
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel was held on Wednesday 20 January 2021.

PRESENT: Councillors , B Hubbard (Vice-Chair), R Arundale, D Branson, M Storey and S Walker

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: S Carter-Smith, S Deeney, S Driscoll, J Legget, P Millward – CityFibre

OFFICERS: S Lightwing, S Bonner, C Cowley, R Horniman, S Muir-Williams and J McNally

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillors M Saunders, D Coupe, T Furness and L Lewis

20/33 **WELCOME**

In the absence of the Chair, the Vice Chair opened the meeting and welcomed Councillor S Walker, who had recently joined the Panel, as well as all who were present. The Vice Chair placed on the record his thanks to Councillor L Garvey, who had recently resigned from the Panel, for his contributions to the Panel's work.

20/34 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received at this point in the meeting.

20/35 **MINUTES - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY PANEL - 16 DECEMBER 2020**

The minutes of the meeting of the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel held on 16 November 2020 were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

20/36 **MIDDLESBROUGH REGENERATION POST COVID-19 SCRUTINY REVIEW - BROADBAND**

CityFibre's City Manager - Tyneside and Wearside, and his team, which included the City Manager - Tees Valley, Area Build Manager, City Build Manager and Regional Marketing Manager, were in attendance at the meeting and gave a presentation in relation to their company's business, plans for investment in Middlesbrough and post Covid-19 recovery.

CityFibre was a competitive fibre builder, building brand new networks across sixty plus cities in the UK. The overall investment for the project was £4 billion and aimed to reach 8 million homes within five years, which was approximately 30% of the UK. Connecting all UK homes was the core ambition for all of the telecommunications networks.

CityFibre had been in the telecommunications sector for ten years and developed an ambition to build fibre networks. CityFibre had worked with Sky and TalkTalk on a test project in York and then acquired a larger footprint across the UK. The original aim was to roll out to 26 cities which had now increased to 60, including Middlesbrough. The company was working with Government, not only focussing on city builds, but to understand how those city builds could be used as jump off points to connected broader rural infrastructure to fibre builds across the UK.

Networks were brand new and built from scratch. The CityFibre team looked at all towns and cities and their existing infrastructure. Their approach was to develop a well-planned network and install end-to-end fibre everywhere. All the way from the exchanges to the individual premises would be full fibre. As well as the opportunity to connect to every single premises or home, a well-planned network would also connect to all mobile sites, 5G, businesses or business parks, and any public sector sites across the town.

The investment in Middlesbrough was around £40 million and CityFibre was making some design changes to maximise its reach. The initial target of 70 to 80 thousand homes had already been increased towards 90 thousand homes with expansion beyond Middlesbrough's boundaries into Grangetown, South Bank and East Cleveland. CityFibre had also worked with a company called Regeneris, who had provided data on the value of this long term investment to the town in terms of the impact on the economy in Middlesbrough over the next fifteen years.

In terms of consumers, about 92% of homes in the UK with a superfast broadband connection, would receive roughly 30 mbps upwards and this would be a hybrid solution. The connection would have fibre at some point but also copper. CityFibre's broadband was full fibre, so by taking a network connection and working with one of their ISPs (Internet Service Providers), customers would receive speeds of up to 1000 mbps. It was a synchronous solution providing the ability to upload and download at similar speeds. One of the key differences was the quality of service and as more people came to rely on the digital structure this was vital.

CityFibre's Middlesbrough build was due to launch in April and the first homes would be connected approximately 3 to 6 months later. The build programme would be completed mid-2024. The investment was solely from the private sector and no public sector funding was required. The company was keen to work in parallel with partners such as the Council and be as collaborative, open and transparent as it could. Governance structures that met the needs of the local authority, as well as the build, would be established with weekly, monthly or quarterly governance sessions. Governance sessions could involve reporting against metrics, partnership working with local authority teams, regular feedback and addressing any challenges or problems. It was acknowledged that the amount of work being undertaken had implications for the town and CityFibre wanted to be transparent and share progress. CityFibre's build teams were also keen to look at how they might co-invest in infrastructure and schedule the build around any capital works that the Council might be undertaking.

