



To be submitted to the Council at its meeting on 12th December 2024

TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND STRATEGIC HOUSING SCRUTINY PANEL

12th November 2024 at 6.30 p.m.

Present:

Councillor Mill (in the Chair)

Councillors Crofts, Hasthorpe, Holland, Lindley, Pettigrew, Wheatley (substitute for Humphrey) and Wilson

Officers in attendance:

- Jo Robinson (Assistant Director Policy, Strategy and Resources)
- Guy Lonsdale (Assistant Director Finance)
- Lani Lamming (Enhanced Bus Quality Partnership Coordinator) (Equans)
- Martin Lear (Head of Transport) (Equans)
- Carolina Borgstrom (Director of Economy, Environment and Infrastructure)
- Paul Evans (Assistant Director Infrastructure)
- Simon Jones (Assistant Director Law and Governance)
- Paul Windley (Democratic and Scrutiny Team Manager)
- Helen Johnson (Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)

Also in attendance:

- Councillor Jackson (Leader of the Council)
- Councillor Swinburn (Portfolio Holder for Housing, Infrastructure and Transport)
- Councillor Harness (Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets)
- Councillor Henderson
- Councillor Shutt

There was one member of the public and one member of the press in attendance.

SPTISH.35 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from this meeting were received from Councillor Humphrey.

SPTISH.36 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest for this meeting.

SPTISH.37 MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Transport, Infrastructure and Strategic Housing Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 10th September 2024 be agreed as a correct record.

SPTISH.38 QUESTION TIME

There were no questions from members of the public for this meeting.

SPTISH.39 FORWARD PLAN

The panel received the current forward plan and members were asked to identify any items for examination by this panel via the pre-decision call-in procedure.

At CB 12/24/03 - Selective Licensing, Ms Johnson advised the panel that this item would be brought before scrutiny in March 2025.

RESOLVED – That the forward plan be noted.

SPTISH.40 TRACKING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF SCRUTINY

The panel received the report of the Statutory Scrutiny Officer tracking the recommendations previously made by this scrutiny panel which had been updated for reference at this meeting.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

SPTISH.41 WORK PROGRAMME

The panel considered a report on progress made to date with this panel's work programme.

A brief update on the panel's work programme was given and members sought clarification on the impact of the panel's work programme. Ms Johnson highlighted the panel's comments on the recent National Planning Policy Framework consultation, that had been forwarded Cabinet and included as part of the council's formal response. Mr

Windley advised that details of panel achievements would be included within future work programme updates.

Members enquired about progress on the panel's Task and Finish groups. Ms Johnson advised of recent progress, with work on traffic management co-ordination to commence later this month.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

SPTISH.42 2024/25 COUNCIL PLAN RESOURCES AND FINANCE REPORT QUARTER 2

The panel received a report from the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets providing key information and analysis of the Council's finance and resources position at the end of quarter two.

Mr Lonsdale gave a brief introduction highlighting the addition of the major projects' appendix. Members congratulated officers on the open and transparent report.

Members sought clarification on property rationalisation and the disposal of local housing assets including Beacon House. Ms Robinson advised members that all properties identified initially go before the Estates Board to establish if they could be utilised before disposal. Ms Robinson advised the panel that she would provide information on the reason Beacon House could not be repurposed.

RESOLVED –

1. That the report be noted.
2. That additional information be provided to members of this panel on the disposal of Beacon House and the reason the property could not be repurposed.

SPTISH.43 COUNCIL PLAN REVIEW

The panel considered a report on the review of the Council Plan.

Ms Robinson advised the panel that the Council Plan was a key policy framework document which aligned with the Council's priorities and aspiration. Ms Robinson highlighted the plan was now based on four main themes rather than service based. The three-year plan intended to be more accessible, and members were advised that performance indicators would form part of the quarterly plan reporting next year.

Members advised officers that they felt the new plan format was greatly improved on its predecessor.

In response to a question on whether there were any plans for the Council to become a housing provider, Ms Borgstrom advised that there were no current plans due to capacity, requirement and funding but that the option was still open for future consideration.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

SPTISH.44 ELECTRIC VEHICLE STRATEGY UPDATE

The panel considered a report from the Director of Economy, Environment and Infrastructure providing an update on progress with delivering the council's Electric Vehicle charging strategy.

The panel raised the following issues:

- Expenditure fund breakdown
- Potential risks, obstacles and cost per kilowatt
- Legality and infrastructure
- Location, cost and volume of chargers
- Strategy
- Disabled Bay applications

The Chair sought clarification on how the £371k Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Capability fund would be spent over multiple years. Mr Evans advised he would circulate a breakdown of how the funds would be allocated.

