

To: All Members and Officers of the County Council.

DX 712320 Stafford 5

Fax No. (01785) 276219

Please ask for: Mike Bradbury

Telephone: (01785) 276135

e-mail: michael.bradbury@staffordshire.gov.uk

Date: 22 July 2021

Dear Sir/Madam,

County Council - Thursday 22nd July 2021

I have recently forwarded to you a copy of the agenda for the next meeting of the County Council.

I am now able to enclose, for consideration at next Thursday 22nd July 2021 meeting of the County Council, the following reports that were unavailable when the agenda was printed.

10. **Questions (Pages 1 - 18)**

Questions to be asked by Members of the County Council of the Leader of the Council, a Cabinet Member, or a Chairman of a Committee. The question will be answered by the relevant Member and the Member asking the question may then ask a follow up question which will also be answered

John Henderson
Chief Executive

Enc

QUESTION 1

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 22 JULY 2021

**Question to Cllr Wilson
Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture**

By Cllr Pardesi

Question

Our Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community members live in small confined spaces next to the Walleys Quarry Landfill site. What steps are being taken to ensure their smaller living situations are not more adversely compounded than those of house dwellers? What is being done to make sure that our GRT community is being fully consulted and updated in order that it is able to contribute to the current process and plans for this site?

Reply

The Environment Agency is responsible for regulating the Walleys Quarry Landfill site and has held three virtual public engagement events, they also provide weekly updates via the environment Agencies 'Citizen Space'.

Staffordshire County Council continues to work with other public agencies as part of a Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG) convened by the Local Resilience Forum, to co-ordinate activities to try and mitigate the risks to the health of all local people.

The SCG held a further a community engagement event on Tuesday 6 July to which all members of the community were invited. Representatives from the Environment Agency, Public Health England, the NHS, and officers from Staffordshire County Council and Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council were part of this, with the event chaired by the deputy SCG Chair, Rob Barber Deputy Chief Fire Officer from Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service.

The Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee are also considering the important matters further next week (26 July), relating to Walleys Quarry Landfill Site with a focus on health implications for all residents.

All local people can make their views known through complaints to the Environment Agency, representations to Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council or their Elected Members. They are also encouraged to report odour and symptoms to the County Council's 'smell and symptom tracker' to help further inform the SCGs approach.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 22 JULY 2021

**Question to Cllr Price
Cabinet Member for Education (and SEND)**

By Cllr Pardesi

Question

In light of the pitiful Covid Education catch-up plan for England students, how can this government claim to be concerned about failing thousands of students and be serious about breaking the link between deprivation and poor outcomes in schools?

Reply

The Department for Education announced a number of different funding streams and packages to support education recovery and children and young people's wellbeing. In June 2020 mainstream schools were allocated £80 for each pupil from reception to year 11 inclusive and special schools were allocated £240 per pupils. Schools were required to use this funding for specific activities to support their pupils' education recovery.

Secondary schools have been provided the opportunity to hold a summer school with a blend of academic education and enrichment activities. The funding to run a summer school equates to £597 per 2-week place (or £1791 per place for pupils in special schools and alternative provision).

To support some of our youngest children attending school, access to the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) programme, is being made available for free, during the academic year 2021/2022.

In 2021/2022 schools will also receive additional recovery funding, building on the Pupil Premium, to further support pupils who need it most. The average primary school will receive around £6,000 extra, and the average secondary school around £22,000 extra. As this funding is based on the number of disadvantaged pupils, schools with more disadvantaged pupils will receive larger allocations but will have flexibility to direct funding based on their assessment of needs.

Schools have been provided with a range of tutoring approaches: both continuing the work with the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) and offering a new complementary school-led approach, allowing schools to take on local tutors or use existing staff to supplement those employed through the existing NTP.

The DfE has provide access to a range of support to improve mental health and wellbeing in schools and colleges. This includes guidance on whole school and college approaches to mental health and wellbeing, funding for senior mental health leads training and funded support through the wellbeing for education recovery programme. This has been received very positively in Staffordshire.

The 16-19 Tuition Fund has been extended for a further two years for 16-19 year olds, into the 2023/24 academic year. The fund will continue to provide targeted small group tuition in English, mathematics and other subjects where learning has been disrupted because of the pandemic and is available to all 16-19 providers.

Nationally Defra initially worked with local authorities on allocating funding for Food and Emergency supplies (allocating over £600,000) and latterly the Department for Work and Pensions have worked to deliver the COVID Winter and Locality Fund (allocating over £4 million) this has enabled the county council to provide vouchers for food and emergency items throughout the pandemic.

