

**COUNCIL 17 MAY 2018 - AGENDA ITEM 11
– QUESTION TIME**

Questions and written responses provided below.

QUESTION 1 – Mrs F M Oborski will ask Alan Amos:

"On Friday April 27th there was yet another Road Traffic Accident at the notorious Husum Way Junction with the A456 in my Division. Regularly there are accidents at this junction or at the adjacent dangerous junction of the A456 with Hurcott Lane in Cllr Rayner's Division. Many residents want either an island or traffic lights installed here but these solutions have been dismissed in the past, largely on cost grounds. Given that accidents are now occurring at least once a month and speed of traffic on the A456 is often a contributory factor would the Cabinet Member please ask Highways Officers to urgently investigate the much cheaper solution of : extending the 30mph Speed limit towards Blakedown on both sides of the A456 Dual Carriageway and installing permanent Speed Cameras on the Kidderminster side of the junction approaching Hurcott Lane and the Blakedown side of the carriageway approaching Husum Way and placing a Weight Limit on Borrington Road., Tennyson Way and Husum Way to discourage HGVs from using the route from Spennells Valley Road and through the Comberton and Offmore Estates as a short cut to the A456?"

Answer given

I thank Cllr Oborski for her question.

I undertook a site visit to this location with officers last week to see the situation for myself.

I do think we can enhance the safety situation at this junction in a number of ways.

Firstly, the lines and give way road markings need renewing as they are very worn. This will be done.

Secondly, we will be putting up some additional signage and there will be a new Give Way sign and post for traffic turning right into Hurcott Lane

Thirdly, we will further review the accidents at this location including injury and non - injury, gather new speed data and consider. We will also liaise with the Safer Roads Partnership to make them aware of any speeding issues for them to follow up as appropriate with enforcement.

On the question of the speed limit, at 40 mph it is correct for this location based on Department for Transport criteria and would have been altered if necessary during the Accident Remedial Scheme during 2010. With single lanes, a 40 mph limit buffer is safer and to extend the 30 mph limit would be unrealistic and likely to be generally ignored as such.

On a weight restriction, I would advise that imposing a Traffic Regulation Order on Borrington Road, Tennyson Way and Husum Way will depend on the traffic count that has now been ordered. We will give serious consideration to a TRO once we've received the data to see if such would be an appropriate.

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question, Mr Amos agreed to consider liaising with the Police about the possibility of introducing a 30mph speed limit as soon as accident data is available.

QUESTION 2 – Mrs F M Oborski will ask Alan Amos:

"Whilst I applaud the decision to open up the second lane of the A442 Worcester Rd Kidderminster where it exits the traffic island towards the Silverwoods Junction at the Worcester Road/Wilden Lane and Chester Rd South, Kidderminster, this will be of little assistance to residents of my Division wishing to turn right at this traffic island to access Chester Road and Spennells Valley Road. For these residents it is the large physical size of the traffic island and the restricted road lanes around it which causes the problems. Will the Cabinet Member please request Highways Dept Officers to Commission a study into increasing the capacity by reducing the size of the island?"

Answer given

I thank Cllr Oborski for her question.

I undertook a site visit to this location with officers last week to see the situation for myself.

I can confirm that the hatchings and lines were removed on Tuesday night as scheduled and on time. In addition to the extra exit lane, it is a location where further works form part of our planned update to this junction. Specifically, the works include revised lane markings, circulatory information arrows around the island and a second keep clear marking for right turners approaching from the south. These improvements are designed to improve traffic circulation and this will be monitored by the installation of a camera to provide us with data both before and after the works.

Due to the current location of the approaches to the roundabout it is unlikely that a reduction in the central island would be possible whilst retaining the required deviation to reduce traffic speeds. Higher traffic speeds combined with more weaving movements around a wider circulatory carriageway would increase accident potential creating a safety issue, which would not support a departure from standard design through reducing the size of the central island. The roundabout would have been designed to set design standards, which require sufficient deviation on through routes in order to reduce traffic speeds. My understanding is that a smaller traffic island and a wider circulatory system would increase vehicle speeds compared to a larger island and by reducing the gap between vehicles would consequently reduce road safety. In other words, it is not likely to be possible to reduce the central island design without a complete redesign of the whole junction; and there is no money for such a large and costly scheme.

QUESTION 3 – Mr P M McDonald will ask Lucy Hodgson:

"Would the Cabinet Member responsible agree that a programme should be implemented for the installation of water fountains throughout our country parks?"

