

Minutes of the Swindon Local Councils Forum meeting held 15th June 2023 at the Civic Offices, 7pm.

Those present: Councillors J Hewer (Wroughton), G Hawkes (Covingham), V Curtis (Covingham), D Griffiths (South Swindon), R Codrington (Stanton Fitzwarren), N Hopkins (South Swindon), A Houghton (Highworth), L Gow (Highworth), I Jankinson (Blunsdon), M Compton (Blunsdon), Colin McEwen (South Marston), J Whitehead (Chiseldon)

328 Apologies

G Wilson (Liddington), D Lomax (Liddington), P Sunners (Chiseldon), R Hailstone (Haydon Wick), J Warr (Wanborough)

329 Minutes

Members agreed to approve the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 23rd March 2023 with an amendment to the wording of Min Ref 319.

Proposed: Councillor V Curtis

Seconded: Councillor A John

Vote: Agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd March 2023.

330 Matters Arising from the Minutes

Min Ref 320 - Peer Review – Still no updates received from Swindon Borough Council. Secretary will continue to chase. Clerks Forum is scheduled for next week and an update may be received then. Changes in administration post-election will require the priorities to be established. Councillor J Grant (Cabinet Member for Communities & Joint Working) is contacting individual parishes for meetings to discuss issues and working on improving communications.

331 SBC Transport

Members introduced Mr John Harris, Head of Strategic Transport for Swindon Borough Council and listened to a presentation on the Transport Update – Key Headlines. The presentation will be circulated with the minutes. Key points included:

- Reviewing improvements to connections from Swindon to Gloucester and Oxfordshire. Enhanced Partnership is critical in developing and implementing improvements.
- £415,000.00 bus improvement funding recently received.
- Collaborative work across SBC climate change and net zero, public health and education (home to school transport). Key focus is currently on the train station and railway service, cycling, walking and freight.
- **Local engagement** – Members of SBC will visit Steam in June and then ward sessions will begin in July. Engagement sessions with parish and town councils will give community insight, local intelligence, known local issues with buses and bus service/timetables, information from cyclists, etc.
- **Current projects** - NEV Highways Schemes, Fleming Way/ Town Centre improvements, reviewing concessionary travel and Electric Vehicle charging points, Street Lighting energy saving.
- **Working towards** – Electric vehicle & low carbon transport options, improvements to active travel corridors, refreshing guidance for developers, improved bus shelters/ waiting areas, reviewing bus services and ongoing consultations, forum, engagement meetings to ensure the service provision is meeting needs of residents.
- **Conversation Survey** – ran for 1 month and 1,500 responses received. Questions such as where they live, how long they lived there for, mode of

travel, school run data/ home working, improvements, or incentives. Happy to re-release the survey if local councils think this would be beneficial. Job opportunities and family connections were the main reasons for living in Swindon – due to its proximity to the M4 and the railway service. Most residents used private cars or walked. Incentives could include rail support and bus support to assist with costs. Continued engagement – Majority of those who answered the survey would continue with trip diaries and surveys. Also welcomed face to face engagement to follow up and discuss findings.

Members received the opportunity to ask questions:

1. Bus services were re-routed throughout North Swindon into areas that are narrow, which caused buses to drive on pavements and caused safety concerns for pedestrians. Some residents had temporary bus stops placed outside their houses. Why was there no public consultation for this?
Swindon Borough Council does not control the bus routes and there are no legal requirements for Traffic Commissioners to consult with bus users or residents. Swindon Borough Council is actively working to improve communications moving forward, so early sight of any changes to bus routes could be reviewed earlier.
2. With regards to the £2 bus cap, it was an excellent opportunity for residents to use the buses a bit more. Noticed that this has increased slightly to £2.50. What publicity does Swindon Borough Council put out to encourage its residents to use the bus services?
Stagecoach and the Swindon Bus Company do their own promotions, and this has been allowed to continue via receiving funding opportunities. Swindon Borough Council is keen to work with the companies to create a campaign up until the end of the year – especially whilst the road works continue in other areas. The cost has risen slightly to £2.50 to meet running costs, but the buses could be used for residents to get into the town centre for Christmas shopping, which will be the focus of the campaign.
3. Wroughton Parish Council has created an evidence base of the need for buses within Thorley Park. *Mr Jon Harris agreed that he will discuss this offline directly with Wroughton Parish Council as maybe scope with the new improvement fund to review the priorities and which would have the most impact.*
4. Residents of Stanton Fitzwarren must walk 1 to 1.5 miles to get to the nearest bus stops. Behaviours may not change quickly as it will take residents time to adapt to the new methods. *Overall, community transport partners, such as Access, is working more with demand and there may be scope to deploy smaller buses and reduced timetables in rural areas depending on the needs of the community.*
5. South Marston has no bus route, although buses diverted from Highworth travel through the village on occasions. South Marston is in a cross ward with Stratton St Margaret. There is planning of 2,830 dwellings for South Marston side and 2,000 dwellings on Stratton St Margaret's side. Due to the expansion, improvements to the road, speed limits and junctions are in review. In the planning applications, developers promised safe access for pedestrians and cyclists. *Take offline with Senior Development Control and Planning Officer for NEV. Active travel England is also a statutory consultee for housing*

development of 150 houses. Highworth were interested in linking with conversations.

