

Stronger Communities and Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Board CPH Environment and Highways – Priorities

What we are currently seeing

Highways

- Impact of HS2: Time required to technically review approve strategically significant new highway infrastructure.
- On existing road and footpath network continues to increase as main works escalate. Phasing of works critical to successful delivery.
- Numerous major projects (excluding HS2) are currently in planning , early works and delivery, including: Wildlife Ways, Fillongley Bridge, DfT Active Travel Fund (Tranche 2 Cycle Routes), NEC Longabout, LCWIP cycling infrastructure, A45 / Damson Parkway signal junction, Sprint, Commonwealth Games, M42 J6 works, Solihull Heat Network, West Gate and numerous housing sites. These will be very staff intensive and place pressure on road space availability over coming months and years.
- Reducing our carbon footprint contributes to a greener Solihull by: completing the LED replacement programme, moving to a zero carbon energy tariff and using low carbon surfacing materials such as half warm asphalt.
- Existing pressures on car parking service remain and appear unlikely to change at current time, particularly with impact of Covid-19
- Demand for changes to on street parking restrictions and changes to priorities continue despite current restrictions. Additional home working has resulted in more residential parking demand and concerns.

Environment

- Need to make a decision on the location of the new Depot and Household Waste Recycling Centre. Improvements to the Strategic Environment Contract dependent on this as current depot is tired and has operational constraints- also not to underestimate the work involved to develop and deliver this.
- Amey being taken over by Urbaser – potential for some change to operations and uncertainty on contract (mainly for the operational staff as will have been TUPED twice in less than a year).
- Increase in littering, use of litter bins and fly-tipping again related to changes in behaviour due to Coronavirus, ultimately a bigger impact on our public realm.

What we might see in the future

Highways

- Continued impact of HS2 on highway and footpath networks across the borough.
- Development of the UKC Infrastructure Programme and SMBC growth agenda
- Innovation and changes in processes and procedures to enable the council to achieve its zero-carbon agenda
- Further reductions/changes to parking demands within the town and other retail centres across the borough.

Environment

- End of the Contract with Amey/Urbaser – start of new Strategic Contract on 01.04.22 – period of uncertainty (for contract staff) and change- requiring careful management by SMBC starting with contract mobilisation in October 2021.
- Increased Contract Costs – a lot has changed since 2007/08 when the contract was last tendered – the new contract will cost more due to changes in market conditions and our aspirations around carbon reduction which have been built into the specification for the contract.
- Development of Sub-regional Material Recovery Facility to process recycling from the Solihull, Walsall, Coventry and Warwickshire – providing state of the art technology, improved material quality and contract security of for recycling.
- Changes to our kerbside collections –due to requirement to introduce food waste and manage the (as yet unknown) impacts of Deposit Return Schemes and Extended producer responsibility.

What we need to do to respond

Highways

- Invest further in digital automation and capture of asset and network usage data to ensure that an efficient and evidence led approach can be adopted.
- Innovate and invest in zero or low carbon alternatives.
- Invest in our workforce to ensure we are resilient and have the appropriate skills, knowledge and expertise to deliver our growth ambitions.
- Co-ordinate effectively emerging works on our network to minimise disruption and delay on the travelling public.

- Identify and secure funding opportunities to invest in and support the network to ensure it remains able to cope with planned and emerging developments within the borough

Environment

- A timely decision on where the new depot/HWRC is going to be and how the development of the new site is going to be funded and managed. Target date for completion 2025.
- Commitment to improvement works at the current depot and HWRC and to funding for the improvement works.

Item of Specific Interest for Scrutiny

Parking Displacement Programme

In April 2016 a report was taken to a Cabinet Decision Session to review the Parking Displacement Programme (PDP) following a suspension of the programme in 2008. However, following requests from ward members a review of the Parking Displacement Programme was undertaken in 2021 and a report was presented at the February 2021 Highways and Environment Cabinet Member Decision Session, which included a recommendation to continue the current position (abandonment of programme) with regards to the Parking Displacement Programme.

Following concerns raised by ward and opposition members the Cabinet Member added to the decision that he would ask Scrutiny in the new municipal year to look to set up a Task and Finish Group to interrogate and analyse all options within the Cabinet Report (with officer support) and provide recommendations on a way forward back to the a future Cabinet decision session.