

CABINET 15 JUNE 2020

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

1 Question from Rob Wilson

The Conservative Party manifesto at the 2019 General Election committed to “Low Traffic Neighbourhoods”. Working with Local Councils to reduce rat running cars and lorries, making side streets nicer to live in and safer to walk, cycle and play in.

At the Council Meeting on 27th February 2020 I asked what plans does Shropshire Council have to introduce Low Traffic Neighbourhoods across Shrewsbury? Cllr Davenport's answer did not mention Low Traffic Neighbourhoods.

On 28th May 2020 the Department for Transport outlined what measures they expect to Local Authorities to take to enable increased levels of walking and cycling; the letter specifically mentioned that one of the quickest and cheapest methods was point closures to create Low Traffic Neighbourhoods.

At the Cabinet Meeting on 1st June 2020 I asked what is Shropshire Council doing to maintain the increased levels of walking and cycling in our community streets, specifically, rapidly implementing the government policy of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods? Cllr Davenport's answer did not mention Low Traffic Neighbourhoods.

When will Shropshire Council begin working with local communities to implement Low Traffic Neighbourhoods?

Response:

Thank you for your question. As you may be aware the aspiration of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTN`s) is an issue that the council is progressing on. Examples of this approach are the recent Full Council motion that asked for 20mph limits outside of all Shropshire Council schools, this proposal is being developed by officers and a paper is being presented to Full Council in September to propose a way forward. This council is also looking to improve and significantly enhance the Park and Ride Service in Shrewsbury to support cross town transport and connectivity to a wider public transport hub and details on this will follow in due course. Currently, the response to COVID 19 and social distancing is developing interventions such as one-way systems, partial or complete road closures, cycle lanes and wider footpaths to promote active travel, these details are on the council's web site. These interventions will be monitored and assessed, and where there are positive benefits that attract community support, consideration to formalising arrangements will be undertaken, currently officers are fully engaged on this work.

Additionally the council will be reviewing its local transport plan (LTP4) this will look at policy considerations such as reducing cars from town centres and encouraging other forms of transport , increasing walking and cycling and will develop specific

policies to inform our approach via Highways and planning policy. Hence subject to approval a formalised evidence base and key strategy of the council will be developed and pressed for consideration in the future. These interventions will assist in encouraging active and public travel in the future, as ever there is always a balance to be struck and currently the response to COVID has prioritized officer time.

In summary to the question, practical and policy based work across a number of fronts is in development and will contribute to LTN

2 Question from Charles Green

CPRE Shropshire supports building the right types of housing in the right places, in numbers that are clearly needed, whilst ensuring that the County's special qualities and countryside are protected and that the genuine needs of its residents are met.

We therefore welcome the ideas behind the Draft Housing Strategy 2020 – 2025 and its 6 proposed priorities.

However, we do not believe that the continued aspirational growth pursued by Shropshire Council will protect Shropshire's special qualities or serve its resident population to best effect, particularly in view of the Climate Emergency and the ecological crisis.

Shropshire Council aspires to build 28,750 houses (or more) during the Local Plan Review period. We expected the Draft Housing Strategy to say something as to how that number of houses is to be sub-divided between the different need groups, but it doesn't. Also, the Leader, the Cabinet and the Council should not just hope that building that number of houses will solve problems, rather than making them worse, without some evidence of the effect of recent building programmes.

However, Shropshire Council appears to have little evidence as to who it is who actually comes to live in the new estates it is fostering all around the County. We have heard it said* that "one-third of all new houses sold in the Shropshire Council area are to affluent down-sizers from outside Shropshire" and have been told* that "research with local agents has revealed that some new housing sites in Shrewsbury have been sold exclusively to affluent downsizers". However, we have yet to see what firm evidence is held by Shropshire Council.

Shropshire Council appears to be opening up the County to affluent downsizers from elsewhere. It appears not to know whether it is making life better for its existing residents, or posterity, by building these massive numbers of houses. It appears to be blindly pursuing policies that may have little grounding in the reality of evidence. So, our question is: What hard evidence does Shropshire Council have of the demographic characteristics of the people who come to live in new dwellings built in its area in, say, the last five years?

Finally, we also hope that the consultation on this Draft Housing Strategy will not overlap with the forthcoming consultation on the Local Plan Review, and that that

LPR consultation will be proportionate in length to the 6-week consultation on this Housing Strategy, based on the volume of evidence produced for each.

