

Report to Overview & Scrutiny regarding the work of the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Group (GEGSG)

GEGSG has met twice since the last O & S meeting:

- 23rd September, a joint meeting with the GCC Environment scrutiny committee where there was just one topic, the Local Transport Plan
- 21st October, where there was just one main item on the Agenda, the Golden Valley development.

Thanks to COVID 19 both these meetings are available to view on the GCC website and the associated paperwork is in Mod.gov.

Apart from these two formal meetings, briefings on the A417 and Junction 10 of the M5 were arranged for GEGSG members (plus a wider audience). It was interesting to compare the Junction 10 project, which is just setting out, with the A417 presentation, which is reaching the final stage of planning/consultation before work actually starts. It is fascinating to see how the project has responded to the various stages of consultation.

LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN (23rd September)

Members were reminded that at a joint meeting in September 2019, both Committees considered and commented on, the draft Local Transport Plan (LTP). This draft was then signed off by GCC Cabinet and went to public consultation between January and March this year.

Due to the onset of the pandemic, today's session had to be delayed from July and therefore the timeline had adjusted accordingly. Members were asked to comment on the revised LTP, following comments received from the public consultation. The final LTP would be presented to Cabinet in January 2021, with an aim for the full adoption in March 2021.

Members noted that the LTP had last been adopted in 2016 and was now therefore increasingly out of date with national, regional, county and local priorities and policies. The review needed to bring the LTP in line with these changes, whilst also strengthening its climate change agenda and reflecting the significant progress in the district local plans e.g. the Joint Core Strategy and Cotswold Local Plan. It was highlighted that both the county council and all six district councils had now declared a climate change emergency.

One of the main topics discussed was the impact of COVID-19 on the plan, not least as all the consultation had taken place before lockdown. Initiatives like the Govt's new cycling/walking strategy 'Gear Up' would also be included. The new cycling and walking schemes that had emerged across the County during lock down would be incorporated. It was also noted that the Govt was due to produce a 'Decarbonising Transport' strategy later in the year.

Funding for the Cheltenham to Gloucester cycleway has still not been completely sourced, but there is definite progress. The Scrutiny Group will return to the LTP in the New Year.

Paul McCloskey
24th October 2020

THE GOLDEN VALLEY PROJECT (21st October; Tim's PowerPoint is at pages 13 to 58 of the Agenda Pack)

Tim Atkins presented an update on the Golden Valley Project, focussing on the economic benefits to the county. This was done to much acclaim by those present. Although it is technically a Cheltenham project, its impact is County wide (if not national!). Not least, part of the land in question is in Tewkesbury, and places like Churchdown will be directly affected.

There was discussion on how COVID-19 had changed people's attitudes to commuting. One largely unanswered question was how we could ensure that the jobs created would go to local people. If they didn't the 3,700 houses would be bought up by incomers attracted to the new high-tech jobs rather than providing affordable homes for people in Cheltenham.

Again, this project is likely to feature at future GEGSC meetings over many years.

HOW THE LEP PRIORITISES PROJECTS (21st October Mally Findlater pages 59-72 of the agenda pack)

This is an ongoing topic. Mally presented an updated report on the Project Pipeline and Getting Building Fund. Members will recall that the Govt recently asked for 'shovel ready' capital projects that could be completed by December 2021.

Because of the existing pipeline of projects, the LEP was rapidly able to review the pipeline against the Govt's new criteria (mainly about stimulating economic growth – not surprisingly!) and they have been very successful in getting Govt funding. Progress with these projects will be a topic for future meetings. Mally's paper gives links to various LEP documents that explain the process of prioritising capital projects.

[The Cambell Tickel review of O&S mentioned the use made of the Leader's presence at meetings. I wonder whether O&S might wish to ask how well Cheltenham punches its weight across Gloucestershire in getting its projects approved?]

FUTURE WORK

The work plan is in the Agenda pack. But it is subject to change. For instance we have had a hoped for Agenda item 'Impact of BREXIT on Gloucestershire' on the drawing board for over a year, and we are still no nearer to having anything worthwhile to scrutinise.

Finally, you will see from the review of the GEGSC's series of visits to each District, (and given that with COVID-19, we can't do any more visits at the moment), that the approach is for District Members to bring forward items of wider strategic significance to the committee. After the recent Golden Valley presentation, the heat is off Cheltenham for the moment, but I do have this standing item to respond to. So, any suggestions from O&S about Cheltenham projects that would benefit from a wider airing would be welcome.

Paul McCloskey
24th October 2020