

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee: Safer, Cleaner, Greener Scrutiny **Date:** Tuesday, 20 January 2009
Standing panel

Place: Council Chamber, Civic Offices, **Time:** 7.30 - 9.10 pm
High Street, Epping

Members Present: M Colling (Chairman), G Pritchard (Vice-Chairman), R Barrett, K Chana, Miss R Cohen, R Frankel, D Jacobs, J Philip and Mrs L Wagland

Other Councillors:

Apologies: Ms J Hedges

Officers Present: J Gilbert (Director of Environment and Street Scene), A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer) and C Neilan (Conservation Officer)

Also in attendance P Thomson, J Dagley and D Sprunt

37. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

38. NOTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

The notes from 9 December 2008 were agreed as a correct record.

39. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME

The Terms of Reference and Work Programme were noted.

40. ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL - FOREST TRANSPORT CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

David Sprunt, the Principal Transportation Co-ordinator at Essex County Council, gave a short presentation to the Panel on the draft strategy. He emphasised that they just wanted comments for now, as no commitments had been made on any specific measures, although some early work had been carried out on cattle grids before the introduction of cattle to the forest.

Safer Crossing Points – there were a number of ideas to comment on, and a number of different solutions could be used according to the situation. There may be some need for equestrian solutions at these points.

Other measures proposed were: reducing the speed limits, introducing average speed cameras, installation of Pegasus crossings, flashing signs (flashes up if you exceed the speed limit) and gateways - to label the edge of the forest.

Road closures - it was proposed that some of the smaller roads would be closed off and effectively turned into bridal ways. There was also the possibility of 'quiet lanes' to be put in as a network (not individually). This is where local people agree to use a

road in a caring, sharing manner (keeping to the speed limit etc.) and protecting the character of that road.

Public Transport – providing buses to take people into the forest; this would need some sort of financial support to keep them running.

This consultation was the first step in the process; there would be public consultation on the proposals and then an agreement in principle. There would then be further consultation on the individual measures proposed. There was money at present for highway improvements over the next three years. Any measures taken would have specific consultation undertaken.

Councillor Frankel agreed with the basic principles and the need to cut down the traffic. However, he did have some problems with some aspects of the strategy:

- Slowing down traffic can cause more congestion, which in turn can cause more environmental damage.
- Epping New Road was built as a new road (in the late 1800's) through the forest, one of the few new roads since Roman times. By 1969 it was not thought fit to carry traffic and in 1974 there were concerns raised about the amount of traffic going through the forest.
- It was feasible that some of the smaller roads could be closed.
- The area had wanted a north facing slip road at Loughton; it had not happened then but it should be included on the plan.
- He was not happy about the cattle grids as they had a potential for causing accidents, i.e. horses who bolt and posing a hazard for cyclists.
- A number of the crossing points would have to be lit.
- There was a natural speed to the roads, and he thought that 40mph was a little low.

Mr Sprunt commented that congestion and slower speeds tended to occur at the roundabouts, and had little effect on the other roads. As for the M11 slipway, as an authority ECC did not have control of such schemes. This had been suggested as part of the Olympics revamp and this had also thrown up the issue of putting more traffic through Debden. This would have to be looked at carefully.

As for cattle grids, they were a barrier to stop cattle getting on the main roads. They would only be put by the main roads, so if a horse bolts here it would be likely to run into the main road and cause further accidents. He was open to any alternative suggestions. They would have to light up any islands installed but could put in some of the modern reflective signs instead of lights. Accidents tend to happen in the north by the M11 and the Robin Hood Roundabout and 40% of them happened in the dark.

Councillor Pritchard liked the idea of average speed cameras. Also there was a need to restrict the number of cars using the Forest roads. A lot of people used the Forest to go into London; this also caused problems with parking in the surrounding areas. Some sort of park and ride would have some merit. A lot of cyclists used the forest but they were not allowed to take their bikes on the tube. Could there be some exploration around that issue, particularly in the weekends.

Mr Sprunt replied if they restricted traffic in the Forest and put in speed cameras and limits, then people would seek alternative routes.

Councillor Mrs Wagland was impressed with the street furniture within the forest, but her big concern was about the aesthetics. She would like as little hard landscaping as possible. It should be kept looking like a forest. She was keen on changing the road texture to change the speed of vehicles; they could also be used for the central

crossing points. She did not want lights at these points, if the desired effect could be achieved by other means.

Councillor Philip commented that the document had not anything in it about how to put the traffic elsewhere by maybe reopening the Epping Ongar line. It was worth looking at reducing speed on some of the side roads although he did not support reducing the speed on the main roads. He did support the introduction of cattle grids and wanted to see as little street furniture and street lighting as possible. Reflective surfaces were better.