The Area Build Manager provided a detailed overview of the build programme from the initial high level design, planning and sequencing of the build, construction and deployment. The provisional desktop planning in Middlesbrough was complete and the low level design was underway and in quite an advanced stage. Surveyors were working in Middlesbrough 5 days a week along with the design partner. Middlesbrough would have two fibre exchanges: one at Sotheby Road, Skippers Lane Industrial Estate and one at Lytton Street, small industrial estate close to the Town Centre. This enabled CityFibre to build the network more effectively because of the natural boundary of the railway line that came in from Nunthorpe all the way into the town centre. Having a fibre exchange on either side massively reduced the need for specialist engineering and also reduced costs.

Two fibre exchanges would enable everyone in Middlesbrough to receive service and the area could be extended to gather up more homes.

Connectivity would be to approximately 92.5 thousand premises and about 900 km of fibre cable would be deployed. As opposed to many of its competitors, CityFibre had a diverse network and therefore a dramatically increased level of resilience should there ever be a strike by a digging machine for example. The network could be fed in east and west directions and service could be restored quickly. A single flex line would have presented a number of engineering challenges to navigate the railway and the beck that ran alongside. Early on in the process of reviewing Middlesbrough, the two flex model was proposed, giving a better coverage and service for residents and a more acceptable level of challenge in terms of engineering.

In the full fibre network the primary node was always underground, fed using large fibre cables. Once the fibre reached the primary node, the fibre could be fed using Duct Pole Access (DPA) or Pole Infrastructure Access (PIA). DPA used the existing network underground to the property whereas PIA was an overhead install, similar to a telephone line. The primary node was reached through a secondary node, which was a smaller cabinet taking up to 48 premises maximum. From that point there were individual 7mm tubes fed to the curtilage of the premises and once an installation was requested a very small fibre could be blown through and provide connectivity within an hour or two of the installation engineer's arrival on site.

The construction process was straightforward and site setups were in compliance with the Red Book and Code of Practice. CityFibre's Build Assurance Engineers and Supervisors performed regular, frequent and robust checks to ensure compliance. Ducts were laid through narrow trenching or open cut method, rather than thrust boring or other techniques. Directional drilling might be necessary in some instances above ground, for example on busy roads. The pavements were always reinstated in accordance with industry standards and subject to robust auditing. The pavement, roads, and grass verges were always left in the condition they were found as this was key to minimising the impact on residents.

Once construction work in a street was completed, the cable teams could work quickly. Around 1km of cable could be fed through the underground ducts per day using a three man team. The process was quick and low impact.

In terms of community engagement and marketing, all residents and Councillors were kept up to date with what was happening in their area. CityFibre had released a press release in 2020 in Middlesbrough and had received positive feedback. Residents' communications began at the construction stage and carried on throughout the build. Due to the current Covid-19 pandemic, the usual door-knocking team could not be deployed. However, a couple of weeks prior to construction, a leaflet would be delivered to all premises in the area. This was followed by a letter which explained any action residents needed to take – such as moving cars off the street – and also provided a FAQs and details of the one line customer service telephone number.

Once on site, banners would be installed, to make residents aware that CityFibre were digging in the street. Wider community engagement included local adverts and events, with information provided on how to pre-register on the website once the service was available. Throughout the pandemic, CityFibre had made a commitment to safety and all construction workers had vests and received training so that they knew what to do if approached by members of the public. There were additional banners informing the public that work was permitted and workers were social distancing.

There was a one project telephone number for residents' issues or queries. All issues raised were tracked and passed onto the build team and none were shut down without being resolved. CityFibre would also engage with Ward Councillors in trying to get their messages out to the community.

Fibre Fans was CityFibre's school engagement project. As the construction process built past schools in Middlesbrough, CityFibre would engage with them and had developed free learning materials for curriculum subjects.

In response to a query, it was clarified that, depending on the local topography, the fibre installation in a hybrid city such as Middlesbrough was generally 70% overground and 30% underground, although this could change depending on the age profile of the specific location. Overhead was a much more effective and efficient deployment that minimised impact on the environment.

