

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a virtual meeting of the **Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee** on Wednesday, 3 June 2020 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor J.Reid
(Chair, in the Chair)

MEMBERS

Armstrong, E.
Beynon, J.
Cartie, E.
Dunbar, C
Dunn, E.

Gallacher, B.
Gibson, R.
Hepple, A.
Pattison, W.

CABINET MEMBER

Dodd, R.
Homer, C.R.
Riddle, J.R.

Business Chair
Culture, Arts, Leisure & Tourism
Planning, Housing and Resilience

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

D. Feige
S. McNaughton
R.Murfin
S. Nicholson
N. Turnbull

Principal Ecologist and AONB
Officer
Strategic Transport Manager
Director of Planning
Scrutiny Co-Ordinator
Democratic Services Officer

48. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Hepple.

49. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Communities and Place OSC held on 4 March 2020, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

50. SCRUTINY OF CABINET REPORTS

The Committee was advised that the following reports would be considered by the Cabinet on 9 June 2020. Members were requested to comment on the proposals in the reports.

50.1 Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2020-24

The purpose of this report was to present to the Cabinet, for its adoption, the Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2020-24. (A copy of the report is enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix A).

Councillor John Riddle, Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Resilience, and the Principal Ecologist and AONB Officer presented the report to the Committee.

The Committee was informed that Local Authorities were required, under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, to prepare a Management Plan for the AONBs within its area and undertake a review every 5 years. The purpose of the plan was to set out the council's policy for the management of the AONB and for carrying out their functions in relation to it.

The Management Plan had received a light review following Brexit and anticipated changes to agricultural policies and mechanisms to influence the AONB. Officers were also waiting for a report from DEFRA following the Glover Review of AONBs and National Parks which was expected to be published in Autumn 2020.

The review had included public consultation, workshops for organisations within the AONB partnership, Parish Council representatives located within the AONB and relevant departments within the Council.

The following information was provided in answer to question from Members:

- They had worked with Parish Councils in the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans to address issues arising from second home ownership and affordability. The North Northumberland Neighbourhood Plan only permitted new housing for permanent occupation and a similar policy was also included in the Northumberland Local Plan. The AONB partnership was in the process of undertaking an assessment, with Town and Parish Councils, on the proportion of housing stock used as holiday lets or second homes.
- The Plan encouraged car free journeys or use of public transport and therefore would be impacted by the COVID-19 Pandemic and the current requirement for social distancing, as there was a reduced capacity on public transport. The situation was unprecedented. It was not yet known how long social distancing would be required and therefore the Management Plan and current situation would be monitored. Work had

been carried out with Arriva to increase the frequency of buses on the Coast and Castle route and to extend the season and had been well utilised in the past.

The Chair suggested that an additional section, on action taken or impact of COVID-19, be included within the Implications section of all reports. The Scrutiny Officer agreed to refer the request to the Business Chair and Executive Team, on the Chair's behalf.

RESOLVED that, subject to the comments above, the Cabinet be advised that the Committee supported the recommendation in the report for the adoption of the Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan for 2020-24.

50.2 Update concerning a potential boundary review for the Northumberland Coast AONB

The Committee received an update on progress made with its request to examine changes to the Northumberland Coast AONB Boundary. (A copy of the report is enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix B).

The Principal Ecologist and AONB Officer outlined the reasons why he recommended that work to review the Northumberland AONB boundary be put on hold. This included:

- The decision on the Highthorn Surface Mine was awaited.
- The current rate of progress for outstanding reviews would take 50 years using the existing process.
- The establishment of a National Landscape Service to oversee National Parks and AONBs would likely result in a review and streamlining of the process.
- There was no budget for the costs of associated work and uncertainty whether documentation would be transferable to the new system.

RESOLVED that a review of the Northumberland AONB be postponed until DEFRA's response to the Glover Review is published and certainty regarding the review process in the future is known.

50.3 'Our Way' Vision for Cycling and Walking in Northumberland

The report presented for endorsement 'Our Way', Northumberland's vision for cycling and walking and the integrated Delivery Plan. (A copy of the report is enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix C).

