NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

STREETCARE, INFRASTRUCTURE AND CULTURE (RURAL and URBAN) WORKING GROUPS

At a Joint meeting of the Streetcare, Infrastructure and Culture (Rural and Urban) Working Groups held in the Chairman’s Dining Room, County Hall, Morpeth on Wednesday 12 November, 2014 at 3:00 pm.

PRESENT

Councillor E Cartie (Chair)
In the chair

COUNCILLORS

Rural
G Castle
C Cessford
A Dale
I Hunter

Urban
D Bawn
B Flux
B Gallacher
J Reid
A Sambrook

OFFICERS

R Bendell
Infrastructure Manager Local Services
H Bowers
Democratic Services Officer
P Jones
Head of Neighbourhood Services
S McNaughton
Principal Transport Policy Officer

1. Election of Chair

RESOLVED that Councillor E Cartie be elected Chair of the Joint meeting of the Streetcare, Infrastructure and Culture (Rural and Urban) Working Groups.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Burt, Daley, Sanderson and Tebbutt.

The Chair was pleased that Councillor Castle had made good recovery and was in attendance.
3. **Notes of Streetcare, Infrastructure and Culture (Rural and Urban) Working Groups**

**RESOLVED** that the notes of the joint meeting of the Streetcare, Infrastructure and Culture (Rural and Urban) Working Groups held on 10 September 2014, as circulated, be noted with the following amendments:

1) Apologies from Councillor J Reid
2) Cemeteries and Crematoria – The third paragraph should read ‘There was no statutory duty on local authorities to provide burial space to carry out an assessment of needs for burial space’.
3) The second last paragraph, last sentence should read ‘It was further advised that NALC had been written to’.

A Member raised the issue of the policy for subsidised bus transport across Northumberland and it was suggested that a joint Bus Services Working Group should be established. Concern had been expressed at the recent Chairmen’s Group that the policy had been due for review by the appropriate Working Group and/or Scrutiny Committee, but had been removed from the Working Group/Scrutiny Work Programme and would be included as part of the budgetary process because of its financial implications. Members of the Chairmen’s Group had expressed concern at the absence of fully considered Member input, supported by officers, on such an important matter prior to a budgetary decision being made.

Given the potential effect of a reduction in bus subsidies, on public transport access for the whole of the County, and the range of possible options for local transport, it was felt that this work was appropriate for a Working Group of Scrutiny.

**RECOMMENDED** that:-

(a) Policy Board be asked to note the concerns of members; and

(b) consideration be given to the establishment of a Scrutiny Working Group for public transport, with particular regard to bus services

4. **Hexham Bus Station**

Information was circulated to the Working Group by Ruth Bendell, Infrastructure Manager who explained to Members that the latest information provided was set out for Members in a number of options for Hexham Bus Station.

Transport consultants had been engaged to undertake an independent assessment and had identified, in conjunction with Hexham Town Council, 8 potential options. The result of the options appraisal indicated that ‘Loosing Hill’ was the new preferred option.

In terms of involvement, members of the public had been invited to attend open days in July to view the options appraisal work, which had been well attended.

Following the involvement event, additional information had been requested from parishes on what the implications would be. An independent bus user survey had been carried out which asked bus users questions about when, why and how often
they use buses and, if they come in to Hexham, how long do they stay and where do they go.

Mrs Bendell advised that the bus station had been in existence since the early 1900’s when there had been less traffic to contend with, and she referred to problems with reversing and other safety issues. She reported that the bus station was not wholly owned by any one business or authority, and several businesses had access rights.

Members were advised about the ongoing health and safety concerns regarding the existing bus station site. Tynedale District Council had attempted to address these issues in the early 2000’s, and improvements had been carried out by Northumberland County Council in 2010 and 2013 before further reports on safety and road safety were commissioned this year.

A Member stated that the developer who owned the land adjacent to the Council owned bus station had not done anything to develop the land which had now deteriorated. He referred to the preferred option for an ‘on street bus station’ and the problems associated with that.

He continued that a year ago, Council Officers had presented to Hexham a ‘preferred’ option which involved selling off the existing bus station to a developer, while at the same time re-providing the bus service from on street bus stops. That option also required that all east bound buses would have to complete a 360 degree turn at the top of Battle Hill at Benson’s monument. The historic monument would have to have been removed to facilitate. That had been deemed unsatisfactory and the Town Council had urged the County Council to revisit its methodology in order to come up with a more robust solution.

A full options appraisal had then been carried out on all eight options put to the County Council by Hexham Town Council, with the original ‘preferred’ option scoring poorly. (Option 7 on the circulated hand out).

In terms of issues relating to the new preferred Loosing Hill option, there was a view expressed by local councillors, who had originally wished to retain and improve upon the existing site, that the loss of ‘precious’ car parking space coupled with the weather proofing of bus stops, the provision of modern toilet facilities were important points that needed addressing and that all of the stated safety concerns should be shared openly with the public.

A Member agreed that it was good to see the Council had changed its preference accordingly having listened to the evidence presented.

