

PLANNING AND TRANSPORT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

23 March 2021
5.30 - 7.40 pm

Present: Councillors Bird (Chair), D. Baigent, Bick, Chadwick, Collis, Green, Hipkin, Porrer and Sargeant (Vice-Chair)

Executive Councillors: Massey (Executive Councillor for Transport and Community Safety) and Thornburrow (Executive Councillor for Planning Policy and Open Spaces)

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Officers:

Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development: Stephen Kelly
Strategic Director: Fiona Bryant

Strategy and Economy Manager: Caroline Hunt

Principal Urban Designer: Jonathan Brookes

Principal Planning Policy Officer: Terry De Sousa

Committee Manager: Claire Tunnicliffe

Meeting Producer: Liam Martin

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

21/12PnT Apologies for Absence

No apologies were received.

21/13PnT Re-Ordering of the Agenda

Under paragraph 4.2.1 of the Council Procedure Rules, the Chair used her discretion to alter the order of the agenda items. However, for ease of the reader, these minutes will follow the order of the published agenda.

21/14PnT Declarations of Interest

Name	Item	Interest
Councillor Baigent	All	Personal: Member of Cambridge Cycling Campaign.

21/15PnT Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2021 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

21/16PnT Public Questions

A member of the public asked the following:

CycleStreets, a local not-for-profit organisation, has been working over the last two years on a website, StreetFocus, to make planning application data more openly available to citizens, and moreover to determine automatically cases where a planning application could fund Section 106 projects. This highly innovative work has had support from the Executive Councillor for Planning Policy.

Working with PlanIt, a national project, the webpages in the IDOX planning system have been converted into an API (a system usable by programmers), enabling innovative uses: <https://www.planit.org.uk/api/>

This is in line with the government's clearly-expressed view that the planning system needs to be made more digital. We use a web scraper system, carefully designed to avoid making extraneous requests or overloading the IDOX webpages, in order to convert the webpages into data, though would strongly prefer an official feed to be enabled to avoid any scraping.

However, the council has recently enabled a 're CAPTCHA' system which prevents automated but well-behaved processes like ours obtaining this data from scraping the webpages.

Would the Committee:

- 1) Firstly commit clearly to the principle that planning application information from the council should be available as raw data (in the form

of an API), not purely as webpages, published on a live daily basis; and
2) Commit in practice in the short term to either
 (a) removing the reCAPTCHA system,
 (b) whitelisting our scraper system address,
 (c) switching on a proper data feed, as we understand IDOX may
now be able to provide as a result of changes being required of them by
the GLA in London.

The Joint Director for Planning and Economic Development responded that the council were supportive in exploring the ideas put forward but earlier in year there had been an extremely high volume of apps seeking to scrap the data; the system then ceased to function for officers and became unstable. IDOX issued an upgrade which prevented data from being scrapped.

Acknowledged that IDOX as a system was not particularly well configured for open access to the data download. The question if certain websites could be whitelisted had been escalated, if possible, this would be made available to 'friendly' scrappers to safeguard the integrity and functionality of the system. This had been supported by the LGA who had been faced with a similar challenge. The issues of the hyper-links had also been raised. Would not be able to advise time scales on when this may occur.

The Executive Councillor for Planning Policy and Open Spaces reiterated the support in exploring the ideas put forward by the member of the public. It was always a good thing to make planning data more accessible and hoped that this would be available as soon as was practicable.

The member of the public welcomed the support expressed by both the Joint Director for Planning and Economic Development and the Executive Councillor; also pleased that the hyper-links issue was being investigated as this was a continued source of frustration. Requested a comment on the principle of switching on a proper data feed.

The Joint Director for Planning and Economic Development advised the council were keen to explore and open up planning data like Leeds City Council had done. Was committed to a fully digital Local Plan process and senior officers were committed to determine how far the digital aspects of planning applications could be available. Had made enquiries to work with the LGA in making the data open and accessible.

21/17PnT Making Space for People: Progress report

Matter for Decision

The report referred to the Making Space for the People document prepared to act as a co-ordination tool to align thinking on future street, public space and movement projects between Cambridge City Council, Cambridgeshire County Council, the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority and the Greater Cambridge Partnership.

At the January 2021 committee meeting, officers committed to bring a Progress Report to the March committee if a full report was not possible at that point. The report provided a progress update on the Making Space for People project.

Decision of the Executive Councillor for Planning Policy and Open Spaces and Executive Councillor for Transport and Community Safety.

- i. Noted the Progress report

Reason for the Decision

As set out in the Officer's report.

Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Not applicable

The Committee received a report from the Joint Director for Planning and Economic Development, and the Strategy and Economy Manager advised it was not now possible to progress the Making Space for People document in 2021 alongside the other priorities for the planning service.

In response to comments made by the Committee the Joint Director for Planning and Economic Development and the Strategy and Economy Manager said the following:

- i. Had met with representatives from Cambridge Past, Present and Future and Historic England to discuss the points raised at the previous meeting.
- ii. Had received correspondence challenging legal status of the document as highlighted in the report; having reviewed the document further officers felt it could be developed into a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which would take additional time.
- iii. The suggestion was the document had the properties of an SPD; it was on this basis the challenge had been put forward to the Council. Rather

- than expose the Council to additional cost and with funding needed to be allocated elsewhere it was felt that it was best to revisit the process later.
- iv. The interpretation of the status of planning policy documents was not straight forward, with there being a category beneath an SPD that could have some limited weight as material consideration.
 - v. The primary objective of bringing the document to the last Committee was as a mechanism to bring the Council and external partners together around a set of unifying principles, not policies, particularly in respect of transport scheme development, which seemed appropriate before the question about its legal status was made.
 - vi. There was a congested work plan which included, but was not limited to, the new Greater Cambridge Local Plan and the North East Cambridge Area Action Plan, at least until the end of 2021 when it was anticipated they will have reached their next milestones. This would then allow officers the time to further develop the document.
 - vii. Officers remained committed to achieve the objectives around the street and spaces of the city for the benefit of all.
 - viii. Had explored other options such as reframing the Making Space for People document as a corporate (non-planning) document and bringing it to a different committee for endorsement but this was not possible as not only were there legal issues to consider but the matter of perception.
 - ix. Noted the comment as made at the previous meeting that the document needed to be improved regardless of the legal status. Had looked at potential for the vision and principles to be taken forward by external partnerships such as the Greater Cambridge Partnership and Cambridgeshire County Council in their transport schemes.
 - x. Not clear at this point if they would be willing to formally endorse them.
 - xi. Understood Members' frustration at the delay of the project but suggested an update be given in the summer and expand on the options available and explored with external partners.

The Committee:

As there was no decision the report was noted, two members did not note the report and three abstained.

Both the Executive Councillors noted the report.

21/18PnT To Note Record of Urgent Decision Taken by the Executive Councillor for Planning Policy and Open Spaces

ROD: Response to Government Consultation - Supporting Housing Delivery & Public Service Infrastructure

The decision was noted.

21/19PnT To Note Record of Urgent Decision Taken by the Executive Councillor for Transport and Community Safety

ROD Interim Amendments to Cambridge City Council's Taxicard Scheme

The decision was noted.

ROD Parking Permits March 2021

The Strategic Director said the following in response to comments made by Councillor Bick.

- i. There were several factors that had been considered when making this decision which included government legislation and their roadmap to ease restrictions during the pandemic and health and safety regulations.
- ii. The roadmap offered an opportunity for all business to re-open over the next three months.
- iii. The work of external partnerships also had to be considered. The County Council were currently studying the lifting of restricted bus services from the park and ride sites across the city and opening public transport.
- iv. The requirements of the community and voluntary sector workers (low paid and those who gave their time for free) who supported community aid and those who supported essential business which were open had also been considered.
- v. The Council supported the reduction in the excess use of private vehicles.
- vi. Income from the car park was essential in allowing the Council to supply other services to the community.
- vii. Free parking had been allocated to public and voluntary sector workers in a previous Record of Decision also to those workers for essential businesses open during the lock down period.
- viii. Important to take into consideration the council resources to manage free or discounted permits; also, the physical changes to tariffs on car parks which took time to change.

- ix. The Council had taken the view that over the next three months that most business would be able to operate.
- x. There were numerous public and voluntary sector workers who travelled across the city providing support and aid and therefore it was relevant to extend the free parking to these groups.
- xi. Discounted permits were also available for the next three months for low paid workers who had supported essential business.

The Executive Councillor for Transport and Community Safety stated it was important that public transport was not a casualty of the pandemic.

Many council officers were working from home while some had been redeployed elsewhere to assist with essential services. Believed the amount of city council officers using the car parks would be minimal and the benefit to the wider public sector would be greater.

Councillor Bick requested his dissatisfaction to the responses given be minuted.

It was not a question at how essential the services were that people were providing but they had employment contracts in which they had no choice in delivering them. This applied to both those in the public and private sector, public money was being used to provide free or discounted parking which those in the private had contributed to who were being denied this substantial benefit.

The decision was unfair and unreasonable, people should be treated the same.

The decision was then noted.

The meeting ended at 7.40 pm

CHAIR