



Community Sub-Group Report

GTDP Board Meeting Friday 17th February 2017

Since the previous Board Meeting on 21st October, the Sub-Group has met twice, and is due to meet again on 15th February. These meetings have been held on Wednesday evenings at the Charles Burrell Centre, and have been reasonably well attended by the public, with around a dozen in attendance at each meeting. Alongside the main agenda items, the public have also had a chance to raise issues of concern to them. Where possible, questions have been answered and/or suggestions given for sources of further information or advice. In some cases the Sub-Group has investigated further in order to establish the facts and background, in order to gain a better understanding of the issue, and potentially present a case to the Board. There are some such issues included under the headings below.

Thetford Signing Improvement Scheme Consultation

In response to the request for comments on the Thetford Signing Improvement Scheme by Norfolk County Council, the Sub-Group considered the scheme and prepared a submission. We were grateful to Ian Parkes, from Norfolk County Council Highways for attending our meeting on 30th November to hear from the public and answer their questions on the scheme. We are now awaiting the Council's response and their final proposals.

It was unfortunate that the timing of the consultation, coupled with the Board's decision to turn its scheduled meeting into a workshop, meant that it was not possible for the Board to formally consider the proposals at a Board meeting. Although not Norfolk County Council's fault in this instance, it is suggested that Partners have regard for the timing of Board meetings when planning future consultations.

It is also unfortunate that the consultation did not directly invite public comments, and that the background information contained in the two initial reports was not available to the public. It was my understanding from the discussion at the Board meeting on 21st October that both of these would happen, and this view is supported by the draft minutes. Providing background information and allowing the public the opportunity to have their say on schemes like this is important for public engagement.

Future Health Provision

Following public concern about the provision of NHS dental and GP services for the forthcoming development, I tried to obtain information about future projections for supply and demand. I do not think I quite have a complete picture, but the data I do have suggest that there will be a significant shortfall in NHS dental provision and a smaller shortfall in GP provision as the SUE is built before the s106 provisions provide additional capacity.

My understanding is that both dental and GP services in Thetford are currently running at capacity. There are plans for 4,000 additional GP places (which would cover around 1,700 new households), but I have not been told of any similar plans for dental services. In the s106 agreement for the SUE, there are no health-care contributions until 80% occupancy of phase 2 (cumulative total of 1,822 households).

I would therefore recommend that, as a matter of urgency, the Board requests detailed information about NHS dental and GP provision to establish whether or not there will be sufficient supply to meet the projected demand.

King Street Square

One of the most frequent complaints we have received from the public has involved the non-functioning features in King Street Square. Establishing exactly who was responsible for the various aspects of the Square has proved challenging, and no-one seems to be able to give a definitive answer as to exactly what the problems are that prevent the clock from working. Due to other projects, the Square has not been a priority for the Town Council recently, but hopefully they will be able to devote some time to it in the near future, and get the other parties involved in the design and construction around a table to work out how to resolve the issues.

Future Education Provision

The public also expressed concern about education provision in relation to the SUE. The anecdotal evidence is that the current primary schools are full to capacity. The s106 provisions only requires land transfer for the first primary school site at 10% occupancy of phase 1, with funding only coming in later phases. I am currently following this up with the Education representative, who has suggested he might be able to attend one of our Sub-Group meetings to answer public questions directly. I would recommend that the Board keeps future education provision under review.

Thetford Bus Interchange

A number of public comments have been received detailing various issues with the Bus Interchange. These included the fact that the interactive screen is still not working, the lack of a crossing on Minstergate for pedestrian movement from the BHF Store or the Priory to Wilko or the Town Centre, the lack of "No Entry" traffic signs at the bus exit to the Interchange, the lack of shelter provided by the bus shelters, and the arrangements for tour bus operator use. I wrote to the Public Transport Team at Norfolk County Council on 16th January asking for more information about some of these issues, but at the time of writing I have yet to receive a response.

GTDP Website

Board members will recall that members of the Community Sub-Group met with representatives from Breckland's Communications Team just prior to the last Board meeting, where a number of improvements were agreed. Unfortunately there has been no significant progress since then, with Breckland suffering from various technical difficulties that have prevented any major work on the site being undertaken. The Sub-Group will continue to work with Breckland to improve the website to make it more useful for the public.

Local Projects to Promote

In response to a comment at the first private workshop before Christmas, the Community Sub-Group has begun collecting ideas for local projects that the Board might, at some point, wish to consider supporting. This work is still ongoing, but a range of different ideas were suggested at our last meeting, including: fixing the issues with King Street Square, a roundabout at the Croxton Road/Mundford Road junction, improvements to disabled access and parking at Thetford Railway Station, community use for the former Cosy Carpets building by the Bus Interchange, improvements to the local walking and cycling networks, supporting Jamie Oliver's campaign against Holiday Hunger, fixing the digital information board at the Bus Interchange, and bringing the former Cottage Hospital Building back into use.

Robert Whittaker
GTDP Community Sub-Group Chair
03-Feb-2017