* By Mark Barrow, in both instances

Response

The housing strategy identifies key housing challenges in the County and provides a framework for how these can be addressed by the Council and its stakeholders by working collectively and maximising the use of resources. It is for Shropshire Council's Local Plan to set the long-term housing requirement for the County to 2038. This must have its basis on the housing need derived from the national methodology, which itself is influenced by future sub-national household and population projections. Therefore, the County's housing need figure does factor in expected in-migration into the County over the long term.

3 Question from Mark Fermor

Question for Peter Nutting, leader of Shropshire Council for the cabinet meeting scheduled for 15 June:

Given the new statutory guidance in force since 23 May 2020, does the Council commit to responding with appropriate budget to achieve the change we need (to achieve the change it must expect to invest in infrastructure at least to the level advocated by Sustrans and others at 10% of UK transport spend - £34 per resident per annum¹)?

The Minister, Grant Shapps, said:

“We recognise this moment for what it is: a once in a generation opportunity to deliver a lasting transformative change in how we make short journeys in our towns and cities. According to the National Travel Survey, in 2017-18 over 40% of urban journeys were under 2 miles – perfectly suited to walking and cycling.”

(Do you agree?)

“Active travel is affordable, delivers significant health benefits, has been shown to improve wellbeing, mitigates congestion, improves air quality and has no carbon emissions at the point of use. Towns and cities based around active travel will have happier and healthier citizens as well as lasting local economic benefits. The government therefore expects local authorities to make significant changes to their road layouts to give more space to cyclists and pedestrians. Such changes will help embed altered behaviours and demonstrate the positive effects of active travel... I urge you all to make sure you do what is necessary to ensure transport networks support recovery from the COVID-19 emergency and provide a lasting legacy of greener, safer transport.”

Given also that you stated recently in the Shropshire Star:

¹ <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/media/5211/sustransmanifestoukgovernment.pdf>

"There is huge potential. Shrewsbury is a bit different to Amsterdam, we have got a lot of hills in Shrewsbury, which makes it slightly more difficult. But there is still a lot we can do around the town to make it more attractive to cyclists."

The most significant change that the Council can make to increase cycling across Shropshire² and show a commitment to active travel will be to introduce a default 20mph speed limit on residential streets. This will entail very limited cost and can be done immediately. Will the Council make this change?

Another vital element of your plans will be for segregated strategic routes to encourage safe cycling. There is a good vision for Shrewsbury in the Big Town Plan, but the Council needs to make a plan for cycling to provide joined up thinking. Will it? Every active travel planner in the country is leaping into action to respond to Grant Shapps' vision! Will Shropshire Council? There is a groundswell of goodwill from across the County offering support and ideas, but so far a black hole in terms of response from the Council. Please can you appoint someone to lead the charge? We and many others are keen to help. Will someone get in touch?

Mark Fermor. Chair, Shropshire Cycle Hub

Response

In response to the question raised, there are a number of current initiatives that Shropshire Council is developing. These are the recent Full Council motion that asked for 20mph limits outside of all Shropshire Council schools, this proposal is being developed by officers and a paper is being presented to Full Council in September to propose a way forward noting that existing 20mph zones are already in situ. This council is also looking to improve and significantly enhance the Park and Ride Service in Shrewsbury to support cross town transport and connectivity to a wider public transport hub and details on this will follow in due course. We have also submitted expressions of interest building upon our electric bus trial for an electric bus town, albeit this is at very early stage, and we are working to support our wider bus services via government grants. Currently, the response to COVID 19 and social distancing is developing interventions such as one-way systems, partial or complete road closures, cycle lanes and wider footpaths to promote active travel, these details are on the council's web site. These interventions will be monitored and assessed, and where there are positive benefits that attract community support, consideration to formalising arrangements will be undertaken, currently officers are fully engaged on this work.

It's also clear that we need via LTP4 a robust Cycling and Walking Plan, and where the council has made previous interventions and supported with infrastructure, it is obvious that the context, need and approach now needs to be different in how we approach and deliver upon this agenda in light of COVID and Government guidance and direction of travel. Work with our partners on the Big Town Plan and movement strategies demonstrate clear improvements that could be achieved.

