

**13/03/24 CABINET
MEMBER QUESTIONS**

Question from:	Rachel Connolly	
Subject:	Bridgnorth Town Centre Parking & Public Realms Works	
Portfolio Holder:	Gwilym Butler	Approved 12/03

Bridgnorth Town Centre Parking and Public Realm Works” was included in the Council’s Capital Strategy Programme with £4.5m investment and approved by Council in February 2022 and March and September 2023.

Bridgnorth Town Centre Traffic and Public Realm Works has been removed from Appendix C from the Priority Capital Schemes Schedule for 2023/24 to 2028/29. The scheme no longer exists on either the list of priority schemes, or those in delivery.

The report was voted through by a majority of members, and thus replaces the previous versions of the Capital Strategy programme.

It appears that the Bridgnorth Town Centre Public Realm Works has been deprioritised.

When questioned during these meetings as to the meaning of this omission, members were given verbal assurances that the commitment to investing £4.5m in Bridgnorth remains.

Could the Portfolio Holder for Finance please confirm in writing, from his verbal assurance, that the Council’s capital strategy programme of February 2024 retains its commitment to the aspirational scheme in Bridgnorth, with an investment of £4.5m?

To provide clarity and context it is worth reaffirming the process by which the Capital Programme and Capital Strategy are managed because they are quite distinct.

1. Capital Programme Schemes – These are part of the **Capital Programme** and are schemes that are signed off by Council with funding specifically allocated (following approval of a business case) and move the scheme to delivery stage.
2. Priority Schemes – These are part of the **Capital Strategy** and await formal funding approval subject to a business case. Once funding has been agreed these can move into the **Capital Programme**.
3. Aspirational schemes – These are schemes in the **Capital Strategy** that do not have a business case but have been identified with an outline budget (where possible) for further consideration.

Both priority and aspirational schemes share the same status in that no commitment is made to funding or delivery at that stage. The key difference between them is that a priority scheme is at a stage that is closer to moving into the Capital programme than an aspirational scheme at the point the Capital Strategy is approved.

The attached list of schemes comprises the ‘aspirational’ list of schemes referred to in the capital strategy recently approved by Cabinet and then Council. The Bridgnorth scheme

remains part of the overall list, with the total reflecting the total set out in para 8.12 of the report (£175.033m).

The scheme originally identified as a 'priority scheme' in Bridgnorth was considered such as it had the potential to be self-financing. A business case to confirm this, however, was not completed. Without the ability to be self-financing the scheme cannot be deemed a priority scheme. A new scheme is being considered and the value and financing for that scheme will be assessed. The status of the Bridgnorth project and its budget were confirmed at the Future Bridgnorth Group meeting on the 24th October last year. The conceptual design work and business case was paused to reflect the decision that this scheme had moved from being a highway-led project to an economic-led project.

The scheme remains within the Capital Strategy as one of the named 'Aspirational' projects and has retained the £4.5m budget, although without the scheme being self-financing, the funding, by definition, no longer exists. This information should give confidence on the current position of the Bridgnorth proposals and confirm that they remain included in the overall capital strategy of the Council.

Could the Portfolio Holder for Finance please indicate in writing that the £4.5m for Bridgnorth High Street and Public Realm Works agreed at Council in Feb 2022 March 2023 and September 2023 is still available and the project is still designated as a Priority scheme, which was also approved at the above-mentioned Council meetings?

As detailed in the response to the first part of the question, the funding earmarked for the original scheme only existed as the scheme was self-financing. The shift in status in the Capital Strategy reflects the reality that the revised scheme is no longer self-financing. If the revised scheme remains within the Capital Strategy as an aspirational scheme, it will enable a business case to be identified and an appropriate budget and financing to be considered. Nevertheless, the previous budget of £4.5m has been retained within the Capital Strategy at the present time.



aspirational schemes
list.xlsx

Could the Portfolio Holder for Finance identify the cost of the work already undertaken by WSP, the Council's Built Environment Contractor, for the regeneration project?

The expenditure to date by WSP is circa £192,000

Question from:	Colin Taylor	
Subject:	Insurance Claims – Damaged Vehicles	
Portfolio Holder:	Dan Morris	Approved 12/03

In the light of all the problems with Potholes across the whole county, I would like to know how many claims have been made against the council for damaged vehicles, ie wrecked tyres, broken springs and suspensions etc. in the last year. If there is an increase in claims year on year what percentage increase has there been year on year. How much in compensation has been paid out to claimants. How many claims are paid out on first claim and how many on appeal.

I would like to know how many claims have been made against the council for damaged vehicles, i.e. wrecked tyres, broken springs and suspensions etc. in the last year.

Response:

- In the 12 months to 29 February 2024 a total of 654 claims for highway related vehicle damage were received.
- 631 of these claims relate to damage because of potholes.

