

CABINET 2 NOVEMBER 2020

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

1 Question from Rob Mills

Given the Council's unanimous vote at the last Council meeting to support the new LTN 1/20 standards for cycling infrastructure and the unanimous support for School Streets at the Council in July, both of which are key elements of the Prime Minister's Gear Change policy, will the Cabinet now consider implementing other elements of that policy?

Response: Cllr Steve Davenport, Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport

I fully support the principle of the Gear Change policy and the councils work on a new Local Transport Plan will be informed by that document. Current levels of annual funding from government for highways improvements however make wholesale endorsement of the policy unaffordable unless the pipeline of assured funding and skills support that is referred to in the document is in place. I am therefore unable to commit to full implementation of the other elements of that policy until more details of the funding pipeline and support available from the new body Active Travel England are shared with local authorities.

2. Question from Nick Saxby

Will The Council make efforts to bring Whitchurch Swimming Centre back into operation for the community?

People in Whitchurch are becoming increasingly upset with the limited community services available to them.

Whitchurch is a growing, thriving town, but needs to have the services and amenities which reflect this. The closure of Whitchurch Swimming Centre is understandable in the context of the covid outbreak. Public health and safety is paramount, and it is reasonable to have closed the pool to prevent the spread of disease. However, the perceived permanency of this closure is becoming frustrating to people in Whitchurch.

Whitchurch residents have been directed towards leisure centres in other towns; however, this is an alternative which is not easily accessible for many members of the community in terms of time and transportation.

Given the importance of exercise for people's wellbeing, as well as the popularity and impact of swimming on health and fitness, I believe that a solution-oriented approach is needed, with a drive to reopen the pool.

The contract manager for Shropshire Community Leisure stated that "*extensive investigations into the feasibility of reopening Whitchurch Swimming Pool*" have taken place. It would be helpful to have access to these findings; having a clearer idea of the challenges, will make it easier to source solutions.

It is unlikely that social distancing measures will be removed any time in the near future, therefore, we should be looking to do everything we can to adapt to them. Simply closing the pool with no ambition to find creative solution, does not seem to be in the public interest.

I am also curious about the financial situation as it now stands. With Shropshire Community Leisure Trust under contract to provide the Whitchurch swimming facilities, but currently unable to do so, to what extent is the council still paying for these contracted services?

I note that the swimming facilities at Market Drayton and The Quarry have been able to reopen as a result of works undertaken to improve their ventilation system. With all of that in mind, I would appreciate receiving an answer to the following questions:

RESPONSE: Councillor Lezley Picton, Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Waste and Communications

The Council, along with Shropshire Community Leisure Trust ARE making efforts to bring Whitchurch Swimming Centre into operation. It is unfortunate that there is a 'perceived permanency' of the closure but it is understandable. The bottom line, however, is that until the social distancing rules are relaxed it isn't possible to provide a Covid-19 secure environment to allow access. The priority in all cases where access to Council buildings is considered is the safety of the users, staff and the community. Where risks can be mitigated effectively a facility will open.

> If there is a case in principle to invest in centres (such as Market Drayton) to make them viable in the current climate, why is the Whitchurch facility not deserving of such investment?

Whitchurch Swimming Centre continues to receive investment from Shropshire Council. If, the only factor preventing the facility from opening was ventilation then the facility would have re-opened. As I said before our inability to open the facility whilst complying with government guidance around social distancing is the main problem although the situation is further clouded by a water leak in the pool. Shropshire Council's Property Services team, working in partnership with the Trust, are investigating the cause of the leak. Once investigations are complete and a solution identified a decision can be made as to the feasibility for undertaking the required work. It is a complex process and potential causes are gradually being eliminated. There is a substantial cost to this investigative work, and therefore the Council and the Trust ARE investing in the centre.

> Does the council have a clear pathway or plan towards reopening the swimming centre?

The pathway is to identify a solution to the water leak whilst at the same time attempting to develop procedures for a currently COVID non-compliant building.

> Can you release the details of the findings of the feasibility study, for public review?

No, as Investigations are still taking place.

> Can you provide any details about the swimming centre's financial position; the extent to which the council is still paying for contracted services, and which entities are receiving compensation for the closure, and how this may be being spent?

The Council are contractually obliged to continue paying the Trust. External legal advice was sought at the beginning of the lockdown period which confirmed this. The Council also have funding agreements with other facility operators which are being honoured. On an

open-book basis the Council have made additional revenue support payments to all facility operators due to the loss of income incurred due to the closure of leisure centres.

Question 3 Slawomir Adam Fejfer

Due to increasing traffic and the need to observe COVID social measures what steps are Cabinet planning to take to follow a government policy and provide extra safety for those, including children, to safely cross Belvidere Bridge on Belvidere Road Shrewsbury. This access is especially busy at the start and end of the school day by students from Belvidere, Crowmere, and St. Giles schools?

