> <p>BT had agreed to lead drop in consultation sessions (the first on 10th August) followed by a public open meeting in September where drop-in consultation info would be presented. HB explained that from the consultation from the previous Wednesday's walk-around they had identified a number of issues around Lower High Street. The process was to take those as a starting point to help business engagement.</p> <p>BT highlighted that from the consultation work carried out to date, short term wins were seen as really important in winning over some of the traders. Having come up with a scheme however the problem was about resourcing it. Whilst she was happy to fund raise at some point, initially she needed ideas. The Chair suggested BT focus on drawing up a business plan to identify potential funding needs and opportunities. Action: BT to work towards presenting a basic investment plan to the October meeting of the Task Force.</p>	<p>3:45pm SE & DS left</p> <p>BT</p>
<p>49/15</p>	<p>Business Plan update</p> <p>JW explained that the paper circulated reflected previous discussions by the Board in April 2015 and believed the revised business plan was no longer only focused on town centre development sites. The vision and updated target dates and actions had been amended, so he welcomed feedback and comments in order that he could bring back a revised version for formal endorsement at Board on 9th October.</p>	<p>ALL</p>