

## COUNCIL 14 SEPTEMBER 2023 - AGENDA ITEM 9 – QUESTION TIME

Questions and written responses provided below. Questions 3 was withdrawn by Cllr Mel Allcott.

**QUESTION 1** – Cllr Josh Robinson will ask Cllr Mike Rouse:

*“After years of trying to find ownership details for the wall on the steps leading up to St Johns Church in Bromsgrove, can the Cabinet Member assure me that everything is being done to resolve this issue?”*

### **Answer**

This issue has been investigated many times in the past and the Council are satisfied that neither boundary wall is the responsibility of Worcestershire County Council.

Officers have visited the location and tried to contact the owner. I understand that the local district council has now made contact.

### Supplementary question

In response to a query, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport agreed to take a constructive role in any discussions regarding the opening up of the steps leading up to St Johns Church in Bromsgrove and attend meetings about the issue.

**QUESTION 2** – Cllr Lynn Denham will ask Cllr Marcus Hart:

*“In the government’s Spring 2023 budget, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced he was providing an additional £33m over the next 3 years to increase the service provided to veterans, including support for those with serious physical injury resulting from their service and increasing the availability of veteran housing. It seems that the initial tranche of £10m for this financial year has been used to fund grants via the Armed Forces Covenant Trust for homeless veterans. None of the successful bids have any connection with Worcestershire.*

*This Council facilitates Worcestershire’s Armed Forces Covenant. What is being done to ensure that Worcestershire veterans get a fair share of government funding in 2024 and beyond?”*

### **Answer**

We welcome the announcement that the Office of Veteran Affairs has secured an additional 33 million to support our veterans and we look forward to seeing how The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust plan to develop their grant programmes in response to this additional funding. It is anticipated that they will align closely to the Government’s Veteran Strategy Action Plan and will call upon organisations such as the NHS, local authorities, other public bodies and the charitable sector, to deliver positive change for veterans. Worcestershire’s Armed Forces Covenant Partnership, Chaired by Cllr Richard Morris, is working hard with its stakeholders to seek changes to policy and practice as well as actively improving services in Worcestershire to make sure veterans and families have the support they need. And although Worcestershire did not benefit from the initial tranche of funding to support homeless veterans, a number of military charities working in Worcestershire have already

been awarded Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust funding for other projects, either directly or part of a regional grant portfolio. We are committed, through Worcestershire's Armed Forces Covenant Partnership to ensure that future funding programmes will be promoted, supported and encouraged to ensure Worcestershire gets its fair share. Worcestershire County Council continues to fund a dedicated Armed Forces Covenant Officer, shared with Herefordshire Council, to ensure those organisations have a good understanding of future funding opportunities together with statistical and local evidence of need.

#### Supplementary question

What processes were in place to ensure that the Council received its fair share of Government funding? The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities responded that the Council would continue to work with Stepway and other charities to put together bids that would find favour with the Covenant Trust Fund.

**QUESTION 3** - was withdrawn by the questioner at Council.

**QUESTION 4** – Cllr Richard Udall will ask Cllr Karen May:

*"Around 253,000 people in Worcestershire are supplied with artificially fluoridated water. However, this does not include any of Worcester, Pershore, most of the Wyre Forest District or areas west of the River Severn. Does she agree with me that fluoridated water is one of the most significant public health measures of the late twentieth century. Will she give a commitment to explore the expansion of fluoridation to all remaining parts of Worcestershire?"*

#### **Answer**

I am glad to see local Councillors supporting water fluoridation, especially for those areas in the county with a higher risk of poor oral health.

The Oral Health Foundation states that this is "the single most effective public health measure for reducing oral health inequalities and tooth decay rates, especially amongst children".

Provisions of the Health and Care Act 2022 have transferred the power to vary water fluoridation schemes to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care.

Dr Lisa McNally, Director of Public Health is liaising with NHS England Midlands' Consultant in Dental Public Health and the Department for Health and Social Care regarding the expansion of fluoridation in Worcestershire. We will ensure we keep Councillors briefed on progress.

Finally, to note that Public Health Worcestershire is doing a lot of work to promote oral health, including:

- distributing almost 50,000 adult toothbrushing packs to vulnerable groups in the community via various agencies, charities, and community groups;
- rolling out the Supervised Toothbrushing Scheme, providing a toolkit for staff in early years settings, teaching children to brush their teeth from a young age and encouraging home brushing;
- distributing Junior Toothbrushing Packs to every child at their 12-month Health Visitor checks; and
- training the wider workforce, including the Starting Well Partnership and Care Homes, on the key oral health messages.

#### Supplementary question

In response to a query, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Health and Well-being agreed that a report on Fluoridated water would be brought to a future meeting of Cabinet.

#### **QUESTION 5** – Cllr Dan Boatright-Greene will ask Cllr Adam Kent:

*"The BBC reported on 4 September 2023 that 38% of the state schools in England and Wales are past their estimated design life. Are Worcestershire schools in line with this estimate and if so, what is the plan to rectify this?"*

#### **Answer**

The Council is responsible for Community, Voluntary Controlled and Foundation Schools. Schools do not have a designated design life as typically they comprise a number of buildings of different types, constructed at different times and have had elements renewed over their life.

