

CABINET 11 JUNE 2019
PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

**Question Submitted by Rev Mike Plunkett, Enterprise South West Shropshire,
Chair of Churches Together**

Would you agree that at the present time the County Council gives more support to urban than rural areas ?

The necessity for a much higher precept in Bishop's Castle as opposed to Shrewsbury illustrates this. The significant reduction in Public Transport would increase this imbalance.

Would not the Council's reduction in Public Transport make a nonsense of the Council's recent acceptance that we are in a climate crisis ?

Have the Council considered the effect of greater isolation on the quality of life of the people of rural areas ?

Bishops Castle has a 45 mile return trip to Shrewsbury: this great distance means that young people, older people and other non drivers cannot go to town for shopping, outings: rail station or national buses. Two very special needs are for our sixth formers and Shrewsbury Hospital. Finally we have been told about many new houses being required: these will not be so desirable.

Response

Actually the majority of council funding of bus services is placed in more rural than urban areas.

The nature of funding of local bus services in England, whereby bus operators themselves decided upon which services they want to put in place because of commercial reasons, will mean that in the majority of cases these commercial services are based in more urban areas. Council funding is then used to support those services where there are gaps in that commercial network and the majority of these supported services being located in more rural locations, where a commercial service cannot be justified, by the operators.

Following the recent consultation and feedback we received, the Council are not proposing to reduce bus service provision within the Bishops Castle area.

Public Transport continues to be a priority for the council and we recognise the positive impact that this can have on the environment and we will continue to work with stakeholders and patients to ensure the public transport continue to play a key role.

The council is undertaking a review of its public transport provision and the points that you have raised in your question are some of the key considerations we will need to consider with our partners and key stakeholders, to help inform how we can evolve public transport provision to not only meet the needs of the existing users but make public transport a real alternative to those who currently do not access this form of transport.

Question Submitted by Isobel Lewis

What actions have the Council taken to create the Climate Action Partnership of Stakeholders and the wider community? Will the Council look at the work being undertaken by Shrewsbury Town Council in this regard with a view to adopting it as good practice within Shropshire Council?

Response

As was set out at Full Council on 16th May, Shropshire Council have a key leadership role to play in the response to climate change both locally and nationally. Locally we have great soft power in influencing the actions of communities, businesses, the voluntary sector, town & parish councils and our own contractors. We must aim to utilise that soft power to drive more sustainable behaviours. Nationally we have a role to play, along with other councils, to lobby Government to set ambitious objectives for carbon reduction and to support local authorities in reducing their carbon emissions, all with the eventual goal of carbon neutrality. In terms of Shrewsbury Town Council, yes I have met with Shrewsbury Town Council to discuss climate change amongst other things. It was a very productive meeting and I look forward to future meetings with them. There is no doubt plenty of good practice we can share in both directions on carbon reduction and sustainability.

Question Submitted by Jonathan Bruton

Can I ask the Council which Councillors sit on the Climate Change Task and Finish Group, what are their terms of reference and have they met? If not, has a date been set for the first meeting of the Group? Are the minutes publicly available?

Response

The first meeting of the Climate Change Task & Finish Group has been set for 1st July 2019 where the Terms of Reference will be agreed. Meetings of Task & Finish Groups are internal Council meetings meant to inform policy by taking evidence from such experts as is required, as such they are not routinely public meetings. The conclusions of a Task & Finish Group are drawn together in to a final report which includes an overview of the work it has carried out and is then reported back to the Scrutiny Committee which set it up, the Scrutiny Committee is a meeting held in public. I will write to Mt Bruton confirming the membership of the Task & Finish Group.

Question submitted by Adam Shipp

Can I ask the Council which Officers sit on the Climate Change Working Group, what are the groups terms of reference, have the group met, how often are they meeting and are the minutes available to members of the public?

Response

Addressing climate change is a cross cutting theme that affects all parts of the councils work and all of our employees. A Working Group has been established under the leadership of the Director of Place to progress the Council's response to climate change and sustainability as a whole. The initial objective of the group is to map out and raise awareness of the current progress being made across all areas of the Council. The groups work will then move to securing a focus on the delivery of key initiatives and review opportunities for fresh approaches and innovations. This will result in shaping a revised strategy which will also draw in contributions from sector experts. Only papers that relate to public meetings of elected members are published.

Question Submitted by Dougal Purce

Has the Council appointed an Officer to coordinate the Council's response to Climate Change and the sustainability agenda? If not, has the post been advertised and when is this appointment likely to be made? What powers will he/she have to drive change within the Council and is there a role profile that is publicly available.

Response

Can I thank Mr Purce for his interest in this key role which was referenced at Full Council on 16th May. I recognise that creating the capacity to deliver against our commitment is crucial to its success. I can confirm that the Council is currently in the process of establishing a new 'Sustainability Officer' post which will be publicly advertised in the near future. This important role will coordinate the related work already underway across the Council, plus give an additional strategy and policy capacity. It will also lead in pulling together our revised strategy and working to co-create and deliver projects with key partners. If Mr Purce or anyone else would like to track progress with this recruitment I would ask that he makes contact with the Director of Place

Question Submitted by Charles Green, CPRE

The question concerns Agenda Item 9: the *Shropshire Local Plan Review: Consultation on Preferred Strategic Development Sites*

There is increasing recognition around the world that human activity is causing unsustainable environmental damage, both through man-made climate change and through environmental degradation and loss of species.

Full Council has recognised this by declaring a "Climate Emergency".

Yet Cabinet continues to pursue its growth plans through the Local Plan Review and the Economic Growth Strategy.

You seem unwilling to accept that continued growth leads to increased carbon emissions, and increased environmental degradation to the countryside.

The current plans, including those before you today, are for a further increase in Shropshire's population of some 25% over the plan period of twenty years. A 25% increase in people and their associated houses and economic activity in that very short timespan is simply not sustainable, or consistent with a declaration of a "Climate Emergency".

We repeat our plea that at the very least, the proposals within the Strategic Development Sites should be treated as part of the existing Local Plan Review targets, not as additional to those, insofar as they are likely to be completed within the plan period.

But the question we now ask highlights this conflict between the declaration of a "Climate Emergency" and the continued pursuit of unsustainable growth.

What annual carbon emissions are presently made from human activity within Shropshire, and what extra annual carbon emissions will be generated from the extra human activity planned within the current Local Plan Review and the related Economic Growth Strategy?

Response

As was stated at Full Council on 16th May we have already started the work of establishing a baseline of emissions as we believe that understanding where we are currently is an important part of developing the Climate Action Plan that will be produced. Reducing carbon emissions is not about growth per se, but about the right growth, about having the Right Home in the Right Place and sustainable employment opportunities. For example that is why we support key worker housing, because it's about helping to place our key workforce in affordable and good quality homes within the communities they serve. The point is that future population growth will not necessarily result in a net growth of carbon. We are exploring a package of measures that are aimed at reducing net carbon emissions and increasing the sustainability of our places, economies and communities for generations to come!