It was noted that approximately 50% of households in North East Lincolnshire had limited or no access to private off-street parking. Members enquired what progress had been made with resolving electric vehicle charging issues for these residents. Mr Evans advised members on potential obstacles, risks to public safety and what steps and actions would be taken to reduce hazards. Various options including pathway channels temporarily housing charging cables and installation of charging points in streetlights were discussed. Members queried how this would work in principle and showed concern how residents could be adversely affected by cost per kilowatt when using the streetlight charging option. Mr Evans advised the panel he would provide the charge costs relating to the on-street charging option. It was felt that a clearer understanding of technology and costs involved would be required.

Mr Evans advised members on potential legal and infrastructure issues around the installation of electric vehicle points and that he was seeking guidance and best practise from London Boroughs on how they successfully manage these issues. Councillor S Swinburn (Portfolio Holder for Housing, Infrastructure and Transport) confirmed this was a very complex area and he was due to visit Nottingham to look at their operation and advised he would report back. A member queried if there had been any current issues around the use of charging cables and if

so, what actions had or would be taken. Mr Evans advised there were no known issues, and any infringements would be dealt with under the Highways Act.

Members showed concern about the ambitious plans to install electric vehicle chargers and sought assurances that they would be positioned in appropriate locations to serve the community and that the financial projections of purchasing and installing each charging unit had been accurate. Mr Evans advised he would update members on the financial projections.

Panel members felt that the strategy needed to reflect the towns demographics and wanted assurances that residents in terraced properties purchasing electric vehicles would have adequate provision to charge their vehicles at home.

Members asked if there were any aspirations to install electric vehicle charging infrastructure around taxi ranks as there was a reluctance by taxi drivers to invest in electric vehicles due to the lack of appropriate infrastructure. Mr Evans advised that there had been no direct contact with Hackney Carriage operators during recent consultations and advised he would investigate further.

In response to a member's question, Mr Evans advised that when residents apply for disabled bay parking, they could now express an interest in applying for electric vehicle charging points. There would be no guarantee of installation, and it would be at the residents' expense.

RESOLVED –

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the following information be circulated to members of this panel:
 - a breakdown of how the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Capability funds would be spent in this and future years.
 - Charging costs per kilowatt when using on-street chargers.
 - Financial projections of purchasing and installing each charging unit.
3. That an update on investigative work around electric vehicle charging installation in both Nottingham and London be circulated to members of this panel.

SPTISH.45 BUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The panel considered a report that updated the panel on the North East Lincolnshire Bus Service Improvement Plan.

The panel received a short introduction on the Bus Service Improvement Plan and schemes highlighting improvements in passenger numbers. Panel members praised officers on the comprehensive report and encouraging passenger numbers.

In response to queries on the potential impact of the Autumn Statement on local bus fares including the £1 leisure fare ticket. Officers confirmed that the leisure ticket was part of a local scheme between the council and the local bus operator and was not affected by the recent government announcement, any increase in this fare was yet to be determined. Other fares could be affected by the operator's April fare review.

Members asked officers if expected funding would still be available until 2029. Officers clarified that due to announcements in the Autumn Statement, the funding allocation was yet to be determined.

In response to a question on commercial viability of some services, Officers confirmed that funding available through the Bus Service Improvement Plan was available until March 2026 and it was an expectation that the bus operator would run the subsidised routes commercially once funding ended. Members questioned whether any future available funding would be better utilised elsewhere once commercial viability had been established.

Members requested that consideration be given to funding other areas in North East Lincolnshire, for example Immingham with its new youth centre opening. It was hoped that bus operators would capture new business from the surrounding areas rather than focusing solely on Grimsby and Cleethorpes.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

SPTISH.46 QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER

Councillor Holland asked the following questions of the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Assets and Resources.

Recent press reports state that the Scartho Cemetery Lodge is currently being marketed for conversion to a domestic dwelling, priced at £275,000. It is also reported that Cabinet agreed in April 2021 to allocate £467,000 to restore and reinstate the property.

The Cabinet meeting of April 7th 2021, estimated that the cost of reinstatement of the Lodge was estimated to be £467,000. Can the Portfolio Holder kindly confirm the amount actually spent to date?

The intended future use of the Lodge at that time was to support the enhancement of Bereavement Services offered to the public and

visitors to the cemetery. Has the building ever been used for such purposes since reinstatement?

The Cabinet meeting of April 7th referenced a Business Case Service Statement which would be required for approval of the funding from the capital programme. Is this Business Case Service Statement still available?

The online sales brochure issued by the agent, PPH, states that there is an opportunity to enhance the value of the dwelling by way of further refurbishment. Has due diligence been carried out to ensure the maximum sale value is being realised?

Rental income would probably be circa £15k per annum, net. Has retention of the asset been considered?

Is the Lodge being sold freehold or leasehold?

Councillor Harness (Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets) responded by initially providing background context regarding the Heritage Asset, stating the property was a Grade 2 listed building which had been vacant for 12 years. The former tenant went into liquidation and left the property in a poor state of repair. This property was one of eight properties on the 'Heritage at risk register' for which the council had approved in principle funding in 2018, reiterating that investment in heritage assets was essential although it often resulted in no financial return. Works to the lodge and surrounding assets had a combined value of £673k.

