



Minutes of the special meeting of the ENVIRONMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE held at QUEENSWAY METHODIST CHURCH, BLETCHLEY on WEDNESDAY 17 JANUARY 2007 at 7.00 pm.

Present: Councillor Hopkins (Chair)
Councillors Butler-Ellis, Eaton, Edwards (substitute for Councillor Holroyd), Fraser, Legg, Pugh (substitute for Councillor Ferrans) and Tamignini-Barbosa

Officers: J Moffoot (Head of Democratic Services), T Dove (Traffic & Transport Manager), K Whiteside (Chief Highways & Transportation Engineer), F Bower (Overview and Scrutiny Officer) and P Taylor (Committee Manager)

Also Present: Councillor Williams (Cabinet Member responsible for Transport and Planning)

Number of Public Present: 86

Apologies: Councillors Ferrans and Holroyd, and Councillors D McCall (Cabinet Member responsible for Environment and Localities) and Mabbott (Ward Member for Bletchley and Fenny Stratford).

EP29 TAVISTOCK STREET

The Committee received an oral update from the Traffic and Transport Manager on the environmental improvement proposals for Tavistock Street.

The Committee noted that there had been a long-standing concern that the mix of industrial and residential land usage within Tavistock Street had led to poor environmental conditions. These problems were primarily associated with parking issues and Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs). Problems with HGVs entering Tavistock Street from Victoria Road had continued to persist despite the implementation of a 7.5 tonne weight limit restriction.

Members were informed that environmental improvement proposals were included in the British Telecom (BT) development plan for Tavistock Street. Subsequently, the sum of £100,000 was received by the Council in August 1996 to be used towards the cost of an unspecified scheme to improve traffic conditions in Tavistock Street

with the stipulation that work would commence within 10 years.

The Committee noted that during the period 2004-2005 a number of options to improve the environmental conditions in Tavistock Street were investigated by the Council. A study into the possible provision of a link road through Goodman's scrap yard linking Tavistock Street to Saxon Street (V7) revealed that the land immediately available was only sufficient to provide a single carriageway for the entry and exit of vehicles. It was also noted that in June 2005, the value of this land was estimated at £140,000.

Members were informed that an alternative proposal to block one end of Tavistock Street and to provide a turning circle accommodated by the purchase of land and subsequent demolition of property had also been investigated. The land costs – not including relocation costs or construction costs – were also estimated to be £140,000.

The Committee noted that several of the options that had been investigated exceeded the funding allocation received from the BT development proposals. Local Ward Members and Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Town Council were advised of the findings of the study together with a number of options for alternative funding.

The Committee was informed that meetings had been held between Council officers and Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Town Council at the start of 2006 to discuss alternative arrangements for improving the environmental conditions in Tavistock Street using the money received from BT. At a meeting on the 2 March 2006, the following schemes were proposed:

- Enhancements to the existing cycle and pedestrian facilities.
- Enhanced paving throughout Tavistock Street.
- Enhanced signing for HGVs via Princes Way and North Street.
- Severance of Tavistock Street between residential and commercial sections.

Members noted that at that meeting the decision was taken to undertake a consultation exercise on the above options.

The Committee was informed that an exhibition had been held on the Borough Bus in Tavistock Street on Friday 28 April and Saturday 29 April 2006. As part of the consultation, residents and employers in Tavistock Street, Western Road and North Street were sent flyers advertising the public exhibition. 125 people attended the exhibition and everyone was given the opportunity to fill in questionnaires regarding the proposals. 42 responses were received before the consultation period ended on 22 May 2006.

Members were informed that, following the consultation exercise a

report had been produced and that a delegated decision was taken by Councillor Williams (Cabinet Member responsible for Transport and Planning) on 14 July 2006. Subsequent to the decision being taken, further representations were made to the Council regarding the Tavistock Street proposals.

The following contributions were received from speakers invited to address the Committee as representatives of local interest groups.

V Pearson, speaking on behalf of the residents of Tavistock Street, made the following comments:

- The prevalence of HGVs infringing the 7.5 tonne Traffic Regulation Order, the general increase in vehicular activity and the insufficient provision of parking bays to accommodate both residential and business parking were all reasons to proceed with the gating of Tavistock Street.
- Streets adjacent to Tavistock Street would not be adversely affected as signage would be provided to direct traffic along designated routes.
- Good businesses that were valued by their customers would not suffer as a result of the gating. Furthermore, the loss of passing trade was not a valid reason for residents to continue to endure environmental problems.
- The public consultation process was robust, open and honest, and as a result a democratic outcome was achieved.
- The proposed gating of Tavistock Street was for a 6 month experimental period and the results should not be pre-judged by the Committee.

K Knowles, speaking as a resident of Western Road, made the following comments:

- The gating of Tavistock Street would cause increased traffic and parking issues for adjacent streets. New signage would be ineffective as people would take the quickest route that they knew. This was a particularly acute problem as the area was already used as a short cut by drivers wishing to avoid the 'B&Q roundabout'.
- Traffic problems would intensify with the opening of the MK Dons Stadium and the proposed improvements to Saxon Street (V7).
- Emphasis should be placed on effectively enforcing the traffic restrictions that were already in place.

