

Statement of the Leader of the Council

1. Countryside Estate Review

The Cabinet have considered the outcomes from the first phase of the Countryside Estate Review which aims to identify a long-term sustainable solution for the management and maintenance of the countryside estate.

Between December 2016 and March 2017, organisations interested in managing and delivering all or some of the Council's countryside sites were encouraged to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI). In total, fourteen EOIs were received. The results of the EOI evaluation process are:

- The RSPB will take over the management and maintenance of Consall Nature Park.
- Heath Hayes and Wimblebury Parish Council will take over the management and maintenance of Wimblebury Mound Picnic Area.

Both of these sites will be transferred via long leasehold agreements subject to detailed heads of terms and appropriate legal agreements being negotiated between the parties.

A further report will be brought to Cabinet in March 2018 which will make recommendations for the final phase of the Countryside Estate Review.

(Cabinet – 20 December 2017)

2. Lichfield Southern Bypass

The previous sections of Lichfield Southern Bypass have been successfully delivered by the County Council in conjunction with lead developers. Delivery of the final section of route will complete the bypass to Tamworth Road/London Road while continuing to support the current local plan.

Around 53% of the final section of the bypass route will be privately funded as part of the St John's Residential Development Scheme. Construction of the final 0.67km section of the total 2.3km bypass requires a new rail bridge under the Cross City Rail Line and modifications to the existing highway network at Birmingham Road, London Road and Tamworth Road. The publicly funded element of the bypass is approximately 53 metres in length and encompasses the new rail bridge. The estimated cost of this final phase of the Bypass is approximately £17.366m with the publicly funded section of the Bypass estimated to be approximately £8.38m.

The Cabinet have expressed their continued support for the scheme and have given delegate authority to the Director of Economy Infrastructure and Skills, in consultation with the Director of Strategy, Governance and Change and Cabinet Member for Economic Growth, to acquire the land for the publicly funded elements of the Lichfield Southern Bypass by private treaty.

(Cabinet – 20 December 2017)

3. John Taylor Free School, Burton

Following extensive consultation with local communities, East Staffs Borough Council, local interest groups, and other stakeholders, a decision was taken by the SLIB (Staffordshire Learning Infrastructure Board) in August 2015 to commence the process to build a new 8FE high school in Burton on Trent to meet the growing demand for secondary school places in and around the locality. A site for the school had been already sourced and planning permission for the building of the new school off Branston Road, Tatenhill was secured through determination by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in July 2016. Work commenced on site in August 2016 in order to ensure that the school can open in September 2018.

The gross cost of the school development is circa £33 million, with the net cost of the school building just in excess of £24 million. To date, £20,926,437 has been secured to fund the works. In addition, after a period of negotiation, the Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) have offered a construction contract of £8,427,880, and a fixed furniture and equipment contract of £1,436,400. Negotiations regarding ICT funding are yet to be concluded and if successful would add a further £858,773 to the offer. This would provide a potential grand total ESFA grant of £10,723,053. The Cabinet have approved the acceptance of the grant funding agreement offered by the Education Skills Funding Agency.

(Cabinet – 20 December 2017)

4. Enlargement of St Stephen's Primary School, Fradley

The Local Plan for Lichfield District identifies the village of Fradley as a Strategic Development Location with an allocation for around 1,250 dwellings. This number of new homes is expected to generate in the region of 400 additional primary aged children. Additional school places required are proposed to be met by a ½ Form of Entry (FE) expansion (equivalent to 105 places) of St Stephen's Primary School during the academic year 2018/19 and, at a later date, a new 1½FE (315 places) primary free school on the Fradley Park Strategic Development location.

The Cabinet have therefore approved the publication of a statutory proposal for an increase in school places at St Stephen's Primary School, Fradley. During the consultation on the proposals Lichfield District Council and the Fradley and Streethay Parish Council wrote in support of the school's expansion, which will ensure that local primary aged children in the village have the opportunity to attend a school within walking distance of their home.

