

CABINET
8 MARCH 2021
PUBLIC QUESTIONS

1. From Nick Saxby

Can the Council commit to a timetable for opening Whitchurch Swimming Centre?

As you will of course be aware, the government has laid out the roadmap for the easing of covid control measures. With this in mind, I am writing to the Council once again regarding Whitchurch's swimming pool, and the plans for getting it reopened. The government has said that 'Step 2' of their plan will begin "*no earlier than 12 April*", and in this step "*indoor leisure facilities, such as gyms and swimming pools, will also reopen*".

Now that there is a clear roadmap from government for opening up services again, will Shropshire Council also commit to plans for the pool's reopening? Over the past year, we have been told that it is impossible for Whitchurch's pool to open. We have also been told that the Council and its contractors have explored all options and worked hard to try and find solutions, yet we have not heard anything about these options, or what work has actually been done to try and get the pool open.

Can the Council now share anything about what this work was? This was also asked for as part of the recent local petition, but nothing was forthcoming.

I have been disappointed by the lack of aspiration and creativity from this Council in trying to find solutions to adapt the centre for social distancing, to enable people to swim. It seems that the strategy has simply been to wait for restrictions to ease, rather than be proactive. However, I hope that now the Council will finally be able to make assurances about making swimming provision available to the people of Whitchurch again in the very near future.

I would like to remind the Council of Swim England's position that: "*we have robust, scientific evidence to prove pools are safe and provide unique benefits for people of all ages*".

To summarise, I would like answers to the following questions specifically:

Will Shropshire Council commit to a timetable for the reopening of Whitchurch Swimming Centre?

Can the Council explain the “extensive” work which has taken place thus far to make the pool usable in the interim?

Ø Will Shropshire Council commit to a timetable for the reopening of Whitchurch Swimming Centre?

The Council of Swim England’s position that there is “robust, scientific evidence to prove pools are safe and provide unique benefits for people of all ages” is only the case if all Covid secure criteria are met, which unfortunately does not apply to Whitchurch Pool.

The Council are unable to commit to a specific timetable for reopening the swimming centre as investigative work to identify the cause of the leak is on-going. Once that has been identified a programme for repair can be established, taking into account the extent of those repairs and provisional costs. Whilst the investigative work continues the Council are taking the opportunity to undertake an intrusive conditions survey of the facility due to issues that have come to light during investigations. The cost of undertaking this survey is £8,300 and will take place in the week commencing 15th March with results available towards the end of the month.

The effects of the pandemic have prevented investigative work taking place as promptly as we would have liked which is extremely frustrating.

Ø Can the Council explain the “extensive” work which has taken place thus far to make the pool usable in the interim?

Extensive work undertaken and planned is as follows:

- The initial excavations to locate part of the pool filter system pipework in the pool walkways was carried out to a depth of 600mm. Excavations to the deep end suction pipe were extended and deepened to allow replacement of leaking pipework. Deeper excavations were required due to unstable ground. The structural engineer was asked to revisit and provide further guidance on this aspect.
- All four skimmers to the deep end, plus associated pipework set within walkways will need to be replaced. The entire deep end walkway must be excavated for any new skimmer pipework to be installed, with a specialist contractor to be employed to build the new skimmers in place.
- Additional scaffolding was required to assist the shoring up of the pool walls and provide safe working conditions for the contractors.
- To facilitate the skimmer/pipework replacement works the existing high level pool cover mechanism must be dismantled and re-assembled by a specialist

contractor. This substantial structure will need to be safety dismantled and re-erected.

- Part test removal of the shallow end floor panels has been carried out. The whole area of floor panels need to be removed, for examination and testing of the integrity of the pool floor.
- The existing pool filters need repair at approximately £6k if the pool is to be used in the short term. However, should the facility life be long term they should be considered for replacement at approximately £20k.
- The tile surfaces to the surrounding walk ways need to be completely replaced. This is either due to excavations undertaken or because areas of tiles are lifting due to expansion or underlying floor issues.

Spend to date on initial investigations is approximately £11,000. The estimated budget to undertake on-going investigative work and remedial repairs is £50,000 with the potential to increase.

At a cost of £2,500 the Council have engaged a Quantity Surveyor and consultant to provide estimated costs and a needs assessment for a potential replacement facility in Whitchurch. Subject to the findings of their work, and to further local community and stakeholder consultation, options under consideration may include:

Option 1 – 6 lane x 25m with and without moveable floor

Option 2 – 6 lane x 25m with and without moveable floor plus a 35 station fitness suite

Option 3 – 6 lane x 25m with and without moveable floor plus a 35 station fitness suite and dance studio

2. From Helen Morgan

What steps can be taken to enforce speed limits on North Shropshire's Roads?

I have become increasingly aware over recent months of the problem of speeding traffic on busy roads through North Shropshire's villages. In most cases 30 or 40 MPH zones are already in place, but they are ignored by many drivers.

This problem has been addressed by some of our Parish Councils by installing solar powered speed warning signs. These are helpful as a reminder, but once regular through traffic has identified that there is no operational speed camera to enforce the limits, they lose their impact, and the speeding continues. This is the case even outside our primary schools, where young children may be crossing the road.

There are many villages affected on all of our busy routes, and these include the A528 (Shrewsbury to Ellesmere Road) the B4397 (through Ruyton XI Towns,

Baschurch and Myddle) and the A495 (Oswestry to Whitchurch through Ellesmere). Here, speeding traffic includes large numbers of HGVs and other commercial vehicles. This not only represents a danger to members of the public, but is also disruptive to residents, as heavy vehicles travelling at speed cause vibrations within houses that are close the road. This is in addition to the obvious issues of noise and air pollution.

A similar issue through Pant and Llanymynech has led to calls for the construction of a by-pass, but this course of action is clearly not viable for all of the villages affected, or deliverable in a short timescale, and the environmental impact is controversial. .

Communities along these routes have responded to the issue – for example by forming their own ‘speed action groups’ and putting up an increasing number of signs to encourage drivers to slow down. However I believe they would be better served by permanent enforcement or traffic calming measures, for example operational speed cameras, or an increased number of pedestrian crossings both to help with safe crossing and slow down the through-traffic. It also seems desirable to consider whether these roads are appropriate for the size and speed of some of the vehicles using them regularly.

Therefore I would like to put the following questions to Shropshire Council’s Cabinet:

- ***Can the council commit to better enforcement of speed limits on North Shropshire’s roads?***
- ***Can the council commit to conduct a review both of the appropriateness of speed limits on busy roads through and approaching North Shropshire’s villages, and the suitability of those routes for larger HGVs that are capable of travelling at high speed?***

Thank you for taking the time to consider my concerns

Response

Indeed speeding or the perception of speeding is a key concern to our towns and villages and forms a key element of the work for our Traffic Engineering team. Work with our towns and parish councils on road safety schemes, providing vehicle activated signs (VAS) and work on reducing serious accidents and injuries is ongoing (as reported to the Council’s Place Overview Committee on 2nd March 2021). Speed enforcement is a police matter and a West Mercia Road Safety Partnership approach is in place for mobile speed cameras, we can advise them of, and advocate, your concerns.

We can also review the appropriateness of speed limits but would also add that some of the trunk roads will be managed by Highways England and this will be their responsibility.