

Minutes of the Place and Environment Scrutiny Committee

Held a 7pm on Tuesday 29th August, 2023 at the Council Chamber, Corby Cube, George Street, Corby, Northants, NN17 1QG

Present: -

Councillor Gill Mercer (Chair)
Councillor Valerie Anslow
Councillor Melanie Coleman
Councillor Emily Fedorowycz
Councillor Jan O'Hara (Substitute)

Councillor Kevin Watt (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Philip Irwin
Councillor Mark Pengelly
Councillor Geoff Shacklock

Officers:

David Prior, Senior Transport Planner,
Kerry Purnell, Assistant Director for
Communities and Leisure
Jack Pishhorn, Head of Culture, Heritage
and Tourism
Ben Smith, Head of Democratic Services
Carol Mundy,
Senior Democratic Services Officer
(Committees and Members)
Emma Robinson, Democratic Services
Support Officer

The Chair welcomed members and the viewing public to the meeting.

6 Apologies for absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Wilkes. Councillor O'Hara attended the meeting as a substitute.

The Executive Member, Councillor Howell, also submitted her apologies.

Resolved that the above apologies be noted.

7 Members' declarations of interest

The chair invited those present who wished to do so to make a declaration of interest.

Councillor	Item	Reason	Interest
Watt	Min 9 Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan	Cllr has previously been involved in the Corby Infrastructure Plan	Personal

Resolved to note the above declaration.

8 Minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2023 were received.

It was proposed by Councillor Irwin and seconded by Councillor Coleman that the minutes be approved. On being put to the vote this motion was declared carried.

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2023 be adopted as an accurate record.

9 Kettering Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan

The circulated report of the Executive Director of Place and Economy was received to inform committee of the findings of the recent public consultation on the Kettering Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure.

Appended to the report were the following documents:

- Appendix A – Draft Kettering Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan
- Appendix B – Kettering LCWIP Engagement Report
- Appendix C – Consultation Report - Kettering Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP)

The report was presented to committee by David Prior, Senior Transport Planner, who explained that Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) had been recommended by the Department for Transport to provide a strategic and planned approach for short-and long-term provision for cycling and walking within the local area.

The Kettering LCWIP has been developed to enable the council to identify prioritised cycling and walking infrastructure improvements for future investment, ensuring that consideration is given to cycling and walking within both local planning and transport policies and strategies, along with making a case for future funding for walking and cycling infrastructure.

The area of the LCWIP also included the area of Burton Latimer, due to the potential for cycle journeys between Kettering and Burton Latimer and is designed to link with those of the Greenways Strategy with the intention of identifying and prioritising a network of proposed routes and improvements.

A public consultation was held between 13 April 2023 and 20 May 2023, and respondents were asked for their overall feeling about the LCWIP. Of those who responded, 81% were either happy or satisfied with the overall LCWIP. Only 3% of respondents were unhappy with the LCWIP (the other responses were 'did not know'). Thus, indicating a very high level of support for the overall LCWIP. The comments received have been examined and many have been supportive of the proposals, with only a small proportion providing negative comments.

The technical report, at appendix A, was developed taking such comments into account.

The next stage of the process would be to commence work to procure support for the initial development of preliminary designs for those routes/ improvements identified within the LCWIP as a priority to form the basis of future funding bids to Government.

The chair thanked Mr Prior for his informative presentation and opened the debate for the committee.

Members thanked officers for the comprehensive findings and noted the amount of work that had gone into the LCWIP already, they considered that the creation of the cycling infrastructure would help with safety for users and was of great importance for the future environment. It was noted that this was a large piece of work that would be very costly, and questions were asked about where the funding would come from and what the next step would be.

Mr Prior clarified that funding would be required for the initial design stage and the main emphasis would be to identify the main routes and to establish cost estimates before submitting bids for funding. The design was proposed to be carried out with Kier and detailed design would be required at a subsequent stage. It was expected that this would be a long-term project.

The committee considered that as this was a scheme being promoted by the Government, funding would be allocated for this project. The committee was in favour of progressing the scheme and wished to encourage cycling for both health reasons and the environment. They also felt that some 'quick fixes' should be encouraged to improve and make safe existing cycling routes.

Some queries were raised over the use of Kier for the initial design stage, but it was noted that this formed part of the NNC contract with Kier.

Questions were raised about the engagement process. Officers clarified that there had been various ways that engagement with the public had taken place and it was not only an on-line process, the team had attended events and consultations in person.

Members asked if connectivity between the LCWIP could include the sustainable urban extension of Hanwood Park and Cranford and if there could be a link with the Greenway route.

Mr Prior confirmed that it was important for as many linkages to be put in place and the developers would, as part of the planning permission, be expected to deliver some connectivity between areas.

The committee was keen for the design work to progress as soon as possible to a formal scheme with full cost estimates. It was also suggested that small areas could be progressed with local contractors being engaged. The committee was also keen to make sure that designs were put in place in consultation with cyclists and walkers to ensure they were appropriate and user friendly and that examples of how routes were planned in other countries should also be considered.

Questions were raised about future maintenance of cycleways, particularly those on unadopted land, and that 'ownership' of routes was assured along with future maintenance agreements.

Committee also asked that during the design process consideration be given to the importance of retaining and ensuring the future of any trees.

The following motion was proposed by Councillor O'Hara and seconded by Councillor Fedorowycz and on being put to the vote declared carried.

Resolved that:

- (i) The findings of the public consultation on the Kettering LCWIP be noted;
- (ii) the comments made by committee be noted;
- (iii) the Executive Member for Highways, Travel and Assets be requested to recommend to the Executive that the routes identified in the Kettering LCWIP be progressed as soon as possible.

10 Cornerstone Art Gallery - Presentation

The circulated report of the Executive Director of Adults, Health Partnerships and Housing was received to provide information on the Cornerstone refurbishment project.

