

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

AGENDA ITEM 6

QUESTION 1

MR BRIAN WILLIAMS will ask the following question:

As I am a Leading Member of the recently formed Admiral Benbow Statue Campaign Group I am certain that, as Portfolio Holder for Planning, Councillor Price will be aware that his officers are at present discussing details of the Section 106 conditions for the proposed Riverside Shopping Centre by the Shearer Group. He will also be aware there is a requirement in all large developments for the provision of public art. He may not be aware that the Shearer Group have indicated support for the possibility of including a statue of Admiral Benbow, one of England's bravest naval commanders, and a true son of Shrewsbury, in the new Centre.

As Councillor Price is amongst Shrewsbury's leading citizens, will he use his best endeavours as Portfolio Holder to encourage his planning staff to keep before the Shearer Group the thought that it might be appropriate to also call the new development The Benbow Centre?

MR MALCOLM PRICE, the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning will reply:

I understand that Councillor Williams has discussed this proposal with the Council's Development Manager where he was advised that unfortunately the Section 106 Agreement for the Riverside development had already been signed and agreed. In any event, the CIL Regulations which describe how planning obligations can be used require that any planning obligation may only constitute a reason for granting planning permission for the development if the obligation is—

- (a) necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms;
- (b) directly related to the development; and
- (c) fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development.

I consider that this would not include a provision for public art and nor is there a requirement under prevailing planning policy for a contribution to public art to be delivered through development schemes.

Having said that, I am pleased to learn that through Councillor Williams' approach that Shearer Property Group has indicated support in principle to acknowledge Admiral Benbow in some way through the development and I will ask that officers raise this in subsequent discussions when the scheme is brought forward for implementation.

QUESTION 2

MR MANSEL WILLIAMS will ask the following question:

Health & Transport

Recently the World Health Organisation declared diesel fumes a cause of cancer and the EU rejected the UK Government's attempts to defer cleaning up the air in our polluted cities and towns.

The Air Quality Management Area in Shrewsbury town centre is for Nitrogen Dioxide and the principal source of that pollutant will be diesel engines. What steps has Shropshire Council taken, and is planning to take, to address:

1. The serious public health problem of Air Quality in and around Shrewsbury town centre?
2. How is the Council planning to remove the most polluting vehicles
3. What other control actions on sources of pollution are planned?

MR STEPHEN CHARMLEY, the Portfolio Holder for Public Protection will reply:

There are hotspots of poor air quality in and around Shrewsbury Town Centre due to road traffic emissions, and it is correct to say that the Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) was declared due to levels of Nitrogen Dioxide in ambient air that exceed the National (and EU) set limits. This has been the case for a number of years. The attached graph shows the trend over the last 3 years from our monitoring using diffusion tubes in several locations within the AQMA. The graph shows the results from the tubes in the AQMA since 2009 and it clearly shows that there is a downward trend in pollution levels.

The poor air quality is almost solely the result of road traffic emissions and the key to making a difference is through either improvements to emissions from the vehicles that use each road, through improvements to public transport such that fewer vehicles travel on those roads, or through improvements to the road network to smooth traffic flow. Guidance from government has been that improvements in engine emissions driven by policies at an EU level as the fleet is gradually renewed would deliver the improvements necessary, with local action only necessary in some cases. Experience nationally over the last 2-3 years has not shown the hoped for improvements though and so attention has turned to the concept of Low Emission Zones with plans for a framework to be introduced to allow these to be put in place where necessary.

In 2007 options were put to Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council members for inclusion in an air quality action plan for this AQMA but Members rejected some of the measures that officers put forward as ones that could make the most significant difference, such as requiring taxis to meet the latest Euro IV emission standards, and public transport commissioning policies to require improvements to the bus fleet through contract amendments.

Since then the Local Transport Plan³ transport planning process has taken into account air quality considerations but public support through the consultation process was quite low for this area to be given priority for funding.

In 2010 roadside monitoring of the emissions actually being produced by vehicles as they are being driven on the road in a location in Shrewsbury Town Centre showed that NO₂ levels being emitted in these real world driving conditions were, on average, about 6 times higher for buses and a few of the oldest vehicles than for the average car. The Environmental Protection and Prevention Team (EP&P) is currently working on a wider environmental quality strategy to incorporate air quality action planning.