Answer

The County Council manages the award winning Waseley Hills and Worcester Woods Country Parks. Both have a range of facilities including play areas, waymarked trails and cafes serving high quality food with an emphasis on local produce and fair trade. Free drinking water is available at both country parks during café opening hours which is the busiest time at our Country Parks.

Providing new water fountains, including infrastructure for connecting utilities, and ongoing maintenance would be cost prohibitive for the Countryside Service, which is currently 75% self-financing.

QUESTION 4 – Mr R C Lunn will ask Alan Amos:

"Can the Cabinet Member for Highways explain why work was carried out to complete the installation of a much needed crossing in Downsell Road, Webheath between 20:00 on Sunday April 15th and 03:30 on Monday April 16th, causing considerable noise, nuisance and disturbance to residents in that part of the road, when Ringway had 2 weeks to complete it?"

"Will he join with me in apologising to the residents for the unnecessary nuisance caused and what steps are being taken to ensure this does not happen again in other roads?"

Answer given

I thank Cllr Lunn for his question.

I was made aware of this incident the very day after it happened and received a full briefing from the officer.

The works in Downsell Road were originally programmed to be completed by 12 April, however the surfacing resource was not available until Sunday 15 April to complete the final surfacing works. The works started at 7 p.m. on Sunday 15 April when two way traffic signals were set up to allow the anti-skid to be completed with some lining work following on. All plant and equipment were removed from site at 4 a.m. Monday 16 April.

WCC were informed on Wednesday 11 April that works would be taking place on Sunday 15 April, it was assumed that these would be carried out during the daytime. Had we known that the works would take place over-night we would have pulled these works and requested them to be rescheduled for another time. As is normally the case, WCC will continue to agree the precise timings of works.

There is no excuse for this but I would just add that the County Councillors were informed on Friday 13 April that the crossing would be completed by the end of the weekend in time for Monday's school run. The zebra crossing was indeed operational on Monday 16 April and it was only Ridgway's determination to honour their commitment that persuaded them to do the overnight work.

The crossing was operational on the Monday morning and being used by the local community.

A full investigation into the matter was undertaken immediately, the fault was quickly identified, and both Ringway - the contractors - and WCC were quick to apologize. Given that lessons have been learned to avoid a repetition of this, and that the apologies were timely and appropriate, I intend to leave the matter there.

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question, Mr Amos agreed to check whether the Council was billed by Ringway for the work undertaken outside normal working hours and check the position with Diamond buses with regard to the removal of the bus stop on Downsell Road.

QUESTION 5 – Mr M E Jenkins will ask Marcus Hart:

"Can you provide me with figures for the number of primary, middle and high schools that have a counselling service, giving this as a proportion of all schools in the county?"

Answer given

I am advised that approximately one third of the county's schools have already accessed the newly-created CAMHS CAST (consultation, advice, support and training) team. The team provides schools and colleges with a named contact within CAMHS who can offer advice, support and training to those working with children and young people who are having difficulties with their emotional wellbeing or mental health. CAST can also give advice on referrals to CAMHS or other services.

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question, Mr Hart agreed to provide details of how the number of referrals to CAMHS for this Council compared to other councils and provide details to all councillors on the availability of online counselling services.

QUESTION 6 – Mr P Denham will ask Marcus Hart:

"Since I raised the issue about Riversides School last year with your colleague Cllr Roberts, about accommodating special needs children in a building which is not fit for purpose, I am aware that the school has been visited by Cllr Roberts, Mr Robin Walker MP and yourself, the last visit by you on 30 January this year.

Can you please tell me what has since been done to resolve this issue and when do you expect to relocate these students into suitable premises?"

Answer given

Officers have undertaken a High Needs Commissioning Review and as a result the Council wrote to all special schools seeking ideas for potential expansions in order to provide more special school places. In March 2018, an initial proposal was accepted in principle from the Advance Trust to develop the former De Montfort middle school site at Evesham. Officers have met with the school to discuss their plans and will now commission consultants to undertake an option appraisal of the site to establish the best use, including options for Riversides School.

The Council is committed to working with all schools in the best interest of the children and young people of Worcestershire. As Riversides in an academy, it remains for the Trust to ensure its facilities are fit for purpose and where necessary seek appropriate funding from the ESFA.

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question, Mr Hart agreed to ensure that the Academy are kept up to date with progress with finding a suitable alternative site for the Riversides School.

