

CABINET 1 JUNE 2020
MEMBER QUESTION TIME

1. Question from Councillor Dan Morris

At the full Council meeting on 19th December 2019, Shropshire Council unanimously passed my motion to support the principle of a 20 mph speed limit outside all schools in the County and asked officers to bring a report to Council within 6 months to consider how this could be implemented. In addition the Government has recently announced a national £2bn package to look at creating a new era for cycling and walking.

It strikes me that both schemes, one instigated by Shropshire Council and one instigated by National Government, could be complementary to each other. Please could the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport report on how the council will look to implement the scheme for 20 mph limits outside schools and what the Councils plans are to help create a new era for cycling and walking in Shropshire?

Response:

In answer to Cllr Morris's question, work is underway in Highways and Transport with colleagues in Education to bring forward a proposal for assessing and where appropriate, implementing 20mph speed restrictions outside of schools . A report to Full Council has been prepared and is scheduled for September's Council meeting. The report will bring forward a methodology, timetable and funding regime, for the Council to consider.

Cllr Morris is correct that the Government has released guidance for local authorities on managing their road networks in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and has made funding available to encourage more people to choose alternatives ways to travel when they need to. There is a focus on walking and cycling to relieve demand on public transport and it is hoped that this will promote healthier habits long term, including for the journey to school. Consideration is also to be given to how social distancing requirements can be accommodated at key points on the network and in our town centres.

Shropshire Council has prioritised a team to consider appropriate measures (hence the deferred report to Full Council). Measures could include temporary one-way streets, road closures, speed restrictions, and new information signs. Work will also be carried out with bus operators in advance of any projected increases in demand as the pandemic moves through future phases.

Recent press releases have demonstrated continuing work with Shropshire's Business Improvement Districts and town councils to develop a package of temporary measures. Highways and Transport are working close with colleagues in Economic Growth to provide support in town centres.

<https://newsroom.shropshire.gov.uk/2020/05/coronavirus-work-underway-to-enable-and-encourage-visits-to-shropshires-market-towns/>

Guidance is being received daily from Government on this issue, and it should also be noted that at the time of preparing this response, no notification or receipt of financial support to implement initiatives has been received from Government. Officers are talking to relevant Government departments to seek the necessary detail required.

2. Question from Councillor David Turner

COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on how we conduct our lives. Individuals and families have adjusted the way they live, work and shop.

It is the latter point I wish to address. There has been a lot of media focus on the large footprint retailers such as supermarkets who have adjusted their retail offer, and on other multiple retailers and hospitality businesses which have been forced to close for the duration. In Shropshire, we have heard plenty about Shrewsbury and the larger market towns, but it's the smaller ones which attract my question.

Whilst food shops, and some pubs and cafes have adapted their business model to not only meet customer needs through home delivery etc., but also to ensure their survival as the lockdown eases, other traders in our towns and villages will make a standing start when they're permitted to re-open. Some who have an online offer may have been able to mitigate the impact to an extent. Hotels and specialist retailers, however, mostly have not had that opportunity. Shropshire Council has withdrawn off-street parking charges during this crisis but, in my experience, there have been very few vehicles using them because of the reduction in economic activity to a snail's pace.

What steps is Cabinet taking now - through the groundwork of appropriate specialist officers - to ensure, when some degree of normality resumes in small High Streets, that we attract visitors to our small market towns and welcome them, thus stimulating the local economy and getting folk back to previous employment levels?

Response:

Shropshire Council has been working collectively across departments and with external partners on supporting the resilience of our towns, businesses and communities. We have been able so far to support 5,916 businesses including retail and leisure business across the County with grants of between £10 or £25k. This

has seen £70.1 million in grants paid to eligible businesses to date, of which £24.44 million to those in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors specifically. We have on 27th May launched the extension funding for small businesses which will be focused on a number of priority types of businesses that could not access these first grants including market traders and bed and breakfasts who do not have a business rated property, which are particularly applicable to our market towns and villages.

We are going to be making available £20,000 over the next few weeks as a competitive fund for projects aimed at encouraging footfall and campaigns to support people back into towns and destinations to use businesses, shops and spend money to support the local economy. More details on this will follow.