Mrs Bendell advised that the Options Appraisal had not looked at detailed design for each of the options and that safety concerns would be addressed as part of any agreed proposal.

A Member stated that the ownership of the land and the accidents had always been an issue and added that it was a big health and safety risk to this and the previous Council.
Councillor Castle agreed with Members’ comments and it was important that they should be noted by the Policy Board. He added that the comments would be referred to Councillor Cessford who was the local member for clarification to ensure clarity on such a complex matter.

**RESOLVED** that the Policy Board be asked to note the comments of the Group.

5. **Review of Traffic Issues on Cowpen Road**

Stuart McNaughton, Principal Transport Policy Officer reported on the progress of the Member led report previously submitted to the Streetcare, Infrastructure and Culture (Urban) Working Group which proposed recommendations for the future.

The Policy Board approved the report early in September and the recommendations were outlined in the report.

The first recommendation required detailed work on the Horton Grange and Dales School access and the most likely scheme was a car park at the rear of the schools.

With regard to the second recommendation, an appraisal study would need to be carried out and expressions of interest were to be received from consultants to lead on study on traffic flows/congestions.

The third recommendation was for a transport appraisal study for the whole of Blyth and the future of the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne rail link and the core strategy and the impact it would have on the future. It was hoped to commission a 3 part study on the existing future of Blyth and the consultation would consider a range of options and also walking and cycling options.

Comments and queries were raised by Members including:

- When would the process begin?
- Would there be any changes to the way people accessed the school when coming from different directions?
- Would there be any changes to the traffic signals at Coniston/Tynedale Road?
- What was the cost of the scheme?

In response to the queries, Mr McNaughton advised that the process would be imminent as it was hoped that the Core Strategy document would be finalised at the end of the month. He was conscious that there might be some additional stress at junctions once the scheme was in place. In reply to the query regarding the traffic signals, Mr McNaughton advised that there would be a blank sheet review with modelling taken from the consultation and further advised that £50,000 would be set aside from the LTP scheme.

**RESOLVED** that the Streetcare, Infrastructure and Culture (Urban) Working Group note the approval by the Policy Board on 9 September 2014 of the following recommendations and the progress on each element.
a) Approve the process of taking Scheme 1. Access to Horton Grange Primary School and Dales School, drop-off/pick up point to Detailed Design Stage.

b) Approve a Transport Appraisal Study focusing on the Coniston Road, Tynedale Road staggered junction and Cowley Road, Spencer Road junctions in combination with utilising the existing Industrial Estate road network as an alternative route.

c) Approve a Transport Appraisal Study for the whole of Blyth area looking at improved links to the A189 Spine Road, Tyne and Wear, future development sites and AB & T interchanges.

6. **Streetcare, Infrastructure and Culture (Rural and Urban) Working Group Work Programmes**

Members considered the Streetcare, Infrastructure and Culture (Rural) Working Group Report. It was suggested that the criteria used for toilets, whether strategic or tourist be explained in the report for the Public Convenience item to be raised at the January meeting.

Issues relating to connectivity across Northumberland were also discussed which needed to be addressed and it was suggested that John Cooper, iNorthumberland Digital Engagement Officer be invited to at the Working Group to discuss the issues.

**RESOLVED:**

1) That the criteria used for public toilets, whether strategic or tourist be explained in the report for the Public Convenience item to be presented at the meeting in January

2) That John Cooper, iNorthumberland Digital Engagement Officer be invited to the Working Group to discuss connectivity issues

7. **Streetcare, Infrastructure and Culture (Rural and Urban) Working Group Monitoring Reports**

**Urban**

Cemeteries and Crematoria - Paul Jones, Head of Neighbourhood Services advised that work was still on going and on target for January.

**Rural**

The Chair referred to the previous meeting where different and innovative ways of burial had been discussed. Mr Jones advised of a project with the Parish Working Liaison Group, NALC and the Church of England who were investigating the burial cap and pinch points. Part of that process would be the investigation and review of the layout of cemeteries. Mr Jones advised that he would report back to the Parish Liaison Working Group and Streetcare, Infrastructure and Culture (Urban and Rural) Working Groups.

With respect to the review of public conveniences, Mr Jones advised that the proposal was to have a more forward look around issues of number and quality and the standard.
A Member referred to the July meeting of Streetcare, Infrastructure and Culture (Urban) Working Group and was concerned that a member of the public had been allowed to speak at the Working Group following the submission of a petition. He stated that there were similar schemes in his area and was concerned that it might set a precedent. The Infrastructure Manager advised that the meeting was more to explain the process which had been done through consultation.

**RESOLVED** that a further report be brought back to the Working Groups in January in relation to Cemeteries and Crematoria.

8. **Date and Time of Next Meetings**

Streetcare, Infrastructure and Culture (Urban) Working Group: 14 January 2015 at 10.00 am to be held in the Reception Meeting Room, Blyth Depot, Cowley Road, Riverside Business Park, Blyth, NE24 5TF.

Streetcare, Infrastructure and Culture (Rural) Working Group: 14 January 2015 at 2.00 pm to be held in the Warkworth Room, County Hall, Morpeth, NE61 2EF.