R Venn, the Chairperson of the Fenny Stratford Residents Association, made the following comments:

- The residents of Tavistock Street had endured serious environmental problems for some years and had worked

hard to have their voice heard. It was essential that the situation be confronted and a gate be used to divide Tavistock Street for a six month trial period.

- Clear and fixed signage was needed to ensure that the environmental problems were not passed to nearby streets.

Ian Ross, Director of Trade2U, made the following comments:

- The current temporary closure of Tavistock Street had given businesses an insight into the likely effect of the proposed gate. Trade2U had seen 68% fewer people in the 7 day period following the road closure than it had in the same period the previous year. If customers had difficulty accessing the businesses they would simply go elsewhere.
- Some businesses were tied into long term leases so any loss in custom would be likely to result in job losses.
- During the period that Tavistock Street had been closed, problems had occurred because vehicles were unable to turn in the road. Access to Tavistock Street had on occasions been blocked because HGVs were attempting multiple-point turns.

John Parker, the Director of Wright Vehicle Solutions Ltd, made the following comments:

- Many of the businesses in Tavistock Street relied on 'passing trade' that would be considerably reduced if the severance proposal went ahead. A loss of business, even during a 6 month trial period, could result in redundancies.
- The difficulty that HGVs delivering goods to the businesses would have if Tavistock Street was severed was highlighted in 2004, when the Council considered the gating of Tavistock Street inappropriate without the provision of proper turning areas.
- The original consultation process had not been thorough enough, and the Council should accept this and attempt to find a compromise solution.

Barry Watson, Managing Director of B&T Tyres and Exhaust Centre Ltd, made the following comments:

- If Tavistock Street was gated it would cause increased environmental problems for Western Road.

Councillor Geoff Bennett, speaking on behalf of Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Town Council, made the following comments:

- There was a conflict between business and residents over street parking which was exacerbated by the poor implementation of current parking regulations.

- Concern had been expressed at the perceived increase in the number of HGVs using Tavistock Street.
- The proposed gating would realise the intention originally expressed by Buckinghamshire County Council to only allow HGVs entry to Tavistock Street from its North Street end.

Councillor Legg (Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Town Council) made the following comments:

- The decision to gate Tavistock Street on a 6 month experimental period needed to be balanced against a consultation process that was clear, robust and fair. Evidence presented to the Committee would suggest that not everybody who would be affected by the proposed gating had been consulted.

The Committee received the following comments from members of the public concerning the present conditions in Tavistock Street:

- Businesses on Tavistock Street operated all hours of the day, 7 days a week, causing serious problems for residents.
- The environmental conditions in Tavistock Street and the risks that they posed had forced children to stay indoors.
- The effective enforcement of existing restrictions on Tavistock Street would stop the largest HGVs using the road and slow down the traffic.
- Businesses were sympathetic to the plight of Tavistock Street residents but the gating was not a feasible solution as it failed to address a number of potential problems.

The Committee received the following comments from members of the public concerning the consultation exercise:

- The residents of Tavistock Street had entered into the consultation process in good faith. The Energizer bus on which the exhibition was held had been open to everyone and provided opportunities for interested parties to engage with the decision making process.
- Western Road residents were given little or no information about the proposals until a very late stage in the process.
- The consultation was not comprehensive enough and any legal advice on the process should be made available to the public
- A further consultation should be undertaken to expose the weaknesses in the current proposal. From the results, a solution should be found that did not affect one group at the expense of the other and included a provision for the affected businesses.

The Committee received the following comments from members of the public concerning the effects the gating would have on the adjacent area:

- The problems in Tavistock Street could not be dealt with in isolation from the larger context of development in Central Bletchley. A comprehensive planning approach was needed.
- Since the temporary closure of Tavistock Street there had been an observable increase in traffic using Western Road.
- The gating of Tavistock Street would not address the use of North Street by HGVs delivering to business premises.

The Committee received the following comments from members of the public concerning the provision of a link road between Tavistock Street and Saxon Street (V7):

- The ideal solution was a link road between Tavistock Street and Saxon Street (V7). This would mean there would be no need for HGVs to use Tavistock Street or North Street.
- This was an issue of the Council not putting enough money into the Bletchley area.

In a response to a question regarding the funding of the environmental improvement proposals, the Traffic and Transport Manager informed the Committee that funding was not forthcoming from the Council because the project was not a Council priority.

Members of the Committee made the following comments in response to the evidence that they had received during the meeting:

- There was a clear issue regarding the enforcement of the existing HGVs restrictions in Tavistock Street.
- The results from the original consultation should be accepted but the issue should be taken back to Cabinet and a discussion in an open forum requested.
- There was enough evidence to suggest that another consultation exercise should be carried out. If such an exercise suggested significant opposition to the gating of Tavistock Street, Councillor Williams should then review his decision.
- The best solution was clearly the provision of a link road between Tavistock Street and Saxon Street (V7).

RESOLVED –

That the Cabinet be invited to undertake a further period of more extensive consultation leading to a more detailed report being prepared by officers, taking into account submissions made to this meeting, and that the Members of the Cabinet debate and undertake to make a final decision in Cabinet open session.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 9.50 PM