The core network was always underground and water ingress had very little impact on optic fibre, whereas with copper it caused corrosion and electrolyte reaction very quickly. With regard to durability there was a vast improvement with fibre from copper.

CityFibre worked collaboratively with Local Authorities and other Utilities in terms of co-ordinating all planned construction schemes to minimise impact on residents and the environment.

The Vice Chair thanked the CityFibre residents for their attendance.

AGREED that the information provided was received and noted.

The Public Rights of Way Officer gave an update on flood risk management.

Following major floods in 2007, the Pitt Report recommended that Local Authorities' scrutiny committees should receive an annual summary of actions taken locally to manage flood risk.

World weather patterns were changing and it was essential that authorities responded by planning ahead and increasing resilience to the changing demands of climate change. Potential risks of climate change included wetter winters, hotter summers and rising sea levels. Extreme weather events were likely to happen more frequently and with more intense isolated downpours during summer that could lead to more regular flooding. There was therefore an increasing need for authorities and the public to adapt and prepare for these conditions.

Middlesbrough's drainage system was extensive and complex in nature, comprising open and culverted watercourses and a surface water/combined sewerage system. Parts of the highway drainage network dated back to the early 1900s and little was currently known about its capacity and condition and it was therefore uncertain how it would cope with increased rainfall. Over the years there had been increased flooding from the highway drainage network due to reduced capacity within the road gullies and the drainage network. Ground water levels were rising as a result of increased rain during the summer, thus reducing the ground's capacity to take the increasing amount of rainfall in the winter and resulted in greater instance of surface water runoff.

The Environment Agency (EA) had produced a map showing areas where it predicted surface water would collect in Middlesbrough when there was a one in one hundred year storm event.

Flooding could come from a variety of sources including surface water run-off, ordinary watercourses and surcharging sewers. Surface water flooding occurred when intense rainfall, often of short duration, was unable to permeate into the ground or enter the drainage systems quickly enough, resulting in ponding or overland flows. This could cause considerable problems in urban areas such as Middlesbrough. Middlesbrough was one of the worst areas affected by surface water flooding in the north east due to its urban nature and the presence of clay close to the surface.

The Council worked closely with Northumbrian Water (NWL) on Integrated Drainage Studies. Middlesbrough had four or five drainage areas which were catchment areas where the water fell and was collected into specific drains. The strategic studies highlighted and prioritised the areas of greatest risk from flooding within each of the catchment areas. Stage 1 of a study focussed on the collection, collation, analysis and prioritisation of information to identify areas of high risk from flooding. Stage 2 focussed on identifying opportunities within the top three or four high risk areas to reduce or prevent flooding. The results of the studies provided all the information required to apply to the EA for funding for flood management schemes.

Currently there was one study in progress which was in Middlesbrough East. Stage 1 was undertaken in 2018 and identified 10 flood risk areas. Three of those areas were taken to Stage 2 and that study began in 2019 and was predicted to be completed by June 2021.

Funding could be achieved either through the EA and central government funding or through local levy which was collected through council tax. Funding could be used for studies or for ground work. The EA's six year programme, called the 'Medium Term Plan' ended in 2020. Middlesbrough had received funding for schemes in Saltersgill, Ormesby Hall are and Cornwall Close.

The Council now had to submit schemes to be included the next six year programme – the 'Long Term Plan' for Flood Defence Grant in Aid (FDGiA).

The schemes submitted by Middlesbrough were:

Gresham Road and Newport.
Lawnswood Road.
Barrington Crescent.
Pallister.
Berwick Hills.
Thornfield Road.
Whinney Banks.
Connaught Road, Nunthorpe.
Shevington Grove, Marton.

It was confirmed that funding would be forthcoming to investigate the potential benefits of all the schemes. Four of the schemes; Lawnswood Road, Barrington Crescent, Pallister and Berwick Hills, were within the East Middlesbrough study area. These nine schemes would potentially protect 588 homes.

