

COUNCIL 15 JULY 2021 - AGENDA ITEM 7 – QUESTION TIME

Questions and written responses provided below.

QUESTION 1 – Cllr Josh Robinson asked Alan Amos:

“Does the Cabinet Member agree with residents of Lickey End, that any closure of School Lane as part of the A38 improvement plans is not acceptable?”

Answer

I thank Cllr Robinson for what is his Maiden Question.

Yes, I do agree with the residents of Lickey End about the closure of School Lane. I have listened to their representations and also to those from my colleagues Cllrs Karen May, Shirley Webb, and Kit Taylor. Consequently, the scheme that I will be putting forward will not include the closure of School Lane, and School Lane will remain open under the new proposals. This was one of the options and it is not one we are going to implement.

Supplementary Question

It was queried whether the right-hand turn would still be allowed, or would it be closed, allowing 180 vehicles at peak morning rush-hour to travel northbound. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways responded that before any decision was taken on the right-hand turn, he had asked officers to provide detailed information on the modelling exercises they had undertaken on it so he could consider the matter in detail.

QUESTION 2 – Cllr Jack Satterthwaite asked Alan Amos:

“After many years of waiting for adequate safe cycling routes that are physically separated from other traffic, when will the construction of a Malvern to Worcester cycle route finally begin?”

Answer

I thank Cllr Satterthwaite for what is his Maiden Question.

The proposal for a Worcester to Malvern walking and cycling route was set out in Local Transport Plan 4, adopted by the County Council in 2018.

On delivering this, I can confirm that a section of the route has been completed through the Southern Link Road phase 4 scheme with the new pedestrian and cycle bridge across Hams Way, linking to Old Road and Powick Old Bridge. Surfacing of Old Road has also been improved using the Active Travel Funding.

County Highways need to secure external funding for delivery of the remaining route from Powick to Malvern. In January 2020 we submitted a bid to the Department for Transport for Pinchpoint funding for this section of the route. Unfortunately, the DfT subsequently withdrew Pinchpoint funding. In June 2021 the link from the new bridge at Hams Way to Hospital Lane, Powick was included in the Levelling Up Fund bid submitted to the

Government by the Council. A decision on the bid is expected in Autumn 2021. This Hospital Lane, Powick, to Newlands, Malvern section is 2.5 miles.

I would point out that as the A449 Powick to Malvern is largely a 60 mph road, the cycle lane must be segregated and therefore 3 metres wide to comply with new government guidelines. The original Pinchpoint Fund bid was for £5m. for the whole corridor and additionally the Ketch-Kempsey corridor. We don't have the full costs for the necessary redesign for the route to comply with the new government guidelines but I can say that the increase in costs will be significant.

This is a priority route that I am keen to deliver and we will continue to explore other funding sources for the route to enable it to be completed. Whilst looking for alternative funding for this corridor, the delivery of it may be in multiple phases as funding becomes available, just like several other highways schemes.

Supplementary Question

Bearing in mind that previous bids have been labelled as 'too poor' to gain the available funding, what specific improvements have been made to cycling bids to try and achieve the funding in the future to deliver this bid? The Cabinet Member with Responsibility responded that funding had been provided for part of the bid and funding was being sought to complete the rest. A bid had been submitted and then the DfT subsequently changed the rules. A further bid had been submitted and the outcome was expected in the Autumn 2021. If the supplementary question referred to bids for phases 1 and 2 from the active travel fund, an extra £800,000 had been received from the Government for these bids.

QUESTION 3 – Cllr Richard Udall asked Marc Bayliss:

"The Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills will know of the proposed closure of Joy Mining, in my Division, which will see the loss of up to 200 quality, highly skilled engineering jobs in Worcester, the factory has been on the current site since 1925, formally known as Meco; it is the last of the many large engineering factories and manufacturers which used to exist on Bromyard Road.

Can the Cabinet Member comment on any discussions he might have already had with the owners of the site, what he can and will do to help the employees who will be losing their jobs and to ensure their skills are not lost to the local economy, furthermore, can he confirm what action he can take to ensure the site on Bromyard Road remains for employment use and is not lost to housing development?"

Answer

We are aware of the current situation in relation to Joy Mining (Komatsu) and we are liaising with the Department for Work and Pensions who are in touch directly with the company. As you will be aware the timescale for implementation for the changes has not yet been fully confirmed, but expected the early part of 2023. Contact has been made with the company via our partners and they are aware of our eagerness to support the business and employees where we can. We understand no final decisions have been made as yet and the company have said once these have been finalised they will be in touch so that we can put together a co-ordinated package of support where it is needed.

We are currently responding to a number of enquiries from companies wishing to locate to Worcestershire, we would always aim to find an alternative employment use for the site if and when this becomes available.

Supplementary Question

Assurances were sought about the use of this site given local opposition to it being lost to quality employment land and it was queried how the former Boughton Holt railway station could be utilised as part of the future transport infrastructure in the area, perhaps as a park and rail station for Worcester. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility commented that the Council would seek to retain the site for employment use. He had not seen any proposals for the use of former Boughton Holt railway station to date.