In terms of controlling other sources of pollution, the EP&P team does also continue to regulate potentially polluting industrial activities through the Environmental Permitting Regulations 2010, and the implementation of these regulations via a risk based, business friendly approach to regulation is proving successful at controlling industrial sources of pollutants to air.

QUESTION 3

MR MANSEL WILLIAMS will ask the following question:

Observation suggests that after 9.30am, since the withdrawal of the use of Concessionary Passes, there are on weekday's large numbers of vacant seats on our excellent Park and Ride Service. Does the Council have figures for the percentage of seats occupied during these hours?

Since the timetable operates throughout the day, presumably at a fixed cost irrespective of the number of passengers carried, would it not be sensible and no more expensive to allow holders of concessionary passes to occupy these vacant seats?

This would have the following positive advantages:-

- Reduce traffic movements into and out of the town centre, helping to cut pollution
- Help to ensure the survival of town centre retail and other services, keeping it vibrant and thriving
- Help to attract additional tourists to enjoy the Town Centre offer, a prime aim of the Council's Tourist Strategy
- Improve the general wellbeing of older citizens by encouraging them to participate fully in the social, cultural and economic life of the town centre

What would be the cost implications, if any, of such a change in charging policy? Is there a fear that overcrowding, to the possible discomfort of paying passengers, would occur?

MR SIMON JONES, the Portfolio Holder for Public Transport will reply:

An analysis of passenger numbers suggests that there is sufficient capacity on the P&R service to accommodate any extra passengers resulting from a change in policy to allow concessionaires to travel for free. Indeed prior to April 2011 concessionaires were able to travel for free and this did not cause any capacity issues.

The service does run at a fixed cost to the operator ie Arriva receive the same level of payment regardless of how many passengers they carry. Current payment is £860,000 per annum. Shropshire Council (the Park & Ride budget) receives the income from any fares paid and concessionary travel reimbursement (if applicable) bringing the current cost of the contract to around £210,000 per annum. Therefore we receive in the region of £650,000 through fares.

A proportion of these fare paying passengers will be concessionary travel pass holders. At its simplest, should we re-introduce concessionary travel to the P&R we will lose the fare income which is currently paid by concessionary travel pass holders paying to use the service. We will however generate additional passengers leading to the positives identified. From best estimates (based upon past and current patronage) we could generate around 103,000 passengers but we would lose income from 140,000 passengers. I therefore estimate that moving to a free fare for concessionaires would cost in the region of £224,000.

Obviously this is an estimate, but worst case scenario. It assumes that the reduction of 103,000 passengers between 2010/11 and 2011/12 was a result of the change in policy however we are aware of the wider economic picture and the increase in fares on the service will also have had an impact.

The Transport Task and Finish group are currently looking at concessionary travel pass options for the P&R which could include a £1 charge for concessionaires although this would also have a cost implication.

We will shortly be introducing a group ticket allowing up to 5 passengers to travel at a cost of £2.50. This is a significant reduction on the current cost and will hopefully address the disparity between parking charges and the P&R fare encouraging more people to travel. This is available for all passengers from 19 November until Christmas Eve.

QUESTION 4

MR TRACEY HUFFER will ask the following question:

Could the portfolio holder explain the rationale behind proposals to introduce Sunday charges for on street parking in Ludlow. Ludlow is heavily dependent on visitors & local residents coming into town to shop and this decision, at a time of recession, when people are spending less, has led to vocal opposition amongst both local traders & many residents who are absolutely furious and who condemn these plans as unnecessary & likely to damage the local economy. Has any consideration been given to the effect on shop owners who rely heavily on weekend trade? Or to the members of the public who attend Sunday services at our town's churches, many of whom are elderly and some with very little disposable income? Or to the continued availability in nearby towns of free on street parking?

MR SIMON JONES, the Portfolio Holder for Car Parking will reply:

The use of car parks has increased in Ludlow over the last 2 years, and we are seeing an increase in the number of market days in the town, which is undoubtedly a result of the attractiveness of the town and its shops. There is increasing pressure on the on-street parking which has to be shared by the

residents, traders and visitors to the town. Therefore on Sundays Cabinet agreed that the off-street car park charge will be halved in all car parks to encourage people to use those spaces, and we are proposing the introduction of the on-street charge on Sundays to encourage this change in behaviour.

