

**CABINET 29 APRIL 2020
PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

Questions and Responses

1. Question from Mark Fermor, Chair of Shropshire Cycle Hub –

The following questions that I asked at your meeting on 27 February 2020 were not answered (except for some positive aspirations about active travel in Shrewsbury, which are welcomed) and I would now appreciate an answer:

Does the Council agree that achieving Zero Carbon Britain means a shift in priority towards active travel by foot and cycle?

This part answers a response to another similar question to this Cabinet meeting. We believe that Shropshire Councils commitment in this context is highlighted in its approach to the North West Relief Road (NWRR). As part of its approach to the NWRR there will be a full Environmental Impact Assessment submitted as part of the Planning Application which is due May/June this year. This will go into full detail as regards the scheme's proposed approach. Further to this, there will also be a Carbon Report accompanying the application that will look specifically at the embedded and lifetime Carbon approach through construction and operation of the road post completion. This will also be available in due course through the Shropshire Planning Portal. In the meantime, I copy a link below to the current NWRR info pages and FAQ, where these issues are explained further.

<https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/get-involved/shrewsbury-north-west-relief-road-public-consultation-2020/>

<https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/media/14550/shrewsbury-north-west-relief-road-faqs-2020-v8.pdf>

The Council's position is that, by diverting through traffic away from the town centre, completion of NWRR provides the opportunity for effective investment in improvements to public transport and active transport modes in a way consistent with the objectives of the Shrewsbury Big Town Plan. Shropshire Council is already bidding for a range of Government grant funding which, if successful, will provide extensive town wide electric bus services; eCargo bikes and the potential for the re-allocation of road space or the establishment of a low emissions zone which will allow us to respond positively to the new reality post Covid-19. This demonstrates the work being undertaken and the direction of travel taken by this Council.

Is the Council committed to investing in cycling to achieve aspirations set by UK government to make cycling and walking a natural choice for shorter journeys.

Shropshire Council wishes to support sustainable methods of travel as highlighted in other responses to questions at this Cabinet, looking at Park and Ride, bidding for Electric Busses, bidding for e-cargo bike scheme demonstrates the Council's approach. Sustainable modes of transport i.e. walking and cycling will also be a key component of the Councils LTP4 strategy which will act as a key umbrella strategy for the councils approach to transport policy and as this work develops and engagement with interest groups is undertaken a strategy will be presented to Cabinet in the future for consideration that will set out the Councils approach and its policy influence for the medium term.

At Shropshire Cycle Hub we would like to work with the Council and others to achieve a fivefold increase in cycling by 2025 appropriate for Zero Carbon Shropshire. Does the Council support this aspiration?

As per the response above, the Council is more than happy to engage and consult with the Cycle Hub to inform and refine the LTP 4 strategy prior to its final consultative circulation and approval. Additionally, the Council has continued to support Cycle proficiency training in schools and this programme of work will continue, the decision to continue this work in a backdrop of financial constraints demonstrates the Councils approach when many other local authorities have ceased this work.

Does the Council agree that to achieve the change it must invest in infrastructure at least to the level advocated by Sustrans and others at £34 per resident per annum and start this year (£12M/a).

The Council is undertaking a process of developing its LTP4 strategy, as stated in the response to this question, this will focus and present recommendations for modal transport of which cycling will be a key component. As explained the engagement with the cycle hub will support this policy development and until the work is completed any financial commitment would not be appropriate.

What is the Council's existing budget for new cycling infrastructure this year?

The Council has no discrete budget for cycling infrastructure - any cycle lanes, signs or national cycle network routes are identified as part of the overall revenue and capital allocation to highways improvements.

Will the Council ensure that no new highways schemes are approved that require use of the Council's scarce resources until a new budget for cycling infrastructure has been established appropriate for the climate and health emergencies we face?

(This answer supports 1 (i) above). The Council cannot commit to this request. As previously stated, any significant new scheme will involve undertaking a full Environment Impact Assessment and this would always be the council's approach, and where appropriate budget, design or policy development will shape the

approach in moving forward. The council has hopefully demonstrated its approach in this area and how it intends to develop, engage and support the issues raised in this question and balance economic growth and connectivity across the county and beyond

2. Question from Rob Wilson

When the COVID-19 Lockdown begins to lift, people will want to return to our town centres to support our local businesses. What plans does Shropshire Council have to temporarily remove motor traffic from our town centres so that people are able to maintain social distancing as directed by the Chief Medical Officer Chris Whitty?