Councillor Jacobs said that unless TfL changed their mind the Epping Ongar line would not reopen. Connections to London had reduced over time, although most of the people living in Ongar work in London and commute by car. A problem for local traffic was that in order to get to the M11 they had to go through the Forest. Although he mostly agreed with the strategy he had certain reservation as already stated by other Councillors.

Councillor Ms R Cohen supported the reopening of the rail line northward. As the government was now revamping all the rail stations because of the upcoming Olympics it was a good opportunity to see if reopening the line could be added to this project.

Councillor Barrett said that the roads in the Forest were for cars, not people as there were no pavements. He did not think that the roads had been improved over the last 50 years. He asked if the animals would be fenced in. Mr Sprunt replied that they would be fences near the main roads. Councillor Barrett said that whatever could be done to improve the forest would be a good thing.

Mr Sprunt was mindful of the aesthetic issues involved in the Forest and wanted to keep it as a forest. They had no intention to turn it into an urban extension of London.

Councillor Mrs Wagland said that the real difficulty with hard landscaping was that once you had started you could not stop and had to keep introducing subsidiary things. They were lucky to have the City holding this land and keeping it as forest. They should start with a premise against hard landscaping unless they had to, as it would destroy the character of the Forest if they went down that route.

Councillor Colling said that nowadays there was too much traffic on the roads to cope with the introduction of cows back into the Forest. If the fencing proposed stopped the cattle wandering into the road it would be better to have it installed. He was not in favour of having speed humps but they could raise the road slightly at crossing points. Any street furniture should be kept to a rustic style. Also could there some sort of bikers trail as they have in Cornwall like the Camel trail. He would like to see the Epping Ongar line reopened and the County should keep pushing for this.

Mr Sprunt replied that there was the possibility to highlight the crossing points in a different colour; modern cars were less affected by road surfaces, there was the possibility of using rumble strips but these were very noisy.

Jeremy Dagley, Conservation Manager from the City of London, commented that this was an interesting session which brought up more strategic concepts like revising the tube line and the north facing slip road. In trying to reduce traffic through the forest the wider area outside the forest had to be considered. As for crossing points, fences at these points would have gates for horse riders to use, with the aim of making them as easy to use as possible.

The Director of Environment and Street Scene, John Gilbert, commented that individual members could fill in the questionnaire as it had been published in the member's bulletin. But there needed to be an official response by the Council specifically from this Panel via the main Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the panel wanted to highlight the following comments made on the Forest Transport Consultation:

1. Document is local in context and at some point a more strategic overview would be required, to include matters such as:

- (i) review of M11 north facing slip roads at Loughton;
- (ii) re-opening of Ongar – Epping line; and
- (iii) the ability to transport bicycles on the tube at weekends.

2. There was general acceptance of the principles behind the strategy in endeavouring to:

- (i) protect the Forest and its environs;
- (ii) improve access to all who wished to enjoy the Forest; and
- (iii) control as far as practical, vehicles numbers and vehicle speeds.

3. However, the Panel did raise the following issues:

- (i) the Panel was sceptical about the need to reduce speeds on the main roads e.g. Epping New Road, considering that accidents were more likely due to poor driving rather than speed generally;
- (ii) any steps to control traffic should be achieved without the use of "hard" landscaping such as central refuges, street lighting, excessive signage etc;
- (iii) the Panel wished to see the exploration of "softer", less intrusive controls such as differential road surfaces, road markings to signify the need for lower speed;
- (iv) the Panel were generally supportive of cattle grids provided that they were restricted to main road junctions and that consideration was given to the effects of grids upon other animals in the Forest;
- (v) the Panel was concerned about the introduction of grazing cattle etc and wished to be assured that adequate steps would be taken to keep animals and traffic separated;
- (vi) the Panel were concerned about the introduction of additional crossing points. The Panel recognised the principle of providing more crossings to change the balance between people and cars in the Forest, but were of the view that, for example, on Epping New Road, this was and would likely remain a very busy road, and therefore it was inherently dangerous to encourage further interaction between people and traffic. However, the Panel did consider that existing crossing points should be enhanced to facilitate their use and to make them more obvious to drivers, through for example, raised tables of other "soft" features;

- (vii) the Panel was broadly supportive of proposals to close 2 roads in the district, namely Fairmeads and Wake Road, enabling them to revert to bridleway status; and
- (viii) the Panel had mixed views on the issue of speed cameras, but if their use was introduced, then there was some preference for average speed cameras, since, if sensitively located, these reduce the need for additional street furniture.

41. REPORT TO BE MADE TO THE NEXT MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

To submit a report to the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on the conclusions reached at this meeting.

42. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

To further business was reported.

43. FUTURE MEETINGS

Future meetings of the Panel were noted.

CHAIRMAN

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