

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on 2 March 2011.

PRESENT: Councillor Brunton (Chair), Councillors Cole, McIntyre (as substitute for Councillor Dryden), Junier (as substitute for Councillor Ismail), Kerr, McPartland (as substitute for Councillor Khan), Mawston, Purvis, Sanderson, J A Walker and Williams.

OFFICERS: J Bennington, A Crawford and B J Glover.

**** PRESENT BY INVITATION:** Inspector Matthew Walsh, Cleveland Police.

****ALSO IN ATTENDANCE AS OBSERVERS:** Middlesbrough Borough Cars Limited representatives.

**** APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Dryden, C Hobson, J Hobson and Ismail.

**** DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were made at this point of the meeting.

**** MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 15 February 2011 were submitted.

A Member asked for further clarification around the status of the taxi rank referred to at the south car park of the William Morrison Stores at Berwick Hills.

ORDERED as follows: -

1. That the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 15 February 2011 be approved as a correct record.
2. That further clarification be provided regarding the status of the taxi rank referred to at the south car park of William Morrison Stores.

TAXI FACILITIES – CROSSFELL ROAD, BERWICK HILLS

The Scrutiny Support Officer submitted an introductory report, which outlined the aspects of the scrutiny review to be considered at the meeting.

As requested by the Board at its meeting held on 15 February 2011 representatives from William Morrison Stores (WMS) had been invited to attend the meeting to outline the issues associated with taxi provision in the area, from their perspective. It was confirmed that representatives from WMS had indicated that whilst they were unable to attend this meeting they had confirmed attendance for the meeting of the Board scheduled for 23 March 2011.

Consequently, representatives from the Police and the Council's Transport and Design Services had been invited to attend to provide information on various aspects of taxi facilities associated with Crossfell Road adjacent to WMS.

For the Board's information the Scrutiny Support Officer referred to an extract from the report considered at the Individual Executive Decision-Making Meetings of the Executive Member for Community Protection held on 21 December 2010 and 11 January 2011 with specific reference to the consultation process under the heading 'Provision of a rank at the lay-by on the southern side of Crossfell Road, close to the Neptune Centre' as follows: -

‘ this rank was requested by a private hire operator on behalf of the hackney carriage drivers who operate through their company. Appendix 4 summarises the responses received during the consultation period. Concern has been raised by the Schools Integrated Transport Service as the proposed location for this rank is currently used by buses which deliver and collect children to the Neptune Centre for swimming lessons. They are unable to identify another safe location from where the school buses could operate. This view is supported by the Transportation and Design Service. The Hackney Carriage Association and Middlesbrough Owner Driver’s Association object to this rank on the grounds that there is already a rank on Ormesby Road and within Morrisons. Four residents have also objected to this rank. The Police also objected to this rank on the grounds that it would obstruct the view of those using the pedestrian crossing in this location. ‘

Members asked for clarification to be provided at the meeting of the Board to be held on 23 February 2011 as to the basis upon which such consultation had been undertaken either on a formal or informal basis.

As part of his introduction the Head of Transport and Design Services referred to the layout of the car park at WMS as shown on the plans displayed at the meeting. Although a public bus service operated at the entrance to WMS it was considered that the layout of the car park did not lend itself for use by other buses given the aisle widths around the car park spaces. It was also considered that it wouldn’t be suitable for use by mini buses or coaches for children attending the Neptune Centre for swimming lessons as groups of school children would need to be escorted across the car park to and from the Neptune Centre. Such buses currently used the lay-by at Crossfell Road adjacent to the Neptune Centre where the overhang of such a building provided some shelter for the children going to and from the Neptune Centre as opposed to the limitations of a normal bus stop shelter. As previously indicated the Schools Integrated Transport Service had indicated that they had been unable to identify a suitable alternative location from where such school buses could operate.

In terms of a suggested alternative location at Penrith Road the Head of Transport and Design Services indicated that it was not as convenient and didn’t provide a direct link into the Neptune Centre. Reference was also made to the likely need to change the layout of the WMS car park in order to accommodate buses to be near to the Neptune Centre. The lack of manoeuvrability for buses in the current layout the WMS car park was reiterated. It was acknowledged that there would be an opportunity for Members to seek further clarification on this matter with representatives of WMS at the meeting to be held on 23 March 2011.

Members sought clarification on the safety aspects associated with the use of buses within the car park of WMS with particular regard to the current use by shoppers and the potential use by school children attending the Neptune Centre. In response, it was indicated that one of the main differences related to the number of people involved and the likely demands of overseeing potentially large groups of school children across an often busy WMS car park to the Neptune Centre. It was acknowledged that further clarification as to the number of buses and school children involved could be sought when representatives of the Schools Integrated Transport Service attend a future meeting of the Board.

The Head of Transport and Design Services referred to the Middlesbrough Officers’ Traffic Group which included representatives from Cleveland Police, Fire Authority, Bus Operatives, Town Centre Manager, Middlesbrough Hackney Carriage Association and Council Officers. Specific reference was made to the minutes of a meeting held on 5 November 2010 when consideration had been given to proposed taxi ranks at various locations. In relation to Crossfell Road it had been recorded that several objections had been received, including an objection from Cleveland Police. It was noted that concerns had been expressed because the lay-by was currently used by school buses for children accessing the Neptune Centre. It had also been stated that Middlesbrough Hackney Carriage Association had indicated that it was not required. Members requested a copy of such minutes to be circulated to the Board.

In response to clarification from Members regarding the enforcement of the double yellow lines at Crossfell Road it was noted that a degree of discretion would be considered with particular regard to the off-loading and alighting of school children at this point attending the Neptune Centre.

Inspector Matthew Walsh, Cleveland Police reiterated the previous concerns raised by the Neighbourhood Policing Team in relation to the lay-by at Crossfell Road being used as a taxi rank. It was considered that it was located very close to a pedestrian crossing and a taxi rank would hinder the view of those using such a crossing.

The Board was also advised of the likelihood of the lay-by being full to over capacity and causing an obstruction in what was considered to be a busy through road to the retail premises at Norfolk Place. Reference was also made to the unsuitability of vehicles doing U-turns in this particular area.

Inspector Walsh indicated the advantages of the current use of the lay-by for buses for school children attending the Neptune Centre as it was within close proximity to the Centre and in a pedestrian area.

In response to a Members' query regarding the possibility of using Penrith Road, Inspector Walsh explained that as he had only recently been based at Berwick Hills he would need to examine and report further.

In commenting on the agreed lines of enquiry Members suggested that the views be obtained from the perspective of the Neptune Centre.

ORDERED as follows: -

1. That the information provided be noted and incorporated into the overall review.
2. That further clarification be provided in respect of the: -
 - (a) status of the taxi rank at the WMS south car park;
 - (b) status of the consultation process undertaken in respect of the provision of a taxi rank at the lay-by on the southern side of Crossfell Road close to the Neptune Centre.
3. That a copy of the minutes of the meeting of the Middlesbrough Officers' Traffic Group held on 5 November 2010 be circulated to the Overview and Scrutiny Board.