If there is an increase in claims year on year what percentage increase has there been year on year.

Response:

- In the 12 months to 28 February 2023 a total of 484 claims for highway related vehicle damage were received (463 relating to potholes).
- This is a 35.1% increase year on year.

How much in compensation has been paid out to claimants.

Response:

- Payments of £89,312 have been raised in respect of claims received during the 12 months to 28 February 2023.
- Payments of £107,115 have been raised in respect of claims received during the 12 months to 29 February 2024.
- 140 of these claims are currently open and under investigation. Depending on the outcome of our investigations, this figure is likely to increase. Currently reserves of £102,110 are held against these open claims.

How many claims are paid out on first claim and how many on appeal.

Response:

- Each claim is fully investigated, and a liability decision made in line with the outcome of this process.
- We do not automatically issue a denial in the first instance, and if it is considered that the Council has no legal defence against a claim, liability will be accepted, and the claim will be settled promptly.
- Where the Council has a legal defence against a claim, such as a Section 58 defence under the Highways Act 1980, a denial will be issued explaining the reasons for this.

- Upon receipt of a challenge, a file will be reviewed and in almost all cases it is unlikely that the decision on a claim will be overturned unless new evidence has been presented.
- It is infrequent that any challenges are received, and as such this is not something that is recorded within the claims handling system.
- Where a denial of liability is maintained, the Claimant will be reminded that they are entitled to seek legal advice in respect of the matter.
- Litigation is infrequent, and just one of the 1,138 claims received over the last two years has entered litigation.

Question from:	Julia Buckley	
Subject:	Keir & WSP Contracts	
Portfolio Holder:	Dan Morris	DM approved

The Highways “term maintenance” contract with Kier and the WSP contract are two of the largest contracts for works from Shropshire Council. Could the portfolio holder for highways please confirm: 1. The annual value of these contracts? 2. How many sub-contractors are involved with delivery? 3. The names and postcodes of the sub-contractors? 4. What per centage of these contacts are delivered by Shropshire companies? If the Council insists on out-sourcing service delivery, we could take the opportunity to ensure the procurement supports our local businesses

1. The annual value of these contracts?

The Kier contact has an annual spend of circa £25m and circa £9m for WSP.

2. How many sub-contractors are involved with delivery?

Kier have 33 sub-contractors available on the Shropshire Contract.

3. The names and postcodes of the sub-contractors?

Kier have a supply chain of 33 Sub-Contractors, 11 of which (33%) are Shropshire based companies. However other national providers, such as Tarmac have quarry's and offices in Shropshire, Mid-Wales and the Midlands and employ large numbers of Shropshire based people.

WSP have very few sub-contractors, but 90% on the people employed on the Shropshire contract live in Shropshire.

4. What per centage of these contacts are delivered by Shropshire companies?

This has been answered in previous question, however I would like to remind you that circa £10m is also spent through council controlled ‘mixed economy’. This involves directly employed, interim employees and sub-contractors, all of which are Shropshire based.

Question from:	Andy Boddington	
Subject:	Recycling	
Portfolio Holder:	Ian Nellins- Awaiting approval	Gavin Waite (contact Kaylie)

The opposition to the closure of two household recycling centres to save £300K a year has been strong. A petition to save the Craven Arms HRC gained more than 5,000 signatures on the day it was launched. In contrast, the opposition to the proposal to charge for green waste collection has not been as strong. We are a very large county and increasing the distance people have to drive to the HRC will discourage recycling, encourage fly-tipping and go against the council's ambitions to become net zero.

Can I preface all of my answers with a general statement simply to reassure everyone that whilst the 2024/25 budget includes series of individual actions or areas where we are looking to achieve cost reductions, in delivering those savings we are focussed on trying to mitigate the impact as far as possible. So, yes, we do have to deliver savings, but we are exploring all possibilities as to how we achieve them.

Current HWRC provision levels

The Council has a statutory duty to provide sites at which residents can deposit their household waste free of charge and that are reasonably accessible to residents. The legislation does not specify how many sites an authority should provide and therefore the responsible authority is able to determine what is reasonably accessible based on local circumstances.

Could the cabinet ask officers to look again at this proposal and consider other options to achieve the same saving? These might include:

1) Examining increasing the proposed charge for collecting green waste from £52 a year to £60 a year – a measure than could raise £600K a year and cost 15p a week

There is presently no statutory duty to collect garden waste and whilst some councils collect free of charge the majority now charge for the service. There is no specific legislation that dictates what a council can charge, but charges are set on each councils' individual circumstances such as, cost of providing the service, local budget constraints and demand. The revenue generated can be used to offset other budget pressure and support the delivery of existing services.