6. Some areas of Swindon require three or four buses to get to the hospital. Whilst there are a handful of direct bus routes still in place could there be scope for this in the future? *This may be an outcome of the bus service improvement and partnership plan if there is a need, the review will indicate smarter ways of operating the bus services and encourage more passengers.*
7. Diverse range between the larger rural parishes and the rural parishes. Survey consultations seem to be from the centre of town itself. The £415,000.00 bus service improvement grant – is it for 12 months or long term sustainability? *The funding is in place for 12 months only, however, surveys could be distributed to the rural parishes and circulated by parishes to obtain residents comments which can build upon the communications.*
8. Highworth, Blunsdon, South Marston cycling maps all seem to end at A419. A suggestion that Councillors of the Forum that are interested in planning create a working party to look at re-doing the cycle maps and local knowledge required, on a plan areas look accessible? *Members agreed that this could be an action for the Forum to investigate and give feedback to Mr Jon Harris directly.*

332 Get Swindon Active – New Inclusive Strategy

Members received an update from Councillor I Jankinson. The Consultant from Get Swindon Active is planning to attend the next meeting in September to discuss the development of the new inclusive strategy and how this could be applied via parish and town councils to support. SBC Ward Councillors also have knowledge of this strategy.

333 Borough & Local Councils Draft Charter (Protocol)

The Forum is struggling with communications with Swindon Borough Council due to changes in administration. Councillor Jim Grant was keen to work cooperatively with parishes so the Forum is hopeful this could be a positive step forward. The document is almost in the final draft stages with some small changes to be made to the appendices. Members suggested inviting Councillor Jim Grant to attend a future Forum meeting and for the Working Party to continue progressing the document with Swindon Borough Council in the background.

334 SBC Local Flood Risk Management Strategy

South Marston has four flood lagoons within its parish – one is owned by Honda and the others are owned by Swindon Borough Council. There has been no maintenance since the floods occurred in 2007 and the SBC Drainage Officer was recently unable to attend a site visit due to the overgrown vegetation covering the area. A maintenance document published in 2014 suggests the last known maintenance was planned for 2019. *Mr Jon Harris explained that the Drainage Team has been under resourced, and the priority has been to complete statutory planning applications. Defra has responsibility for ongoing maintenance but the general maintenance, measuring, monitoring and storage may be devolved to local authorities. Swindon Borough Council is currently in the process of writing a flood risk strategy and reviewing maintenance regimes. Mr Jon Harris was happy to deal with this enquiry outside of the meeting and attend site visits with the SBC Drainage Officer where necessary.*

Covingham has also had flooding issues regarding Coate Water. Ongoing maintenance significantly reduces the flood risk to Covingham. Covingham has had separate meetings with SBC Officers since June 2022, whereby committed funds were in place to complete the works last year. The recent request to unblock some of the blockages downstream couldn't be attended to by the Environment Agency recently due to the risk of the banks sliding. The Thames Water pumping station for the New Eastern Villages estate has been placed by the River Cole which could cause further risk of flooding. *Mr Jon Harris confirmed he would also discuss this issue outside of the meeting and attend site visits with the SBC Draining Officer where necessary.*

7.45pm Mr Jon Harris left the meeting.

335 SBC Planning Enforcement Issues

Haydon Wick has had several Planning Enforcement issues in recent years and has dedicated an agenda item every month due to the lack of response from Swindon Borough Council. It is apparent that staffing shortages within the Planning Department may be causing issues. No other local councils were experiencing Planning Enforcement issues to raise a case via the Forum so Haydon Wick will continue to progress with the Planning Department individually outside of the meeting.

336 Members Reports

Highworth – Two representatives attended having recently been elected as Councillors. Both are getting settled into their new roles and found the Forum useful and would be contributing to future meetings.

Stanton – Is having broadband issues with Open Reach. Open Reach is turning off all copper lines and this is causing issues with road works on narrow streets. Residents have requested refunds for the inconvenience and inability to use the wi-fi. Blunsdon is having similar issues and is going to go copper less at the end of 2023.

South Swindon – As one of the larger parishes who employ its own staff, has access to equipment, is keen to develop areas of crossing services and working collectively to achieve best practice across the Borough. Planning to run a Swindon's Got Talent competition and will soon be contacting all parishes requesting them to get involved with advertising. Town Board hasn't met since last meeting, next one on 30th June.

Covingham – Gave examples of projects which have not been progressed with Swindon Borough Council. Will arrange a meeting to discuss with Councillor Jim Grant directly.

Wroughton – Would like to thank Mr Jon Harris for his attendance at the meeting, his presentation was helpful and is looking forward to working with him.

337 Items for the Next Agenda

To be passed to the Secretary prior to the next meeting 21st September 2023.

- Invite Deborah Bourne to the next meeting
- Update on Draft Protocol
- Update on Engagement – Clerks Forum, Clerks & Chairs Meetings, Peer Review