These schemes are due to finish in October and will be replaced by the Holiday Activities and Food Programme. This programme delivers food and activities to children who are living in low income families (Free School Meals eligible.) We are working hard to prepare for the summer schemes and will also deliver this in Easter and Christmas to ensure that this much needed support is available for families.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 22 JULY 2021

**Question to Cllr David Williams
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

By Cllr Oates

Question

As we come out of a difficult period, a community group in Tamworth is organising a Pride event. Could the Cabinet Member arrange for the installation of a pedestrian crossing in Tamworth to be painted with a Rainbow in order to show our support for this community and celebrate Pride?

Reply

The County Council is committed to the promotion of inclusivity within all of our services and welcomes the suggestion to celebrate diversity within Staffordshire communities.

Should the scheme be accepted, careful consideration will need to be given to ensuring the road safety features provided by the crossing are not diminished.

As the Local County Councillor, I hope you will be able to work with your local community to seek agreement for such a scheme and to find appropriate funding both for the implementation and the required continued maintenance.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 22 JULY 2021

**Question to Cllr David Williams
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

By Cllr Charlotte Atkins

Question

Most of the roadside grass verges in Leek are looking very unkempt while many trees badly need pruning. Is this part of a County Council plan to maximise flowering plant diversity, benefiting insects, pollinators and other wildlife?

If so:

- (a) When will the roadside verges be cut and trees pruned, how many times a year, and in which months? Will the grass cuttings be collected to reduce the development of thick hatch?
 - (b) Why has a strip not been cut at the edge of verges to keep the verges tidy, preserve good road visibility and ensure pavements and footpaths are accessible?
 - (c) What work has been carried out to ensure that road sight lines and junctions are not obscured by vegetation?
 - (d) Why are there no signs on the verges, making it clear that wilder verges are part of a thought out management plan rather than, as widely believed by the general public, just cost-cutting? Why has there been little engagement with communities to share this County plan and communicate its objectives?
 - (e) Where can Staffordshire residents read the reasoning for the County Council plan for roadside grass verges and trees?
 - (f) Will the council consider facilitating a meeting of relevant stakeholders and experts to review the overall plan in advance of next year's growing season, ensure it is meeting best practice, and then draw up a simple means of communicating the results to residents?
-

Reply

The County Council's approach to highway grass cutting, hedge cutting and tree maintenance is detailed on our webpages: [Weeds, grass, trees and hedges - Staffordshire County Council](#). This includes information about the routine activities that take place every growing season to control the growth of highway vegetation in order to maintain visibility, reduce damage to the road structure and, most importantly, improve road user safety.

This summer, so far, has seen ideal weather conditions for vegetation growth and, in addition to routine activities, reactive works will take place to address specific concerns regarding the safety of road users, e.g. excessive tree growth blocking a footway. These concerns can be reported online and our routine Highway Inspections will also ensure any necessary works are prioritised.

Environmental maintenance service levels were last reviewed in February 2020 when engagement took place with all local councils specifically regarding changes to grass cutting programmes. A number of these local councils deliver urban grass cutting on our behalf to meet our safety specifications but often enhance this level of service to maintain and improve the appearance of the public realm in their area.

The Council also supports those communities who wish to maintain local wildflower areas to promote biodiversity and local identity. A number of schemes are in operation but the views of the community and their contribution to the necessary maintenance of such wildflower areas is paramount.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 22 JULY 2021

**Question to Cllr David Williams
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

By Cllr Charlotte Atkins

Question

What is the expected delivery time for traffic calming measures in Morley Street, Leek as a feasibility study has been completed and sufficient DHP monies allocated to pay for the scheme?

Reply

A feasibility scheme for traffic calming on Morley Street was funded by the local member through their Divisional Highway Programme (DHP) to address local concerns about vehicle speeds. The feasibility study, completed in February 2021, established that traffic calming measures could be physically accommodated and provided an initial cost estimate for the scheme. The next phase is to undertake a full consultation with the local community within the next few months on the proposed arrangements, and this work is currently being programmed against all other Member DHP priorities. Upon completion of the consultation the final scheme design/delivery costs will be confirmed so that the Member may consider funding through their DHP; however, it is anticipated that more than one year's allocation will be required.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 22 JULY 2021

**Question to Cllr David Williams
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

By Cllr Afsar

Question

As a new County Councillor, since becoming elected I have been inundated with requests to visit Potholes and general conditions of the Roads around Burton Town Division which are in a very poor state of repair.