Councillor Cath Homer, Portfolio Holder for Culture, Arts, Leisure & Tourism, and the Strategic Transport Manager presented the report to the Committee. Councillor Homer thanked all the officers and partner organisations in the Northumberland and Cycling Walking Board, for the work involved in the development of the strategy, delivery plan and the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans.

The Strategic Transport Manager explained that Northumberland's ambition was to encourage more people of all ages and circumstances to walk and more often. He outlined four goals: Sustainable Towns, Active Place, Quality Ways and Inspiration and Support and how these would be measured.

He explained that the responsibility for delivering actions within the Plan, not only rested with the Council, but also other members of the Board.

Investment in walking and cycling infrastructure would be provided from the Local Transport Plan Programme, Section 106 agreements and applications to Government, for larger improvements, as funding streams became available. He confirmed that the impact of COVID-19 strengthened the aspirations of the strategy and provided further justification for investment in walking and cycling.

Members raised the following issues:

- Communication needed to be carefully considered given criticism of past schemes on social media.
- How success would be measured. There was anecdotal evidence that more people had been cycling and walking in the last 3 months. The existing evidence base would be utilised which included details of: who, where, routes etc. As many data sources would be used as possible although it was difficult to make a causal link between health benefits.
- Discussions were taking place with the Communications Team with regard to alternative methods to face to face consultation. Engagement with Town and Parish Councils would be carried out as part of the consultation process when it commenced on the local plans.
- Whilst initial focus centred on the 12 main towns to access funding opportunities, it would then move to smaller villages, and movement between these.
- Surfacing would need to be carefully considered as there were different views regarding preferred materials and also issues regarding privately owned land. Signage of routes was something that would be reviewed.
- The Department of Transport had given a favourable response to the first LCWIPs reviewed.
- Whilst not all schemes submitted to the LTP Programme were successful, officers would look to see how Borderlands and North of Tyne Combined Authority could be utilised to link towns and attractions. It was hoped that progress would be made as fast and effectively as possible.
- How employers could be encouraged to participate in cycle to work schemes. Information was included on the Visit Northumberland website but consideration would be given to the introduction of an Employer e-newsletter, similar to the school e-newsletter, for circulation to the main employers in the county.
- Provision of secure storage for bikes should be considered, such as bike sheds as used in other European countries. Each location would need to be considered individually as different solutions would be needed in Conservation Areas.

- Extensions to existing cycle tracks needed to be considered to encourage cycling to school, as some routes ended suddenly. This issue had been identified within the local plans and required investment from S106 monies, the Department of Transport or the LTP Programme.
- Whilst there were many excellent recreational cycle routes across the county e.g the Sandstone Way, some smaller settlements did not have footpaths and their location next to busy roads meant that residents were reluctant to walk or cycle nearby. Unfortunately, it was unlikely that a successful business case could be made to purchase land to create cycleways or footpaths. Advances in technology meant that more electronic bikes were now available and were more affordable, and would be more attractive to residents who had a longer commute or lived on a route with a steep gradient.
- All users (pedestrians, dog walkers, cyclists) needed to be respectful and courteous of others whilst enjoying shared space. They also needed to be aware that some residents might have sight or hearing problems. Users wearing earphones could not hear warnings being given by others.
- Cyclists should be encouraged to use the cycle paths where these were available to reduce the possibility of accidents.
- Cycling and walking routes needed to be included on regular inspection regimes, surfaces maintained and kept clear of debris and adjacent hedges cut back.
- There needed to be a policy regarding electric bike charging points in locations such as town centres and along coastal routes.
- The aspirations for 2025 were challenging and it was queried how they would be measured. It was acknowledged that these were ambitious, and deliberately so. The baseline was formed from census and journey to work data. 'Hands up' school surveys could be utilised as well as area specific surveys, in respect of new infrastructure, to identify the impact they were having and demonstrating a modal shift. Surveys were difficult and costly if required county wide.
- Use of environmentally friendly, low carbon impact materials were to be encouraged. Consideration would be given to alternative permeable surfaces to ensure the carbon impact was minimised.

Members thanked officers for the report which was well written. It was noted that common themes raised included communication and education. Comments regarding the challenges of shared space by different users, education and cascading of proposals from main towns to connect surrounding villages, would be referred to Cabinet.

RESOLVED that, subject to the comments above, the Cabinet be advised that the Committee supported the recommendation in the report.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____