QUESTION 5

MR NIGEL HARTIN will ask the following question:

Many retail businesses across Shropshire have suffered a difficult years trading & we are now about to enter the key Christmas trading period. Will the Leader agree that Shropshire Businesses deserve all the assistance they can get to help drive the Shropshire Economy forward again & in order to help that process would he agree to a limited period of free parking both in Council Car Parks & on street in the vital last two weeks running up to Christmas Day.

Whilst there would be a limited impact on car parking revenue, this demonstration of the Councils commitment to Shropshire's retail economy would be a welcome shot in the arm for local businesses across Shropshire.

MR KEITH BARROW, the Leader of the Council will reply:

Councillor Hartin will be aware that Scrutiny recently reviewed the level of parking charges across all of our Market Towns – in order to support them in whatever ways we can. Councillor Hartin will also be aware of the need for the Council to balance its budget. The cost of allowing free parking for the two week period before Christmas would be over £200,000 and so this is neither realistic nor affordable.

QUESTION 6

MR ROGER EVANS will ask the following question:

Can council and councillors be updated on how applications for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) are now being assessed? Can details on the system being used in the grading of applications be publicised so all councillors are aware of the new policy that has been implemented.

Can council also be informed how long has the longest applicant been waiting, this to be from when the first application was made, how long did it take an Occupational Therapist (OT) to make the first visit and how long is it expected to be until the required work is to be carried out. Is it anticipated that any applicant will have to wait for their grant beyond the legal limit of 12 months.

Can council be reminded please what was the total budget allocated for DFG work in this financial year and in each of the preceding two years and how much was spent. For this financial work, how much of the budget was committed at the end of October and how much were any outstanding applications at that date expected to total. Are there any plans to offer deferred grants to any applicants and if so what does this mean.

Specifically for children at the end of October how long has the longest application for a DFG been waiting? What is the longest and also the average length of wait for a visit by an OT.

How long after a visit by an OT has it been taking for the grant to be agreed and how long is it expected to be before the work is carried out.

MR MALCOLM PRICE, the Portfolio Holder for Disabled Facilities Grants will reply:

(Can council and councillors be updated on how applications for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) are now being assessed? Can details on the system being used in the grading of applications be publicised so all councillors are aware of the new policy that has been implemented.)

Since August 2012, A Priority Pointing system has been in place in Shropshire in relation to applications for Disabled Facilities Grants, following the Review of DFGs.

Priority Pointing is applied by Occupational Therapists following their assessment of works deemed to be 'necessary and appropriate'. The Priority Pointing system indicates the level of need and the degree of urgency with respect to the adaptations required. OT recommendations are graded into one of three bands (gold, silver and bronze) before being passed to the Council's Disabled Facilities Grants Team.

OT recommendations are held in band and date order (date of assessment). The DFG Team also assesses whether the recommended works are 'reasonable and practicable'. Cases are then progressed through to the next stage, which is preparation of the DFG application, in priority and date order, targeting those assessed as being in greatest need. Early indications suggest that one outcome of managing the throughput of cases to the Home Improvement Agency in this way is contributing to a reduction in the time taken to prepare formal DFG applications as cases come through.

When the completed application for a DFG is received by the DFG Team, it is determined within 10 days. There is no grading applied at this point.

Details of the Priority Pointing System have been made available in the Members' Library.

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At 29 October 2012, 112 applications have been determined (approved) this financial year. 101 were determined within 10 days. Of the remaining 11 which were complex and therefore took longer than 10 days, the longest wait was 26 days.

The grant limit of 12 months starts on the date a valid DFG application is received by the DFG Team. The Priority Pointing Scheme enables management of the throughput of works to ensure grants are approved against available funding. It is not currently anticipated that any applicant will have to wait for their grant beyond the legal limit of 12 months.

Value of outstanding applications (29Oct12)

There are no outstanding applications as such. There are cases 'in the pipeline', at the pre-application stage. Figures are therefore approximate:

Pre-Priority Pointing Pipeline Cases	approx. £200,000
Post Priority Pointing	approx. £553,428
Total	approx. £753,428

There are no plans at this stage to issue Deferred Payment Approvals. The Priority Pointing scheme enables managed throughput of cases against available funding and so reduces the potential risk of having to issue DPAs.