QUESTION 4 – Cllr Matt Jenkins asked Karen May:

"Can I ask the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Health and Wellbeing what the latest figures are for overweight and obese children in Worcestershire, and what steps are being taken to reduce these?"

Answer

The latest figures for Worcestershire are Reception age (4/5yrs), 21.3% are either overweight or obese compared to 22.6% nationally; for Year 6 (10/11yrs), 32.9% are overweight or obese compared to 34.6% nationally. The National Child Measurement programme is undertaken annually through schools, measurements were not fully completed last year due to Covid.

A feedback letter is sent to all parents/carers following measurement signposting families to local activities and opportunities and a health, exercise and nutrition support programme is available for families to take up. A wide range of prevention activity is available across the system by various agencies through leisure, food, planning, active travel, activate programmes and the voluntary sector.

Supplementary Question

In response to a query, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility undertook to encourage more schools to sign up to the "daily mile" which aimed to get children active while in school.

Cllr Jenkins asked about actions being taken to make roads safer for children to be able to walk and cycle to school. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility indicated that the County Council offered Bikeability cycle training to all schools in the County. Bikeability was supported by the DfT and was designed to give the next generation of children the skills and confidence to ride their bikes on today's roads.

QUESTION 5 – Cllr Natalie McVey asked Karen May:

"I am sure that we will all have been distressed by the news that as of 1 July, West Mercia Rape and Sexual Assault Support Centre have been forced to close their waiting list for referrals to their counselling service, due to a lack of adequate funding.

It is unacceptable that this unique, specialist service has to scratch around for funding every couple of years. Surely we can do better for some of the most vulnerable people in our County; survivors of the most heinous crimes.

My question to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility is:

How will Worcestershire County Council meet its moral obligation to ensure that this life saving service remains available to survivors, who include women, men and children from the age of 5?"

Answer

Worcestershire County Council is committed to collaborating with the PCC, Herefordshire Council and NHS partners to ensure vital support for victims of sexual abuse in the county can continue sustainably in the long term for the benefit of the residents of Worcestershire. In the coming weeks we will work with partners to better understand the level of need for counselling services for historical and other victims of sexual violence, how best to respond to those needs and the roles and responsibilities of partner organisations in meeting the needs of residents. We will then collectively be able to agree a sustainable, longer term solution with partners.

QUESTION 6 – Cllr Beverley Nielsen asked Marc Bayliss:

"In my division of Malvern Langland following a recent survey by Pickersleigh Community Project with 233 responses, residents noted that their top priority was being able to access new skills development and training. The government too have highlighted the importance of lifelong learning and adult education with their White Paper, Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth.

With the closure at the start of July of our local FE and adult education college, Malvern Hills College, by Warwickshire College Group having taken it on five years ago, over 800 adult students are now having to look elsewhere for skills development. I know there are many people in my division and across Malvern who feel passionately about the loss of this one hundred year old institution, whose dedicated staff are so highly esteemed, about its amazing contribution to life in our town, and its unique position in our county, region and beyond, as well as the many lives which have been transformed through minds opened up to new opportunity. They would be grateful to hear more about the Council's actions in prioritising access to skills development in arts, design and creativity, as well as lifelong learning in Malvern in light of the closure of Malvern Hills College and the actions being taken.

To add to their questions, I would ask if you would echo the words of Sir Antony Gormley who in providing support to the College in Malvern stated, "We must value the places where we can think through making and learn from each other in doing so. Art is the essential tool in making a future. We are not in the world only to make money but to contribute to the evolution of life itself - potentially a rich, positive and exciting venture. We do not need another complex of 'luxury' flats, but we do need Malvern Hills College".

Answer

Many thanks Beverley for your comments and questions in relation to the closure of Malvern Hills College. Worcestershire County Council, along with our partners within the Local Enterprise Partnership continue to be committed to improving skills and increasing employment opportunities for Worcestershire Residents. We know that the impact of the COVID pandemic has increased unemployment levels, with our young people being disproportionately affected. For example the rate of unemployment claimants in young people aged 18-24 has increased from 3.8% to 9.4% since the pandemic.

We, therefore, continue to focus on efforts in promoting job and training opportunities across Worcestershire through our www.worcestershirejobs.co.uk and are also working closely with the DWP in filling the 700 Kickstart placements we have across the County. This is along with all of the work we do with employment support providers, business and our schools. We also operate a successful adult learning service which offers a range of leisure lifelong learning programmes – you can find out more about the courses available on www.worcestershire.gov.uk/adultlearning. I would encourage any of the 800 adult

students you mention to take a look at the site and get in touch with the team if they need further support.

Supplementary Question

In response to request for further information about the discussions taking place with the parties involved in the closure of the college, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility indicated that he would continue to work with the local MP Harriet Baldwin who had led the campaign along with other local activists in the area to try and find a satisfactory outcome.