The response mirrors a reply to a similar question to Cabinet asked today. Shropshire Council recognises this issue. Currently the Council is supporting business on many fronts in response to COVID-19, whether this be supporting small business with grants, business rate relief, flooding grants, working with Chamber of Commerce and Local Enterprise partnerships. Key staff have been diverted to ensure that financial support is provided. Further the newly formed Community Reassurance Team is supporting in town centres and wider communities across a number of issues with staff redeployed to assist and support.

Planning work is underway in respect of when the governments lock down begins to ease or cease, and a number of scenarios are being considered this may be in the Councils approach to public transport, phasing opening of car parks (currently all Shropshire Council car parks are free) to Park and Ride, to wider promotions for town centres in association with the Business Improvement Districts (BID`s).

How central government will approach any relaxation or cessation of the lock down is not yet clear, and yet it's clear that there will be adjustments to how people and the Council operate and this will have to be integral to any developmental work and town centre support. There is a balance between adherence to any requirements that government require when the lock down is eased or ceased, public confidence in utilising transport and town centres and supporting the local economies. Discussions are underway and scenarios are being developed so that the council can move at pace should it be required once the advice from government is received.

This development work will consider a number of issues and at present, these discussions across a wide range of issues are underway with partners such as local BID`s, local and town clerks are underway, currently no firm proposals have yet been developed.

3. **Question from Joanna Blackman (please see full information supplied with question attached)**

In the light of the new reality we find ourselves in and the prospects of continued uncertainty in the fossil fuel market, will the Cabinet propose to the Pension Committee that the Shropshire County Pension Fund divests from funds which include fossil fuels?

Pensions Committee have responsibility delegated from Council for Shropshire County Pension Fund investment decisions and this question should be directed there as it is not for the executive of this council to direct them. Cabinet has no role or jurisdiction in their business, to do otherwise is ultra vires.

My understanding is that this issue continues to be raised at Pensions Committee and is continually revisited. The Fund's investment decisions are taken within the framework set by the regulations and statutory guidance issued by the Ministry for Housing, Communities, and Local Government. Accordingly, the Fund's primary duty is to pay pensions, and the Fund's approach to environmental, social and corporate governance issues is implemented with this duty in mind. The Fund's approach to responsible investment, of which climate change is one component, is set out in the Investment Strategy Statement and further in the Stewardship Code Statement.

4. **Question from Jackie Jones**

On a list of Shropshire Council priorities where does the Climate Emergency sit? Given the Emergency, do you think it is reasonable to devote only 0.06% of your staff resources to the Climate Task Force and why is there no representation on the group for some of the most important sectors, especially Transport?

Climate Change has been adopted as a key corporate priority and a theme that underpins the Council's direction of travel as an organisation. Whilst the staff of the Climate Task Force represent only a small proportion of the Council's total staff in numerical terms, they are certainly not working alone and are supported by an internal officer working group drawn from services across the Council, including a number of key staff from highways and transport. One of the early priorities for the Task Force has been to start to embed climate change considerations in the Council's governance systems, including committee reports, procurement and investment decisions, so that it becomes normalised as a consideration for all Council staff. This has been reinforced by organising carbon literacy training for key staff from a wide range of Council services.

5. **Question from Mike Streetly**

The survival of many town centre businesses will depend on a rapid increase in footfall once the main lockdown period ends: what preparations is the council making to ensure that there is more space immediately available to pedestrians (otherwise cramped onto narrow pavements) in order to ensure

that our town centres can operate as fully as possible whilst social distancing rules continue in force (currently forecast to continue for many months) and will this include widespread imposition of temporary pedestrianisation?

Shropshire Council recognises the issue. Currently the Council is supporting business on many fronts in response to COVID-19, whether this be supporting small business with grants, business rate relief, flooding grants, working with Chamber of Commerce and Local Enterprise partnerships. Key staff have been diverted to ensuring that financial support is provided. Further the newly formed Community Reassurance Team is supporting in town centres and wider communities across a number of issues with staff redeployed to assist and support.

