

Appendix A

HARLOW COUNCIL

Notice of Call In

Agenda Item 16A

CABINET 3 December 2020

Reason:

Cabinet was not provided with sufficient information from which to reach a reasoned conclusion.

Cabinet was asked to commit the Council to expenditure for an unknowable amount on a feasibility study on options for a sustainable transport system for the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town concept on the basis of support from other members of the HGGT.

There was some evidence of research into the project but surprisingly little into costs of either the study or of a transport system. Despite the portfolio holder claiming at the start of his presentation of “overwhelming and enthusiastic support” for his project, no evidence of that support was provided.

Costs

In order to put both the study and project into some form of context and scale there should have been some indication of the costs so that members of the Cabinet could give some weight to the practicality of finding the required funding.

There are no comments in either the report or the committee presentation to give any idea how much was being considered. It was only after probing questions, which were cut short by the chairman, did Cllr Purton agree that costs of the project could be in the order of £20M per kilometre.

In her contributions to the debate, the deputy leader was not telling the whole story about two towns in France. Angers is the centre of a conurbation of around 420,000 with two universities. She could have added to the debate by referring to the construction of a new tram line of 10 km at a cost of EU245M (£222M) with a state subsidy of EU36M (£32.5M), suggesting a very high level of debt.¹ Nancy is a *department* capital in a conurbation of 435,000 which also hosts two universities and a host of colleges. So we are not comparing like with like.

Cllr Harvey referred to “eleven” other tram systems in UK; Birmingham, Croydon, Docklands Light Railway Edinburgh, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Sheffield, most of which were built on existing rail lines to a greater or lesser extent, plus Blackpool, which is nine. All of these places are major conurbations with substantial populations. It is a very small list, omitting

such cities as Bristol and Liverpool. Glasgow has the only other underground system in the UK.

Geographically, Harlow is a small town covering some four square miles and the population of a 'greater Harlow' will only be in the order of 150,000. There must be a reason why there are so few tram systems in the UK. They require a substantial critical mass of population to justify such schemes.

Support

Following a presentation to the HGGT board of a Metro system there was only an agreement "in principle" with no commitment towards funding either the study or a Metro system. At the Technical Briefing for members of the Development Management committees of East Herts and Harlow councils on 7 December the chair of East Herts committee said she "admired the ambition" of the Metro project.

There was no evidence provided of support from Essex County Council, responsible for highways and transport, who have already presented their proposals in the HGGT Transport Strategy - New Public Transport Routes which will:

" Be used by modern, high quality, low emission buses"

During the Technical Briefing the representative from Places for People, the principle developer and funder, said because of costs, separate 'tram' routes were not supported. Without the support, financial and in principle, of the main developer, it is going to be very difficult to encourage other investors to get involved.

In answer to questions about subsidy for operating costs Cllr Purton said that "operators already agreed to cover early years", giving no indication as to who those operators of an, as yet unidentified, Metro system might be. Places for People are offering subsidies for buses from Gilston to the town station, the High and employment areas.

So where is this overwhelming and enthusiastic support? Cabinet needs to know who are the supporters and the degree of support, other than just 'in principle' before committing the council to unlimited expenditure.

There also appears to be some confusion as to what Cabinet was being asked to endorse. The principle of a sustainable transport system for HGGT is not in doubt as it is fundamental to the proposals put forward by HGGT and adopted by this council, such as the Transport Plan and Infrastructure Delivery Plan, the latter including connections with employment areas, which the Metro proposals do not:

The Sustainable Transport Corridors (STC) will form a strategic network of routes, principally, north-south and east-west across the Garden Town, connecting the new neighbourhoods and villages to Harlow Town Centre, the existing neighbourhoods of Harlow new town and key locations including the railway stations and employment areas.

The deputy leader said she was endorsing a viability study and not endorsing a scheme, yet the title of the Report refers to a 'Harlow Metro System' and paragraph 8 covering the focus of the study says:

Identify a range of (current and future) potential public transport technology system options considered suitable for the Harlow Urban Metro proposal

restricting the scope of the study to a guided bus/rail system as portrayed in the video presentation circulated in advance of the meeting. HGGT already has a sustainable transport proposal, accepted by all of the other HGGT partners and designed by Essex County Council. None of this was referred to in the report or accompanying presentation by the Cabinet Member.

Paragraph 7 of the report refers to

The commission (sic) should identify and assess the feasibility of existing and emerging public transport technologies that might be suitable to operate on the Sustainable Transport Corridors that are to be implemented across Harlow and the Garden Town.

without pointing out that this work has already been undertaken by the transport consultants to Places for People, the principle developer.

The viability study is supposed to answer many of the detail questions but there are some specific issues which require more preparation such as the impact of a high level interchange on a Grade II listed building, the station, which would make profound changes to its site and setting. And the two right angle turns on Edinburgh Way and Fifth Avenue.

Conclusion

Cabinet needs more specific information on the level of support for such a scheme, and the size of costs for both the study and the scheme. This proposal requires more preparation and a resubmission before meaningful conclusions can be reached by Members.

Cllr Simon Carter Cllr David Carter
Members of the Call in-In Committee

11 December 2020

¹ <https://tramway.angersloiremetropole.fr/ligne-b-c/le-reseau-des-3-lignes/>

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Decision

Development of Options for a Harlow Metro system

Key decision? Yes

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- A Endorsed the principle of establishing a sustainable transport system to meet the modal shift and climate change aspirations to support the future growth of the town.
- B Approved, subject to C below, the commissioning of a first stage feasibility study to explore different innovative transport technologies that a 'Harlow Metro' might bring and to advise the Council on operational and business models.
- C Delegated authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with Leader of the Council, and Portfolio Holder for the Environment to identify a budget and scope for the first stage feasibility study to be commissioned in conjunction with the Council's external partners.

Reasons for Decision

- A As a core partner in the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town, Harlow Council is committed to developing sustainable transport solutions to serve both the existing population of Harlow and also to support the future growth of the town, including settlements that will lie beyond the town's boundary. The Vision for the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town, and also its Transport Strategy, identify a requirement for a significant modal shift in the use of transport mechanisms so that 60% of journeys from the new housing sites, and 50% of those within the existing town, are undertaken by sustainable means.
- B It is unlikely that such a modal shift, which would be an achievement of national significance, can be attained through an expectation that there will be a greater use of existing public transport systems. Particularly in a post-Covid world, there will be additional challenges in persuading people to use an alternative to private cars. To achieve this is likely to require the development of a transport system that also has national significance and provide the opportunity for Harlow to develop an aspirational network that is genuinely seen to be a better alternative.
- C To achieve the objectives and vision that the Council has set in its forthcoming Local Plan will require some bold thinking and transportation will be very high within that. The Council should set its aspirations at a high level and ask questions as to what can be achieved.
- D The report set out a proposal to endorse the principle and embark on a first stage feasibility study to explore what a Harlow Metro system might look like, how it would operate, initial engineering issues and what business models could be employed. Depending upon the outcome of this, further work will be required

to look at engineering details, to market test the concept as well as more detailed business planning. However, this work will not be commissioned until the first stage feasibility work has been undertaken and the outcome of this and proposals for any additional work will be the subject of a future Cabinet report.