

Climate Advisory Panel

20 April 2020 (4pm – 6pm)

Present: Andrew Lewis (Chairman), Councillor Matt Bryan, Will Pearson, Sean Traynor, Simon Dowell, Clare Olver, Ged Barlow, Renia Kotynia, Colin Watson, Steve Hughes, Rob Pickering, Chris Hardwick, Mark Thompson, Jane Gaston, Vanessa Griffiths, Laurence Ainsworth, Georgina Patel, Dean Sargeant, Rebecca Collins, Danny Crump, David Brown, Karen Cove, Andy Hulme.

Apologies: Charlie Seward, Phil McCabe, Mike Gardner, Maria Byrne

Welcome and Terms of reference

The Chairman welcomed colleagues to the third meeting of the Advisory Panel, which was to be focused on Transport. The Chairman provided an update on matters since the last meeting and discussed that despite the pressing priority of the COVID19 Response, it was important that responding to the Climate Emergency remained a key priority for the authority.

Transport

The Advisory Panel received a presentation from Chris Hardwick and Danny Crump, of Mott MacDonald and Broadway Malyan respectively.

Danny Crump began by outlining the “Streets for All” initiative, a collaboration with Transport for Greater Manchester, and its vision to make streets more equitable. This project was designed to pilot new approaches to place-making which could meet GM’s Transport ambition, delivering sustainable economic growth, protecting our environment, improving quality of life for all, and developing an innovative city region.

The Streets for All project carried out a number of pilot studies, one of which was focused on the A577/A58 route between Orrell and Rochdale. It was discussed that this set out a number of parallels between the challenges in GM and those in some localities in Cheshire West. The specific issues highlighted in the pilot study were; high car dependence, struggling local centres, poor place perceptions and poor quality public realm. The principle underpinning the redesign concept was that streets were more than conduits for vehicles, they were valuable social spaces, which have their own heritage and cultural offer, and this should be brought to the fore.

The yardstick used to determine if streets were well-designed and navigable was whether a 12 year old could be allowed to use it independently.

Rather than having siloes of Public Realm/Highways and Transport, places designed with ‘Streets for all’ in mind draw on the strengths of both disciplines to create more balanced streets.

It was discussed that co-production and design was essential in this approach, and that this involved speaking to Leaders, portfolio holders, officers and local members. Following an appraisal of the specific issues at the pilot site, the key issue was identified as high car dependency, which led to congestion and poor air quality. This was compounded by a lack of available space to expand into. As a result of design focused on high throughput of cars, there was limited cycling infrastructure, and walking was not prioritised. These spaces were highly

engineered and hostile to pedestrians.

The key opportunities identified were;

- To re-balance the street, encouraging modal shift;
- De-engineer the character of the street;
- Streets as healthy, inclusive and accessible spaces;
- Short trips are key;
- Stakeholders as co-designers.

In order to begin the process of re-design, one test used to judge whether streets were good places was Lucy Saunders' 'Healthy Streets' criteria. Alongside these criteria, proposals were reviewed by local communities. Key takeaways from the process were that it paid to be bold, that stakeholder knowledge was key, and to avoid tribalisation between different road users.

Chris Hardwick then set out the work being scoped on the A56 Hoole road corridor. This review would look at the Eastern quadrant of Chester, with a view to improving sustainable travel options, and creating connected communities. Initial observations were that there was a poor gateway experience, pedestrians were marginalised, vehicles dominate the street scene, and that there were road markings (e.g. hatching) which were perhaps unneeded.

Options to improve the space included:

1. Tidying up the streetscene;
2. De-cluttering;
3. Relocating and merging functions;
4. Rethinking traffic management;
5. Recreating the street.

The presentation then moved on to capturing the post-COVID19 opportunity, with questions such as how do urban environments enable social distancing after lockdown, how can we discourage universal car use, and how do we capture the benefits of increased homeworking.

Following Danny and Chris' presentation, the Advisory Panel received an update from Rob Pickering on the work of British Cycling.

Rob discussed British Cycling's role and strategy to promote cycling for people of all ages, throughout the UK. He set out the highly successful partnership that British Cycling has enjoyed with HSBC in recent years, and the way in which Elite success was vital to promoted cycling adoption at a local level.

It was discussed that cycling has the potential to tackle some pressing challenges such as congestion, adverse mental health, childhood inactivity and obesity, and reduce the strain on the NHS.

Reinforcing points made earlier about the need to seize the opportunity to improve the environment in a post-COVID19 world, it was discussed that we needed to focus on maintaining air quality improvements and using this to push for the adoption of sustainable transport.

Sean Traynor echoed the need to grasp this opportunity to maintain the growth in cycling and walking, and that the priority of the Council was on developing

sustainable transport options. The development of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan was referenced. The work underway with Planning colleagues to refresh the design guide was also discussed.

The opportunity for a significant expansion in green infrastructure was raised by Simon Dowell, and that wildflower planting should play a role in this to promote biodiversity and improve air quality.

The need for appropriate metrics was also discussed – moving past using the number of vehicles as a measure of success, and towards broader public satisfaction with the space. It was discussed that the evidence base for these changes was still developing, and was at this stage fairly London-centric, but that the evidence was rapidly improving.

It was discussed that Government, both local and national, needed to improve on how it valued non-motorised traffic in business cases.

Rebecca Collins noted the importance of transport options that work around people's lives was discussed, given the complexity of the journeys that might occur during the course of a day, so sustainable transport options that for example, stop at 6pm, are of little use. A question was raised about how innovative the thinking currently is about different modes of transport, e.g. park and cycle schemes, taking bikes on buses, etc.

The Mersey Forest's representative, Clare Olver, discussed the success the Forest had seen in securing funding from the Government's Urban Tree Challenge fund, and set out how important it was to take advantage of these funding sources.

Colin Watson discussed the best practice that the Council could learn from, and that in Oxford and York there is between 5-10 times more cycling than in Chester. The need to improve air quality was reinforced, given the significant health impacts caused locally by poor air quality.

LEP representative Andy Hulme also noted that a Natural Capital Audit and Investment Plan was in the process of being commissioned for the sub-region, and that part of this will include stakeholder engagement, and that the group would be included in this process.

Sean Traynor discussed in relation to buses that around 95 per cent of the local network is operated commercially, and so the Council can exercise little direct control over those operations. That said, the Council is about to undertake a holistic bus service review, to ensure that community transport, home to school transport, and broader bus service issues are addressed as one in order to deliver better outcomes.

Colin Watson raised a question regarding the Northgate development and the extent to which it was compatible with the ambition to achieve carbon neutrality by 2045.

Andrew Lewis acknowledged that this was a very important question, and set out the Council's ongoing commitment to the Northgate scheme, and that given the

stark economic picture facing the UK, the Northgate scheme would be essential to maintaining Chester as an economically vibrant city.

Andrew noted the point raised about the Northgate Car Park, but discussed that this was replacing poorer quality car parking; that it would be the only car park in the city centre capable of 100% EV charging, and that personal transport would remain an essential transport option especially for people with mobility needs. It was discussed that we would continue to keep the way in which we do business under review, to ensure it is compatible with our climate goals, and that this will also be discussed at future meetings.

Colin Watson also raised a question regarding the full lifetime carbon costs and benefits of the HyNet project. It was discussed that representatives from the HyNet project would be invited to the Climate Advisory Panel following the next meeting to present the project and address Colin's question.

Any other business

The date for the next meeting is 16 June 2020 and will focus on Housing and Land Use.