Planning work is underway in respect of when the governments lock down begins to ease or cease, and a number of scenarios are being considered. This may be in the Councils approach to public transport, car parks (currently all Shropshire Council car parks are free) to Park and Ride, to wider promotions for town centres in association with the Business Improvement Districts (BID`s). How central government will approach any relaxation or cessation of the lock down is not yet clear, and it's clear that there will be amends to how people and the Council operate and this will have to be integral to any developmental work and town centre support.

This development work will consider a number of issues and at present, these discussions across a wide range of issues are underway with partners such as local BID`s, local and town clerks are underway, currently no firm proposals have yet been developed.

6. Question from Slawomir Fejfer

As a result of COVID-19, what general support has Shropshire been giving to care and residential homes and in particular how many peoples is it supporting and has Shropshire been able to provide PPE for support and community carers?

Shropshire Council are working closely with colleagues in health and Telford and Wrekin council and Shropshire Council are hosting a system wide emergency PPE request site. This is a platform for providers to request PPE when they are in urgent need of stock and their usual PPE supply chain has not been able to meet their planned delivery. Providers and individuals providing care and support can submit a request form which is prioritised based on need and will then be given a time slot to collect a pack of PPE form the Shirehall on set days.

7. Question from Adam Shipp (please see full information provided with the question attached)

1) Does the Cabinet agree or disagree with these sentiments? (Show of hands?)

2) Do they believe that the Shropshire Economy has suffered due to extreme flooding and droughts over the last 2 years?

3) Has any economic assessment been carried out to quantify the effects of these recent events on businesses in Shropshire, is one underway, or is one planned and if so, will it be made public?

We will take these 2 questions together. The recent floods earlier this year affected large parts of Shropshire and were the worst in 20 years. An impact survey for businesses was undertaken for a short period of time at the peak of the flooding to understand the business and economic impacts – the survey was responded to mostly by business in Shrewsbury and 185 responses were received, over half of which were retail. A summary of the headlines from this survey tell us that;

- Less than 1/3 of businesses were able to operate as normal during the floods
- 1/4 of businesses closed completely
- Nearly 3/4 of businesses expected to be open as normal within a few days of responding to the survey
- For a significant minority, premise damage was sufficient to delay “business as normal” for longer – almost one in 10 businesses that were forced to close/reduce operations, did not expect to back up and running properly for a month or longer
- 97% of businesses reported loss of trade during the floods and the total estimated cost from this loss was £7 - 8 million
- Total cost for each day of disruption was estimated as £0.9 million

This was a sample survey of 185 businesses who chose to respond but it has helped give us an indication of the business and economic impact from the February flooding events. We have used these figures to help us focus local support and have fed into Government via our MPs and Marches Local Enterprise Partnership to ask for more support locally to help recover from these floods and to prepare for future events that may occur.

We will be preparing further more detailed economic analysis of CV-19 impacts to inform our recovery plan, and the flooding impact data will feed into this given many businesses have been impacted by both.

The Council has already committed to exploring and supporting opportunities or ‘Clean Growth’ as is recognised in our Corporate Plan and Economic Growth Strategy. Officers are working with colleagues from the Green Shropshire Exchange and other environmental organisations in the county to develop a ‘Climate Action Partnership’ to help drive the transition to a low carbon Shropshire economy. Working with others, the Council is keen to explore positive opportunities for business to maintain and normalise some of the positive travel, working patterns and growth opportunities which have developed from the current lockdown conditions.

4) Mr Nutting, in the light of these quotes, will you and use your considerable influence to move with haste to decarbonise Shropshire Council and set a firm date for carbon neutrality?

Shropshire Council approved a 'Climate Strategy Framework' at its meeting on 19 December 2019, which establishes the objective of net-zero carbon performance for the Council by 2030. Officers have started to embed climate changes across the Council's governance systems and are currently developing a Strategy and Action Plan to identify projects and initiatives which will continue the good progress which is already being made towards decarbonising the Council's services.