In 2021, Cabinet approved funding of £467k to be spent on the lodge and £206k on the waiting room and toilets, giving a combined total of £673k. An additional £170k was approved to carry out works on the cemetery chapel. Expenditure to date was £726k.

In response to the properties intended use, Councillor Harness advised that the asset had not been used for bereavement services and the option was no longer viable. He confirmed that ward councillors had been informed.

Ms Robinson advised the panel that a request for the business case had been received before and that on advice of the Monitoring Officer these internal documents were not available to panel members. Mr Jones added that the documents formed part of internal governance and were not intended to be disclosed to members. He further advised on members' rights of access to information.

Councillor Harness advised that due diligence had been carried out in the most transparent way to establish that best consideration had been achieved by openly marketing the property.

In respect of the rental figure quoted it was felt this was not achievable and although the property had been brought up to a standard to remove it from the at risk register, it was still in need of extensive updating. The property was not of a standard where an Assured Shorthold Tenancy Agreement could be given.

Councillor Harness (Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets) confirmed that property was being marketed as a freehold disposal.

SPTISH.47 CALLING IN OF DECISIONS – FRESHNEY PLACE CAR PARK MAINTENANCE

The panel considered a formal request from Councillors Henderson and Bright to call-in the above decision taken by the Freshney Place Cabinet Sub Committee at its meeting on 8th October 2024.

Councillor Henderson described the rationale for the call-in, noting that the decision notice referenced car park maintenance and that it was felt that it was unclear as to whether this was maintenance which would be met from a maintenance revenue budget or whether it would require large sums of capital investment which would necessitate further increase in borrowing or use of budgets that have not previously been allocated. He also noted that the decision notice had not been subject to pre-decision scrutiny. Councillor Henderson read a statement from Councillor Bright supporting the call-in.

Mr Jones advised the panel on the options available with regard to consideration of the call-in.

In response to members question on finances it was agreed to exclude the press and public at this stage to consider the closed appendix to the report.

RESOLVED – That the press and public be requested to leave on the grounds that discussion of the following business was likely to disclose exempt information within paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

Mr Lonsdale gave an update to members on the Freshney Place financial position and advised that there was an awareness of maintenance requirements as they formed part of the original purchase. Mr Lonsdale confirmed that the Freshney Place purchase was part of the Future High Street fund and that ongoing maintenance costs would be recovered through Freshney Place service income and that the

financial position would be presented to all members in December 2024 as part of the anticipated Freshney Place Leisure Scheme report.

In response to members requests on why the financial position was being discussed in a closed session Mr Jones advised that the costings were currently commercially sensitive.

Having considered the closed appendix, the panel invited the press and public to return to the meeting.

Councillor Jackson (Leader of the Council) responded to the call-in and advised that he did not support it as there were no viable alternatives and failure to carry out maintenance works would allow the Freshney Place car parks asset to. He added that, at the time of acquisition in 2022, the purchase was supported by full Council. He also confirmed there was no debt on the Council's balance sheet associated with the purchase of Freshney Place and refuted Councillor Henderson's statement on transparency.

A panel member advised that the car parks were an integral part of the building and agreed with Councillor Jackson (Leader of the Council) that stalling now would be detrimental to future developments in and around Freshney Place.

It was proposed that the decision be released for immediate implementation. The vote on the proposal failed.

Members continued to discuss the call-in citing that major expenditure projects should come before scrutiny to gain assurances of value for money and requested confirmation of what powers the sub-committee had to approve capital expenditure. Mr Jones advised the panel that the Freshney Place sub-committee has the same powers as Cabinet.

Mr Lonsdale advised that the expenditure would form part of the capital programme but at this stage were deemed commercially sensitive.

A member of the panel felt that there were limited options available to them and proposed that the panel recommend the release of the decision with the recommendation that the Freshney Place sub-committee refer the matter to the Audit and Governance Committee to consider transparency of finances around car park maintenance. The proposal was passed.

RESOLVED – That the decision of the Freshney Place Sub Committee be released for implementation, and that it be recommended that the Freshney Place Sub Committee refers the matter to the Audit and Governance Committee regarding the Freshney Place car park maintenance figures.

SPTISH.48 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED – That the press and public be requested to leave on the grounds that discussion of the following business was likely to disclose exempt information within paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

SPTISH.50 CORPORATION BRIDGE UPDATE

The panel received a presentation providing an update on the Corporation Bridge project.

Mr Evans provided panel members with an update on the following aspects of the Corporation Bridge project:

- Status and condition of spans 1,2,3,5 and 6
- Scope of Span 4
- Height of bridge once completed
- Assurance around completion dates
- Funding

The panel asked questions of Mr Evans and broadly welcomed the progress made. The panel requested a further update on this matter in January 2025.

RESOLVED –

1. That the update be noted.
2. That a further update on this matter be submitted to the meeting of this panel in January 2025.

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 9.05pm.