Supporting town centres to be resilient is critical and officers from across departments have been working collectively to support this. We have been undertaking reviews of town centres to ensure we can support them to open safely, public health and safety remains at the centre of these efforts. Measures include changes to movement flows and routes to allow for social distancing to be achieved, supporting businesses to put in place changes to re-open, and clear messaging and communications. Highways are continuing to review car parks to ensure the safety of users whilst supporting the businesses and traders. Car parks have been free of charge during the lockdown period, and from June 1st car parks outside of immediate town centres will remain free of charge until July. Work to improve and refresh the car parks is being undertaken and this programme of county-wide work will be almost complete. As a council we have allowed car parks to be used to support some local trading, and in the near future will be a key part of supporting social distancing, for example supporting wider footpaths. Numerous guidance documents are being received daily from Government from public transport to cycling and social distancing is a key priority to support Shropshire towns and their economy.

Working with local groups, organisations and town councils we will support innovative ideas and approaches to trialling new ways and opportunities – including more pedestrian priority and cycling and pop up greenspace as well as looking at local marketing campaigns to support the economy, including tourism and visitors by ensuring a safe environment. We are undertaking a lot of research and analysis of data to monitor unemployment, business change, poverty and other economic impacts and working closely with partners including the LEP and Midlands Engine to collectively pool our resources and information to ensure we can access funding and target the right areas for intervention. There will be two dedicated taskforces moving forward to enable the council to develop and focus on its economic and social recovery plans, with Cabinet members, local experts and representatives of the council's partner organisations.

All of our towns and high streets are important and key to our social fabric and economy and we need to do all we can to give residents, visitors and businesses confidence to return safely. This will mean there are limits to activities, controls will need to be in place and we know recovery will take some time. We will continue to work closely with Town and Parish Councils to co-ordinate this effort and response.

With respect to street trading charges, the Council appreciates that removing these would ease the financial burden on those individual businesses that undertake street trading activities. However, there are wider licensing related impacts that need to be

considered before a decision can be taken on whether or not to remove street trading charges.

3. Question from Councillor Les Winwood, on behalf of Bridgnorth Councillors

Could the following question be put to Cabinet on behalf of the four Bridgnorth members. Car parking can be a real challenge in Bridgnorth and there have been discussions of a possible multi storey car park on Innage Lane car park Bridgnorth. This would help to deal with our desperate car parking shortage and benefit the town greatly. Could we have an update on progress please, Regards Les Winwood ,Elliot Lynch, William Parr, Christian Lea.

Response

There are competing proposals for possible significant housing developments at Tasley and Stanmore as part of the emerging Local Plan Review, which the Council are currently considering. An officer recommendation on the preference of site will be subject to Cabinet discussion on 6th July, and then public consultation. Whichever option is preferred, it is accepted there would be an impact upon Bridgnorth in respect of transport and movement . In light of this it's wise to consider current and potential impacts upon the town in respect of transport and movement. Undoubtedly there is need to consider a mixture of opportunities to address these concerns, including Park and Ride, public transport provision as will any potential future demands, and provision and capacity for carparking.

As part of this work , developing a rationale that would inform a proposition for transport, balancing car and public transport use, would prove a more comprehensive and sustainable approach. Part of this is being developed via the approved Car Parking Strategy. Other considerations supported such as possible reconfiguration of car parks and or possible additional provision of car parking provision are ongoing .Thus, preparation work with colleagues from Estates and discussions with Planning colleagues are scheduled to identify an approach to land use and feasibility as well as discussions with the wider market on such projects , transport staff are sourcing currently available usage data.

The intention would be to utilise this data to formalise an approach over the summer for consideration.