Kerry Purnell, Assistant Director for Communities and Leisure, explained that the project was conceived and started under the former Kettering Borough Council in 2018-19 and had been funded following receipt, in 2020 of a £3m grant from SEMLEP, and other funding meaning a budget of £4.5m was allocated to the scheme. The library roof replacement was not included in the original project.

She explained that Cornerstone was home to the Alfred East Art Gallery, Kettering Library, Kettering Museum & the Manor House Gardens with the building being Grade II listed.

The refurbishment project included a new two-storey extension, to be used for events and as a workshop space, the Garden Room and the Studio, event space, accommodating up to 130 people. A café had been created, with indoor seating for 30 people and a further 45 outside on a new terrace. In addition there is a new climate-controlled gallery art store capable of storing and caring for the gallery collection, along with a refurbished gallery space and floors, again with climate control to allow for the hosting of local and national exhibitions, talks and workshops. There were new accessible toilet facilities and amenity spaces including a changing places toilet. The library floor had also been refurbished along with internal redecoration. A new business intellectual property centre for North Northamptonshire, provided the environment for creative and cultural business to start up and grow on site.

The original proposal was to open the site in Spring 2023, but this had been delayed due to snagging issues and concern over the library roof. Some of the snagging issues related to a blocked drain, causing a foul smell in some of the new toilets, a leak through the new art store roof, issues with the lift and additional fire breaks, which were now all resolved.

Other issues identified had included the heating in the gallery space, intruder fire alarm system, the fire alarm for the site and Wi-Fi connectivity. These had subsequently all been resolved.

During Winter 2022 roof issues and water ingress was of concern in the library area and had delayed the opening of Cornerstone, which remained dependent on decisions being made in relation to the roof.

Due to the library being in the conservation area, the replacement of the roof required the use of Collyweston slate. Such slate required to be mortared in dry weather conditions and there would be a need to 'wrap' the building to make it water-tight, and to erect scaffolding, for the work to be carried out. There are only two companies who produce the slate and once an order had been placed it could take up to 11 months for the tiles to be delivered.

In early 2023, the design had been procured, for the replacement roof. An additional technical report had been requested to consider health and safety issues, to provide an explanation of methodology, the cost of wrap, and timelines. Officers would be providing a full report to the Executive in October and to Council thereafter to set out options for both enabling works and potential full project costs based on the need to replace the roof in its' entirety to enable members to understand the potential scale of works and funding required.

The chair thanked the officer for her informative presentation and welcomed two speakers who had made a request to address the committee.

Councillor Anne Lee addressed the committee expressing her concerns over the delay to the opening of the Cornerstone project opening and the continuing issue with the library roof, which had been discussed previously by Kettering Borough Council, and minutes were available. She requested a definitive opening date. Mr Clark Mitchell also addressed the committee with his concerns over the delays and concerns over potential clawback of grant funding, along with the need to ensure that the project was completed and open to the public as a matter of urgency. He also sought assurance over the safety and storage of the art.

Officers clarified that they were determined to open the site as soon as they possibly could as it would be a worthy asset for north Northamptonshire. As soon as confirmation was received from the Executive and Council to progress the roof repairs and the wrap to the building the project could be set in motion. Once the wrap to the building was installed it was hoped that the remainder of the site could be opened.

Jack Pishhorn, Head of Culture, Heritage and Tourism confirmed that work was ongoing with the National Heritage Lottery Fund regarding their investment in a significant future project to refurbish the museum and improve the collection for future exhibition and interpretation.

The committee discussed the report and information they had received. All expressed concern over the delay and felt that the opening was considerably overdue. It was considered that an order should be placed as soon as possible for the Collyweston Slate to ensure that production of this commenced urgently. Mrs Purnell clarified that this would be the subject of agreement by Executive and Council and an order could not be placed until such agreement to progress was received, and financial approvals in place. Once all financial costings had been received, officers would be preparing a full report to go before the Executive in October, and for final approval by Council. Members suggested that this be put to an urgent meeting of the Executive and Council to avoid further delay. The officer said that information on costings was still awaited and it was expected that October would be the earliest this could be reported.

It was asked if an alternative tile could be used to Collyweston slate and whether some of the slates could be reused. The officer clarified that due to this being in the

Conservation area, the only option was to use the Collyweston slate. During the removal as many tiles as possible would be reused.

Concern was also expressed that library employees had to work in such poor conditions and would be having to monitor the leaks, and that generally this would not be a good environment for them to be working in. The issue regarding the WI-FI was also raised and the officer explained that this had been disconnected during the project and had taken longer to re-establish as the library had fallen under the control of the former county council with the Wi-Fi account being held under West Northants Council. Connectivity had been resolved and, in the future, this would fall under NNC.

Members queried why there hadn't been more communication between NNC and Kettering Town Council during the project as it was felt that those involved with KTC would have considerable knowledge of local issues. The subject of the name Cornerstone was also raised, as it was felt that this name was not appropriate, and that consideration should be given to revisiting the name and branding of the venue.

The committee also sought assurance that if approval was given to the scaffolding and wrap of the library that this would not delay the opening of Cornerstone any longer than was necessary.

The general feeling of the committee was that the issue with the library roof needed to be resolved and actioned as soon as practical and without further delay.

Committee also asked for regular updates on progress to be provided via briefings for all members.

The chair agreed that she would put the committees concerns to the Executive.

Resolved that:

- (i) the report and presentation be noted;
- (ii) the comments of the committee be noted;
- (iii) the chair would inform the Executive of the urgent need to progress the repairs to the library roof to enable Cornerstone to open as soon as possible.

11 Close of meeting

The chair closed the meeting at 9.25pm.

Chair.....

Date