Having visited many roads around my division I am constantly finding that there are large areas of the division that have had previous work done by third party contractors such as Gas works, Virgin Media etc and the finish is of a poor standard further leading to pot holes and road sinkage which in turn requires SCC to repair at their own cost.

Could the Cabinet Member confirm what are the arrangements for checking the quality of work by these contractors and by whom, do the works carry any guarantees, what are the percentages of work completed and are there and KPI's kept of such quality checks?

Finally, would the Cabinet Member for Highways at a mutually convenient date and time accompany me for a short drive through my division to see and experience my concerns?

Reply

Utility companies have legal powers to install and maintain their apparatus in the highway. This legislation and a series of national codes of practice and specifications exist to ensure that their work is safe and fit for purpose. Utility companies, as professional private organisations are entirely responsible for the quality of their work and must ensure that their work meets the national specifications.

All utility reinstatements have a guarantee period of two years during which any faults must be remedied at their cost. The same legislation and national codes of practice permit us to inspect a utility company's work.

There are over 30,000 holes dug in Staffordshire roads each year by utilities. The national code of practice for inspections sets out a process whereby the County Council visually inspects a random 30% sample of utility works:

10% during the works

10% immediately after works have completed, and

10% at the end of the two-year guarantee period

The utility companies pay us to undertake these inspections. If more than 10% of inspected sites fail to comply then the utility company responsible is usually required to put in place an improvement plan to try to prevent further problems occurring. We can also undertake additional random inspections on poor performing utility companies to ensure compliance with their improvement plan. There is currently one utility company with an improvement plan in Staffordshire.

We undertake extra inspections as part of normal highway duties when we receive reports from members of the public. These additional inspections are undertaken at any stage of the reinstatement's life, even after the two-year guarantee period.

Inspections undertaken are mainly visual inspections and are done to check that the correct cones and signs are being used or that the surface of the reinstatement has not sunk, cracked or is not visually defective. We also operate a small program of both random and targeted coring to determine compliance of the layers not visible on the surface.

The Cabinet Member for Highways would be pleased to meet with yourself and the Network Inspection team at a mutually convenient date and time to look at local issues with utility reinstatements.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 22 JULY 2021

**Question to Cllr David Williams
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

By Cllr Winnington

Question

While I totally support projects that are designed to counter Climate Change, I am becoming increasingly concerned about the misuse of Electric Scooters across the County. I have had many communications from residents who have seen younger people riding these scooters in an unsafe way. Could I ask the Cabinet Member what controls are in place to register those scooters that are under the County supported scheme? I would also like to know if driving licences are being checked?

Reply

As the Member will be aware the Council is one of several Local Transport Authorities taking part in the national pilot study on the use of E-scooters on the public highway. The Department for Transport believe that E-scooters may be a potential low emission solution to replace short distance car journeys. It is important to remember that national travel data shows that 2/3 of all car journeys are less than 5 miles in length.

The pilot E-scooter schemes in the Stafford and Newcastle have generally had a positive response from users and take up is increasing. As you would expect there are several controls to encourage safe usage and we are working closely with the operators and the police on this issue. The controls include:

- Fixed Bay Parking Model - Across both trials areas we operate a fixed parking bay model, this means E-scooters can only (without incurring a fine and potential account suspension) be parked and left in designated bays that is agreed by the operators and the council.
- Speed Cap - Each E-scooter on the trial is capped at 12mph, the legal limit set by the DfT is 15mph.

- Age Restrictions - E-scooters cannot be rented by anyone under the age of 16, they must upload a picture of their driving license and a “selfie”.
- Area of operation - In conjunction with the operator we determine the operational area. Outside of this area, E-scooters stop.
- No-Go Zones - There are some areas in the operational area, such as pedestrianised areas, where using a E-scooter is not appropriate, E-scooters come to a stop in these areas.
- Slow Zones - Areas where it’s appropriate to use a E-scooter – but there are high number of pedestrian and vehicle movements scooters slow to 6.5mph in these areas.
- Curfew - The E-scooters in both trials areas have a curfew of 10pm, this means no new rides can start after this time.
- Banning Users - A small number of users have been banned for unsafe riding or antisocial behaviour, this is done by the operators when incidents are reported to them. Using the built in GPS tracking system, a rider will usually receive a warning and then, if appropriate a ban. We are working with all stakeholders including the police to improve rider education and reduce misuse.