To identify the required saving within the budget setting process a proposed charge of £52 was used for this basis however, several options in terms of charges were also provided by officers. This represents value for money when benchmarked against other authorities within our CIPFA group and equated to £1 per week. This will now be subject to public consultation and following the

responses received both Cabinet and Council approval will be required, giving ample opportunity for representations to be made.

2) Examining whether reducing the hours or the days that some HRCs are open would lead to savings that could help keep all five HRCs open.

This has previously been discussed with our contractor Veolia, but we have now requested that a detailed assessment of the costs and savings of the option to close all five sites for up to two days per week, although there will be some provision through the week all sites will still be open on a weekend.

Question from:	Kate Halliday	
Subject:	Flood Water Samples	
Portfolio Holder:	Cecilia Motley	CM approved 11.03.24

On 30th Jan 2024 ITV news reported that flood water samples tested from rivers around the UK have potential to pose a significant risk to human health. Round Our Way, a not-for-profit organisation supporting people impacted by climate change in the UK, sent flood water samples to a laboratory to determine the various levels of contamination following the storm Henk floods. The water samples were found to contain high levels of bacteria and pollution, after recent extreme weather had caused the rivers to flood into surrounding areas. The flood water samples were taken from a child's playground next to the River Severn (by the weir) in Shrewsbury, a housing estate near the river Mole in Surrey, and the River Ouse's in York. In all three areas, results showed ammonia levels that were above UK quality thresholds. In Surrey, York and Shrewsbury, flood water samples showed high levels of E.coli or clostridia, indicating fecal organisms in the flood water. During times of flooding (when there is an increased sewage discharge into our rivers) does public health analyse whether there is an increase in incidence of vomiting and / or diarrhoea. If not, could this be considered for the previous 3 flood episodes and going forwards as standard?

Response

Thank you for your question. Firstly, to reassure members and the public, that infection problems arising from floods in this Country are rare. Usually, any harmful bugs in floodwater become very diluted and present a low risk. The key risks from flooding during the acute phase is from exposure to contaminated water in the home or from contaminated clothing etc, injury (from submerged hazards) and in the post-flood recovery phase; mental health and possibly asthma-type presentations from as homes dry out.

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) (formerly Public Health England) is responsible for protecting every member of every community from the impact of infectious diseases. As part of their role their field services team do undertake syndromic surveillance, analysing information on diarrhoea and vomiting and gastrointestinal illness from a number of sources at a national, regional and local authority level and look in further detail if they pick up signals/case reports of illness etc in a geographical area. Some of this intelligence is shared in a restricted capacity with local Public Health Teams. In addition, local public health teams are notified of waterborne infections and provide information to the affected individual and request that they complete a questionnaire to try to identify any potential source.

In the past three months there have been four significant storms leading to flooding between 18th October 2023 to 2nd January 2024, with flood warnings on the Vyrnwy and the alerts on the Severn plus the Tern and Perry which empty into the Severn. Most of the tributaries flowing into the Severn were on flood alerts. The data available to UKHSA for Shropshire and also Worcestershire for comparison during or straight after the events, does not show any significant peaks at that time for vomiting and diarrhoea, with the exception of week 51 and 52 in 2023. This peak was also seen in a number of other areas that were not subject to flooding and also coincided with a peak in seasonal illness reported at that time, therefore the findings were inconclusive of links to flooding.

I can confirm, this data will continue to be monitored going forward and during floods this will be reported into any emergency response arrangements including through the multi-

agency Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG) arrangements which UKHSA and key partners are on.

Whilst rare there are a few precautions to be aware of when dealing with flooding which should prevent unnecessary additional health problems and surveillance in place to monitor for any change. In addition, we do signpost to information on the health risks of flooding, during any episodes. We would ask members to support pushing out the messaging available at [Your health and flooding | Shropshire Council](#) including advice that will reduce prevent exposure [Flooding and health: advice for the public - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Question from:	David Vasmer	
Subject:	NWRR	
Portfolio Holder:	Dan Morris/Gwilym Butler	Approved 12/03

At the Council meeting on February 29th it was reported that the Director of Place had authorised an “exceedance” over budget of £300,000 spending on the North West Relief Road. When I questioned this during the debate on the Road, I was told that the Director of Place had authority to approve spending of up to £500,000. When was this agreed and by whom? Are there any restrictions on how this exceedance is used? Apart from the extra spending on the North West Relief Road, has the Director of Place authorised any other items of spending over budget of up to £500,000

Full Council approve the Constitution, including Financial Procedure rules, which provide:-

“A.2.24. A manager or director, with the approval of the Section 151 Officer, may exercise virements on budgets within or outside of their own area for amounts below £500,000. There shall be full agreement between the manager(s) and, or director(s) with responsibility for the policy area.”

The Director of Place has authorised several other items of spending over budget of up to £500,000. There’s no requirement to report virements up to this value, but they are included, in aggregate, in the financial monitor each quarter. Summary details of virements in Revenue and Capital are provided.