QUESTION 7 – Mr P Denham will ask Lucy Hodgson:

"Last time I asked you about unfilled school crossing patrol posts, you told me that about ten percent of schools entitled to a crossing patrol in the county were without one.

Can you please tell me whether there has since been any improvement in recruiting to these important child safety positions?"

Answer given

We currently have 58 School Crossing Patrols sites, four of these sites are vacant with adverts out for a replacement. We continue to focus effort on local recruitment campaigns through school newsletters / local posters as 84% of the current school crossing patrol workforce live within 2 miles of their designated site (35% live within ½ mile).

The County Council does offer road safety education (RSE) and practical pedestrian training to every first, primary or middle aged child in the county to try and prevent injury from crossing roads, and any injury sustained is unfortunate. We also offer RSE to high school pupils. The training is designed to develop the behaviours and attitudes of all participating school children for safe road use as pedestrians, passengers, cyclists and novice drivers. These are behaviours that are potentially life-long.

Supplementary Question

Half the school crossing patrol vacancies appeared to be in the Rainbow Hill Division. Perhaps the Cabinet Member could consider increasing the salaries of school crossing patrol staff to improve recruitment. Mrs Hodgson confirmed that a zebra crossing would be installed outside St Barnabas Primary School in the summer. She highlighted the particular safety issues facing school crossing patrol staff.

QUESTION 8 – Mrs J A Brunner will ask Alan Amos:

"Recently in Arrow Valley East division Severn Trent Water have replaced a main water pipe. This work had caused huge inconvenience to residents, schools, bus services, and businesses. As a result bus services had to be rerouted and two bus lanes had to be opened.

Would the Cabinet member with responsibility for highways please inform this council whether the tax payer picked up the bill for this huge inconvenience?"

Answer given

I thank Cllr Brunner for her question and can I at the same time congratulate her and Cllr Baker-Price on their very proactive response to this situation.

The Works promoter can pick up costs of the provision of alternative services due to road closures where an agreement has been reached beforehand. In this instance, an agreement was not reached; it was a late decision to use a shuttle bus to mitigate the full impact of the road closure and maintain this public service. The only expense that the County Council incurred was the temporary bus service which was put on, at a cost of £60 a day for 35 days; and we are now pursuing reimbursement of this from S-T.

I would add that S-T are actually on some penalties because, although the road closure was removed, S-T then confined all the works to the verge and divorced footways but closed down their permits, meaning that they submitted a Works Stop Notice which should indicate that they had completed the works and cleared the site. However, we then discovered that works were still going on, hence the section74 charge, so they have incurred a fine of £24,000 on it.

I would further add that I now receive quarterly performance reports on the utilities and I can inform Council that, in the last quarter, an amazing 19% of S-T inspections failed (that's 59 out of 303); and that we served 180 Fixed Penalty Notice Offences, equating to nearly half

of all the Notices we served in that period on all the utilities. We shall not let up in our efforts to bring about a significant improvement for the people of Worcestershire.

Supplementary Question

Utility companies should improve their communication with councillors, particularly local councillors. Mr Amos agreed with this sentiment and the need to improve the quality of work and time-keeping and would make every effort to hold utility companies to account and improve matters.

QUESTION 9 – Mr R M Udall will ask Karen May:

"Can the Cabinet Member with Responsibility confirm that she is aware of the decision of the County Council to declare the YMCA field in St John's as surplus to requirements and that attempts are being made to commercially dispose of this land, which would make many sporting clubs and teams, including the current England Homeless Rugby Team who have just become the Homeless Rugby International Champions, without a local ground to play and train. Effectively making The England National Homeless Rugby Team - homeless.

Our Public Health duty should ensure that County Council owned land which is currently used to support and promote physical activity for the local community, should be preserved.

Will she agree to ensure that public access and public community use is protected and that discussions are held with local agencies or charities to ensure the future of this field. Furthermore will she confirm that it will not be simply sold to the highest bidder and then lost to the local community?"

Answer given

The land is surplus to the council's direct delivery requirements. The site was leased to the YMCA in 2006 for a playing field in conjunction with their adjoining owned YMCA centre and hired to a number of local clubs and the England Homeless Rugby Team to use the field. In 2011 the lease to the YMCA expired and they didn't renew although a new lease was offered.

The Council's agents are reviewing the options to regularise the current use and protect the council's asset and informally exploring the options which could be available to the Council to dispose of this surplus site which will form part of the decision making process.

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question, Ms May agreed to speak to Mr Udall in private to discuss the future community use of the site.