4. Question from Councillor David Vasmer

Why are officers considering the sale of the former Training Centre on Racecourse Crescent with a large section of the car park for Monkmoor Rec which is used on a regular basis by people using the football pitches, the all-weather pitches, the tennis courts, a bowling green and a croquet lawn for practices, training and matches. On Saturdays the car park is full to overflowing and I am already receiving complaints from nearby residents about people using the Rec and parking on Racecourse Crescent. Since taking over the Rec from Shropshire about eight years ago it has been transformed by better management and investments by the Lawn Tennis Association and Town Council who recently renewed the all-weather pitch and its

lighting. So why has the County refused to transfer ownership to the Town Council? Is the County so keen to gain income from its assets that it is willing to sell land and thereby undermine the success of a recreational facility used by people from all over Shrewsbury, and beyond, and seriously inconvenience residents living in nearby streets? Or will the Council adopt a policy of not selling land that is currently used, directly or indirectly, for recreation?

Response

The site in question has been promoted as a sustainable location for new housing within this area of the town, in close proximity to local shops and services and with good access to public transport and local pedestrian routes. An outline planning application is being prepared by Shropshire Council officers to establish the principle of a residential use of the site alongside the recreation ground and amenities. Informal discussions have taken place with officers from Shrewsbury Town Council. It was agreed that the matter will be progressed by consulting with Highways Development Management colleagues on the appropriate form of access and on parking requirements for the recreation ground as this is a key consideration for the venue and also for local residents. Officers will work with Councillor Vasmer as Local Member and with the Town Council to bring forward a proposal which delivers further enhancements and an improved visual identity for the access to and from the Recreation Ground with further work planned to review the opportunities for other sustainable methods of travel to and from the facility.

5. Question from Councillor Brian Williams

Could Cllr Potter explain what action might be taken against parents who might be reluctant to send children back to school - and also what action in respect of any LA maintained school that delays or resists re-opening? How confident is he that all Shropshire schools will have begun the process of re-opening by July 17th?

Response:

No action will be taken against parents in relation to returning the children to school in the Summer term. The Government guidance is clear on this issue, as indicated in the FAQs below.

7.1 Is attendance compulsory?

Eligible children – including priority groups – are strongly encouraged to attend their education setting, unless they are self-isolating or they are clinically vulnerable.

No one with symptoms should attend a setting for any reason. If someone in their household is extremely clinically vulnerable, children should only attend if stringent social distancing can be adhered to, and the child is able to understand and follow those instructions.

Families should notify their nursery, school or college as normal if their child is unable to attend so that staff can explore the reason with them and address barriers together.

Parents will not be fined for non-attendance at this time.

7.2 Will parents be penalised if their child does not attend school?

Parents will not be penalised if their child does not attend school. We expect schools and other relevant partners to work with and support the relevant families and pupils to return to school.

“Under the Coronavirus Act 2020, we have relaxed the law, so that the parent of a child of compulsory school age is not guilty of an offence on account of the child’s failure to attend regularly at the school at which the child is registered (section 444 of the Education Act 1996).”

Source: ‘Actions for schools during the coronavirus outbreak’ – Government guidance updated on 18 May 2020, available at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-school-closures/guidance-for-schools-about-temporarily-closing#attendance>

It is important to note that an average of around 80% of Shropshire schools have been open since lockdown commenced on 23 March 2020, for vulnerable children and those of critical workers. The decision when to reopen for further age groups will be taken by schools individually, based on detailed risk assessments, which will determine when it is safe and practical to do so. In a number of cases, schools will need to plan for a phased re-integration, particularly where the school buildings place restrictions on the number of staff and pupils that can be accommodated safely and/or the school is faced with shortages of staffing through self-isolation, shielding or other constraints to staff returning to school.

The portfolio holder is confident that all Shropshire schools will have begun the process of extending provision to the specified year groups by the end of the Summer term, provided that there are no barriers to doing so.

6. Question from Councillor Rob Gittins

Crow Lane which runs from Childs Ercall to Ollerton Business Park is in desperate need of a vehicle weight restriction and signage scheme limiting all traffic to under 7.5 tons. Could I ask the portfolio holder to provide a timescale for the completion of this work please?"

Response:

In response to Councillor Gittins request, as a highways authority we receive numerous requests for schemes across the county. These schemes are assessed and prioritised in respect of support from local town councils or parish councils, Police concerns and data from accidents, near misses and availability of resources . Hence, we will consider the request and assess if the scheme is identified to be included or not in any future programme , against the other competing requests and funding available.

As soon as the initial assessment is undertaken Councillor Gittins will be updated directly.