The Council continued to investigate the highway drainage system, which had not been previously recorded or mapped. The aim was to increase knowledge of the system and the interactions with sewers and watercourses. The system could then be repaired and cleansed as appropriate. The Council undertook regular maintenance of the gullies and worked to resolve any flooding issues when they occurred.

The Council also continued to work with Developers to ensure that Sustainable Drainage (SuDs) techniques were part of all major developments. In partnership with the Planning Department there was a draft Green Blue Infrastructure Plan that looked at the whole of Middlesbrough, what green spaces there were and what benefits could be brought to those areas. Middlesbrough needed the green spaces to be able to hold water and also undertake schemes to hold water back. The Council also considered how the same areas could be utilised, for example schools having ponds in their grounds.

A detailed update was provided on progress with current schemes which included:

Saltersgill Fields - creation of ponds and scrapes and a bund to better protect 306 properties. Although slightly delayed due to the covid-19 pandemic and also unprecedented rainfall, the scheme was completed in November 2020, on budget, and with additional benefits. The additional benefits included the installation of a footpath across the fields and a knee rail around the overflow car park to prevent vehicular access to the fields. In response to a query it was acknowledged that the knee rail was not effective against motorcycles but it did prevent other vehicles from accessing the fields.

Cornwall Close – creation of a bund and deflection of surface water into highway drains to provide flood risk reduction to 3 properties. Funding had been approved and planning permission would be submitted soon and construction would begin later this year.

Ormesby High Street – creation of a bund, flood defence wall and some property level protection. This revised scheme covered two flow paths with potentially 100 homes better protected compared to the original 18. The EA had recently undertaken works to the trash screen on the culvert to allow water to flow through more quickly.

Another major scheme during the last year was the Marton West Beck Scheme which was managed by the EA in partnership with Middlesbrough Council. The aim of this scheme was to reduce the amount of water coming downstream so that the lower stream culverts could cope. A series of bunds had been created in Albert Park to hold water back, the height of the wall at the side of the Park had been raised, and the lake was now utilised as a water storage area. The trash screen at the north east end of Albert Park had also been improved with a lateral screen added. Work had also been undertaken at Borough Road where the flood walls had been improved. A series of bunds had also been created upstream, near to Nature's World, which would hold the water back and release it gradually into the beck. The scheme on target to be completed by March 2021.

A Member raised concern in relation to the work at Nature's World and drainage area that had been formed but did not appear to be holding water. The Officer explained that there were different types of SuDs. Ponds would hold water all the time and release it gradually, whereas bunds would only fill up when there was a one in one hundred years type storm event.

Responding to a query, the Officer explained that in relation to new housing developments, he provided comment on all planning applications in relation to the design of flood management. All developers had a legal responsibility to ensure that all water was managed on site.

The Chair thanked the Officer for his presentation.

AGREED that the information provided was received and noted.

20/38 **REVIEW OF PEST CONTROL - TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Vice Chair presented the draft Terms of Reference for the Panel's review of Pest Control for comment. The Chair and the Vice Chair had formed a Task and Finish Group to gather information from other Local Authorities which would be presented to the Panel at a later date.

The Vice Chair asked Members to forward any evidence of requests or complaints from residents about pest issues, to assist in establishing the extent of the pest control problems in Middlesbrough as evidence for the scrutiny review.

AGREED that the following Terms of Reference for the review of Pest Control were approved:

- A) To examine the Pest Control Services currently offered by Middlesbrough Council including the resources required to run the service and income achieved.
- B) To establish the range and cost of pest control services provided by other Tees Valley Councils and local private operators.
- C) To consider whether expanding Middlesbrough Council's pest control services could provide an additional income stream to the Council.

20/39 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel had been rescheduled and would be held on Tuesday 23 February 2021.

NOTED

20/40 **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD UPDATE**

The Vice Chair provided a verbal update on items considered at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meetings held on 18 December 2020 and 14 January 2021.

20/41 **ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED**

Teesside Crematorium – Final Report

The Panel's Final Report on Teesside Crematorium had been approved by Executive at a meeting on 19 January 2021 and the service area had agreed to implement all four recommendations.