In Staffordshire, you must be 18 years or older to use the rental E-scooters and as mentioned above, driving licences are checked prior to rental although it is recognised that like any system this is open to potential abuse. The operators are constantly working on ways to improve rider education in this area to minimise this happening.

The Council is in close contact with the Department of Transport which is collecting data from all the E-scooter pilot areas prior to deciding on whether to legalize E-scooters for use across England on the public highway. The control of private E-scooters, operating outside the control of rental schemes such as the two in Staffordshire, will clearly be a matter for full debate and careful consideration.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 22 JULY 2021

**Question to Cllr Wilson
Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture**

By Cllr Hussain

Question

In her video on the Burton library consultation, respected Councillor Victoria Wilson, the Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture, says that moving the library into the market hall would "create increased footfall into the town centre to grow and attract more businesses". On what statistics is this based? According to data from the Freedom of Information Act, the present market hall had a footfall of 249,083 in 2018/19. (the last full year not affected by Covid restrictions.) The Burton library had 276,156 visitors that year. Given that BOTH locations are in Burton town centre (they are less than 250 meters/ 275 yards away), HOW can shutting the market hall and relocating the library "create increased footfall into the town centre"? Without a doubt, it reduces footfall into the town centre by 249,083! Can I ask Cllr Wilson, what statistics did she depend on to make this assertion, or is it a mistake that may severely mislead people being consulted?

Reply

The Council are aware of the Market Hall footfall. At the point of submitting the Town Investment Plan to Government an uplift in footfall of 40% was proposed. The increase in footfall achieved in Lichfield was much higher than this (97%) but the projections were moderated down to take account of the footfall which would be lost because of the market hall closure.

The figures quoted in Cllr Hussain's question are just for the Burton library service itself. Cllr Hussain will be aware that the proposals are broader than moving just the library service. The consolidation of all County staff into the town centre and the footfall from the Registry Office will be moved on top of the library footfall.

In addition to the increase in footfall on the Market Place, the proposals which would follow on from this Council's move away from the existing library site will open up exciting new regeneration opportunities for redevelopment of the waterfront (known as project D – High Street Linkages). This project forms another of the seven inter-related projects contained within the Burton Town Improvement Plan submitted to Government. East Staffordshire Borough Council will lead a public consultation process on project D later in the summer.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 22 JULY 2021

**Question to Cllr Wilson
Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture**

By Cllr Hussain

Question

According to Councillor Wilson, the relocation of the library to the Market Hall is "very essential for the rehabilitation and preservation of the market hall, which is such an ancient structure." The county council plans to invest £8.3 million for this purpose. HOWEVER, according to freedom of information statistics, just £345,000 is required to maintain the ancient market hall over the next ten years (£1.4 million was spent on it in 2014). According to Councillor Wilson, relocating the library would save taxpayers £84,000 per year in maintenance and operating expenses. That sounds admirable until one considers that it would take the council 100 years to spend the £8.3 million that it plans to spend on the library relocation. **HOW ON EARTH CAN THIS BE CONSIDERED VALUE FOR MONEY?** Would this council consider such a proposal if it was going to be funded by the council rather than the government? Is this the wisest use of the town's windfall funds?

Reply

The £8.3 million estimated project cost caters for much more than relocating the library. Investment in the fabric of the Market Hall will go way beyond the recommendations contained within the latest condition survey (£343,000 in September 2017) to preserve this locally important building for decades to come. High cost interventions include replacement of the existing roof, new heating system, new electrical systems along with construction of new internal and external meeting rooms and extension of the existing balcony to create modern office accommodation.

Calculations on whether this provides value for money for Staffordshire tax payers should relate to this Council's £1.3 million investment, which at a saving of £87,000 per annum when compared against the "do nothing" scenario, will be recouped in just under 15 years. This investment should also be offset against increasing footfall in the town centre and furthering the regeneration ambitions of the town.

The Town Fund is one of the Government's national funding interventions aimed at "levelling up" the country and is an acknowledgement that Burton needs additional funding for projects of this nature. Ultimately, it is for East Staffordshire Borough Council, the Burton Town Board and Government to determine whether they believe this investment provides value for money within the constraints of the funding criteria. At a contribution rate of around 15% of the overall project costs, this Council believes the project delivers value for money for the Staffordshire tax payer.