² <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/our-blog/policy-positions/all/all/our-position-on-20-mph-speed-limits-in-built-up-areas>

Currently the immediate response to COVID is all consuming, however a more strategic approach, policy development and a cycling and walking plan supported in a council approved Local Transport Plan is a key development that needs to be brought forward

4 Question from David Cooper

At the Cabinet's next meeting on 6th July 2020, the Cabinet is due to consider a draft of the Local Plan for authority to proceed to regulation 19 consultation. Can you confirm that there will be no new proposals for sites, included in that draft plan, which have not been subject to a regulation 18 consultation?

Response

The contents of the draft Local Plan will be made available on Friday 26th June ahead of Cabinet on 6th July. I therefore cannot confirm the contents at this stage. Should the draft Local Plan include proposed allocations which were not subject to the 'preferred sites consultation' between November 2018 and February 2019 under Regulation 18, the public will have sufficient opportunity to comment on their inclusion through the Regulation 19 consultation.

5 Question from Nick Saxby

Will Shropshire Council support the Local Electricity Bill?

This bill had its first reading in the House of Commons on Wednesday of this week (June 10th 2020).

(Draft of the bill: <https://powerforpeople.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Local-Electricity-Bill.pdf>)

I am strongly in favour of this bill. I believe that it will bring about great opportunity for renewable energy projects to increase their positive impact for local communities. The bill seeks to amend regulations in the energy sector which currently prohibit renewable energy producers to sell directly to local consumers. Current arrangements favour large energy companies, and stifle small scale renewable energy production. If the bill passes, it will make small scale local energy projects cost effective.

Shropshire Council has spoken several times of their commitment to carbon reduction and improvement in renewable energy infrastructure, yet I note that the council has not given an endorsement of support to this bill as many other local authorities have.

I am a part of a project in Shropshire to develop renewable energy in the county. I have seen the great potential that our region has for becoming a substantial hub for green energy development. Several town/parish councils in the county have given their support to this bill. I feel it would be remiss of Shropshire Council not to join them.

If Shropshire Council does indeed value climate action, please pledge support to this bill by completing the online form: <https://powerforpeople.org.uk/the-local-electricity->

[bill/organisation-sign-up/](#), and writing to the campaign at info@powerforpeople.org.uk. Given its significant potential to improve both the clean energy provision in the United Kingdom, and the empowerment of local communities, I would be perplexed why you would not.

I would greatly appreciate a response as to whether the council will indeed support this bill, or an explanation of why it will not.

Response

Having taken advice from colleagues, it is our view that the success of the Bill is desirable not only for climate change but also for ourselves as local authorities if we are to be able to deliver on a number of climate-related objectives such as the ability to improve the resilience of local energy supplies and to improve the carbon performance of our local communities.

For a local renewable project to supply their local community seems so obvious that it comes as a shock to many to find that they simply can't. The loss of the Government 'Feed in Tariffs' has made community energy schemes far more marginal and this will only be addressed by increasing what they can charge for their energy unless an alternative form of subsidy is introduced. Current energy market conditions and policy changes made by Ofgem currently disadvantage smaller community scale renewables and storage suppliers.

6 Question from Mary Davies

The government is committed to ban all new petrol, diesel or hybrid cars by 2035 and is currently considering introducing a scrappage scheme in which drivers could be given up to £6,000 to trade in their diesel or petrol cars for an electric one.

In order to encourage more people to switch to electric cars, is the Council gearing up for this potential surge in demand by ensuring all future developments will have electric charging points? Also, please confirm if the Council is planning to install electric charging points at their offices and car parks for use by staff and the public. If so what is the current position and what is the estimated timescale for when this will be done by.

Response

The Council have undertaken consultations with suppliers of charging points and where best to initially site these, in the context of the network that is being rolled out by commercial providers across Shropshire and the Country. Part of this initial review was to review the potential locations for charging points at Council buildings and its other locations, which included car parks, the Council depots and the Park & Ride sites. Timescales for their implementation have not as yet been clarified but we will be able to provide an update on this in due course.

It would perhaps be also helpful to highlight that the Council are also exploring options to electrify its own fleet of vehicles, its Car Club vehicles for staff travel and has recently submitted an Expression of Interest to the DfT to provide for electric buses in Shrewsbury.

We did receive a grant from HE to install two rapid 47kw charging points on the A49 southern corridor. These are located in Church Stretton Easthope car park and Ludlow Lower Galdeford car park. Both are now operational and open to the public as of last month.