(Cabinet – 20 December 2017)

5. Enlargement of Baldwins Gate CE (VC) Primary School.

In response to new housing being built in the village of Baldwins Gate, it is proposed to increase capacity at Baldwins Gate CE (VC), the only primary school serving the village. The School's Governors are in full of the proposals which would increase the primary school places from 105 to 140. The Cabinet have therefore approved the

publication of a statutory proposal to provide a 4-week “representation period” during which time any person or organisation can submit comments on the proposals.

(Cabinet – 17 January 2018)

6. National Funding Formula implementation for Staffordshire Schools

Historically, Staffordshire has been one of the lowest funded authorities in terms of schools. For years the Authority has been campaigning at a local and national level for fairer funding for its schools. In September 2017 the Department for Education announced the formula they proposed for the National Funding Formula (NFF), which is built on the characteristics of each individual school. The Cabinet have considered the impact of the new National Funding Formula which will result in Staffordshire receiving an extra £9.5m in funding for its schools. It is the Government’s objective to move to a ‘hard’ NFF in time, this is where the formula is set and distributed from Central Government directly to the school. However in 2018/19 and 2019/20 the Government will be operating a ‘soft’ formula. In these years the local authority may continue to determine the formula used in their county boundaries.

(Cabinet – 17 January 2018)

7. Treasury Management Strategy 2018/19

The Local Government Act 2003 requires a local authority to have regard to the Prudential Code and to set Prudential Indicators for the next three years to ensure that its capital investment plans are affordable, prudent and sustainable. The Prudential Indicators are approved as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The Treasury Management Strategy is a key element of the MTFS as the planned capital expenditure programme drives the borrowing required.

Where possible, the County Council will continue to use its own cash instead of borrowing money whilst retaining the flexibility to take out loans if needed.

The Cabinet have resolved to recommend to the County Council, at its meeting on the 22 March 2018, the adoption of the Annual Investment Strategy (AIS) 2018/19 and the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy 2018/19.

(Cabinet – 17 January 2018)

8. Carers Campaign

This year we will be spending a record £310 million on care, with a significant proportion of this going on the care for our most vulnerable adults, to help them live as independently as possible in their own homes. As part of this, we have also joined forces with care providers to recruit more than 400 carers. Our own stand-alone company Nexxus has also recruited carers to ensure we continue to support people in hospital to get home as quickly as possible when they are fit and well to safely do so – and I am pleased to report we continue to improve in this area.

9. Broadband Roll Out

In a county as vast as Staffordshire, access to good broadband is hugely important, so I am delighted to report today that in Staffordshire we have achieved the target of 95 per cent of properties being able to connect to high speed broadband – ahead of the national programme.

We, of course, want to see those pockets of more rural communities benefit too and therefore welcome the Government's pledge that all properties must be able to connect to broadband speeds of 10Mbps by 2020.

10. HS2 Progresses

At the end of January, the HS2 Bill for Phase 2a, which runs from Fradley to Crewe, cleared its second reading in the House of Commons and Royal Assent is expected to be given late next year.

Our priority remains to get the best deal for Staffordshire and ensure the voices of communities continue to be heard by HS2 Limited and Government.

In Phase One, we not only secured the Handsacre Link to allow access to HS2 compatible trains via Stafford, but also achieved significant mitigation. In this next phase we will continue to petition where we believe changes can be made for the benefit of the county.

11. Growing the Economy

In challenging financial times it is more important than ever that we continue to build on the success we have had in growing our economy, keeping unemployment low and delivering better paid quality jobs.

In our MTFs we have set out almost £120 million of investment in our capital programme for 2018/19 including around £12 million to build new schools or expand existing ones and spend on economic and regeneration projects such as the Stafford Western Access Route, IC6 at Keele, ROI Featherstone and at Friars Gate in Lichfield.

12. Potholes

Good roads are of course also important to a successful and strong economy.

Although our highways crews have been focusing on keeping us safely on the move after a chilly start to February, they will soon be turning their attention to tackling potholes across the county, which of course are always more noticeable at this time of year due to the impact of the weather.

Last year we invested an extra £5 million to tackle potholes alone and repaired 35,000 compared to 20,000 in a typical year. So, despite the financial challenges, I can confirm that we will once again be investing a further £5 million in this coming year and our highways teams will be out in force once again from the spring.