RESPONSE: Councillor Steve Davenport, Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport

The council has undertaken many initiatives across the county to widen footways, implement pedestrian one way systems or close roads to allow full pedestrianisation in areas where there is the highest risk. The council is obviously unable to implement measures on all footways however and therefore are focussing on those areas where there is likely to be prolonged exposure to others. At present there are no plans to undertake additional safety measures at Belvidere Bridge but the Council will continue to monitor the situation and review measures if necessary.

Question 4 Slawomir Adam Fejfer

In July 2020 Council overwhelmingly voted for the Liberal Democrats motion which included the following words

“As COVID-19 restrictions ease, the Government is encouraging people to walk and cycle, where possible, instead of taking public transport or returning to their cars. - The Government has stated that it aims to have all school children returning to school in September 2020. - The Government has specifically stated that it wishes more children to walk and cycle to school. - To enable this the Government has announced a £250 million ‘Emergency Active Travel Fund’ for temporary infrastructure to enable safe walking and cycling – of which, Shropshire has been allocated an indicative funding allocation of £432,000. 20% of this money was available in ‘tranche one’ (June 2020), the remaining 80% is available in ‘tranche two’ (Summer 2020). - The Secretary of State for Transport, Grant Shapps, issued new Statutory Guidance on 9 May to all Highways Authorities, requiring them to deliver ‘transformative change’ within an urgent timeframe. - Measures listed under the Statutory Guidance include (but are not limited to) ‘pop-up’ cycle facilities, widening footways, ‘school streets’ schemes, and reducing speed limits. - The guidance further states that ‘measures should be taken as swiftly as possible, and in any event within weeks, given the urgent need to change travel habits before the restart takes full effect.....’

The aim of Government and this motion was and are to reduce traffic by schools during pick up and drop off times; to make the roads outside and near our schools safer for children to walk and cycle along. Can a list of which schools, where this has been implemented since the July meeting, was held be published. How long does the cabinet think it will take to fully implement this important and much-needed initiative.

RESPONSE: Councillor Steve Davenport, Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport

The council received £86k within 'Tranche 1' of the Emergency Active Travel Fund which it has combined with grant funding for Reopening High Streets to support travel solutions into our town centres. Whilst the council have been given an indicative allocation for 'Tranche 2' there was a requirement to submit bids to the Department for Transport to access that funding, with opportunities to bid for larger amounts where needs could be demonstrated. Shropshire Council have submitted a bid of £1.6m to extend the number of active travel measures available. Whilst a response was anticipated in September the council has not yet received feedback on what our final allocation will be but have been advised that the council will be informed in November. The council have therefore been unable to progress further initiatives at this time. At its meeting in September the Cabinet agreed to a separate programme of 20mph schemes around schools within Shropshire which would review all schools in the County and consider opportunities for broader "school street" initiatives as part of these reviews.

Question 5 Public Question from Shropshire Playing Fields Association – David Kilby Secretary

Shropshire Playing Fields Association is supportive of there being a Playing Pitch Strategy for Shropshire but would like the whole issue of 'accessibility' to playing pitches to be dealt with more robustly in the report before Shropshire Council agree to the report being used for the purposes stated in the report.

The **Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy** being put before Cabinet today states it will be an evidence base document for the Local Plan Review and that the strategy will be capable of:

> addressing issues of **accessibility**, quality, and management with regard to facility provision.

The **vision** set out by Shropshire Council in the document states:

An accessible high quality and sustainable network of sports pitches and other outdoor sports facilities which supports increased sports participation by all residents at all levels of play from grassroots to elite.

Question

Do the members and Officers agree with Shropshire Playing Fields Association that this strategy document does not come close to adhering to Sport England Guidelines (as recommended by NPPF) with regard to the section that is meant to focus on 'accessibility' therefore would not in its present format stand up to scrutiny at a public inquiry as a sufficiently robust study?

RESPONSE: Councillor Lezley Picton, Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Waste and Communications

Throughout the whole process we have been working with Sport England and the 7 National Governing Bodies of Sport referenced within this strategy (Football, Rugby, Hockey, Cricket, Tennis, Netball and Bowls) and have followed Sport England's Playing Pitch guidance. Each NGB provided feedback and amendments to the documents, where deemed necessary, to give an accurate representation to protect, enhance and provide sporting provision across Shropshire to meet current and future levels of demand. All NGB's have now signed off on their respective sections and Sport England have signed off the whole Strategy and associated documents.

Throughout the process (KKP conducted non-technical site assessments on all sporting provision included within the agreed scope of Shropshire Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy (PPOSS). Each of the various sports non-technical assessments asks relevant questions surrounding the access and availability of the sites. The answer to these questions in turn has affected the overall quality score. Although it is not explicitly detailed this has been factored into each quality score for each site.

In addition, clubs are surveyed within each sport and asked relevant questions surrounding pricing/access and availability. These are referenced throughout the report where appropriate for example Shawbury United FC having to travel to Ludlow to access suitable provision and Market Drayton HC exporting its demand to Newcastle-under-Lyme.

We wonder how accessibility can be questioned in the manor it has given the level of detail provided. Further, the reports have been signed off by SE and the NGBs and therefore accessibility issues are clearly presented to their satisfaction and therefore the points raised do not in any way affect the robustness of the Shropshire PPOSS.