Regular condition surveys are undertaken from which the identified recommended works are prioritised in the annual capital programme.

The Council is not responsible for Academies, Voluntary Aided and Independent school buildings and does not hold information relating to these.

#### Supplementary question

In response to a concern about the costs associated with the maintenance of school buildings, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Corporate Services and Communication undertook to investigate any concerns raised by councillors about maintenance issues in schools on a needs basis.

#### **QUESTION 6** – Cllr Josh Robinson will ask Cllr Mike Rouse:

*"Bant Mill Road and Old Station Road become like a car park around school drop off times for Bromsgrove School, this has been a constant issue for local residents who cannot at time get off or onto their drives, would the Cabinet Member be willing to meet with me on site to see the issue first hand and see what more we can do to resolve it?"*

#### **Answer**

It is important to recognise that the congestion issues we are discussing occur for a limited period during weekdays, essentially amounting to a small fraction of the entire week. Moreover, it primarily affects those who have chosen to reside near a school, a decision that naturally comes with its share of challenges, including the one in question.

I must emphasise that our primary responsibility as the council is to facilitate the safe and smooth operation of school drop-off and pick-up times, focusing on the safety of the students.

Moreover, while the individual concerns of residents are noted, it is essential to retain a broader perspective that considers the overall well-being and functionality of the community as a whole. Implementing stringent restrictions through Traffic Regulation Orders (TRO) not only presents a significant financial burden on the council but may lead to further complications, including the displacement of traffic to neighbouring areas, creating a cycle of issues that could potentially be more problematic than the existing situation.

I would urge residents to exhibit understanding and patience, given that this inconvenience lasts for a short duration. Meanwhile, parents and guardians who are causing obstructions

should also take this as a reminder to be more considerate and adhere to the community principles of respect and cooperation.

Applying for the location to become a School Street site is a potential avenue to explore. However, he and residents must be aware that this would entail road closures during specific times, hindering their access even more.

I encourage constructive dialogue and community-led initiatives that foster a harmonious living environment for all. Given the councillor's experience and understanding of his constituency, I am confident that he is more than capable of orchestrating a meeting with all relevant parties to address this issue directly, a proactive approach that many members in this chamber have successfully undertaken in their respective divisions when faced with similar issues.

#### Supplementary question

In response to a request, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport suggested that it might be preferable for Cllr Robinson to meet with local stakeholders to find an appropriate solution rather than involve the Cabinet Member.

#### **QUESTION 7** – Cllr Mel Allcott will ask Cllr Mike Rouse:

*"I understand Kepax bridge is scheduled to be completed December 2025. The nearby river footpath WR-810 in Claines has been closed for 2 ½ years. At a prior Council meeting, on the back of a highways general update, I asked Cllr Alan Amos (whilst Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport) if funding could be provided to reopen the footpath and this was declined. I am now asking Cllr Mike Rouse (as Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport) if funding can be provided, to ensure this much loved, very popular and previously frequently used river footpath can be reopened, in conjunction with the opening of Kepax Bridge, for the benefit of residents, visitors, tourism and the local economy?"*

#### **Answer**

I thank Councillor Allcott for her question. Just before I respond to her substantive point regarding the public right of way, I should just point out that Kepax Bridge is due to open by the end of 2024 rather than December 2025 as stated in her question.

As Cllr Alcott is aware the path has been closed on safety grounds due to a collapse of the riverbank. Due to the difficult access and sensitive nature of the site the cost of reinstating the river bank has been estimated to be between approx. £0.5M to £1m so isn't considered feasible. Officers are still engaged with the relevant landowners and hope to avoid the path being permanently closed.

#### Supplementary question

In response to a query, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport agreed to meet Cllr Mel Allcott to discuss whether any progress could be made opening up footpath WR-810 in Claines.

#### **QUESTION 8** – Cllr Richard Udall will ask Cllr Tracey Onslow:

*"The west side of Worcester has five primary schools and one high school. Two of the primary schools are faith schools. The expected population growth of the area may indicate the number of schools and existing school places maybe inadequate. The infrastructure of some existing schools may also be questionable and may now require new investment. What plans does the Cabinet Member have for possible new schools or the expansion or improvements to existing schools which could accommodate such changes in demand?"*

## **Answer**

The West Worcester Urban Expansion (WWUE) site of 2,000+ new dwellings sits in the catchment areas of Broadheath CE Primary School at primary phase and Christopher Whitehead Language College and The Chantry High School Martley at Secondary phase.

Pupil projections indicate that the developments for the WWUE as submitted, will impact on pupil numbers within the area. A proposed site has been identified for a new two form entry (60 place per year group) primary and nursery school which is currently being planned to open in September 2028 (subject to build out and occupation rates). In the meantime, pupil forecasts indicate that primary schools within 2 miles of the development will be able to mitigate the places required ahead of the new primary school opening.

The County Council are seeking the costs on a cost per dwelling basis from the developer(s) from the Temple Laugherne site (whole of the West Worcester Urban Extension) towards the provision of secondary infrastructure (expansions) at Christopher Whitehead Language College and The Chantry High School, Martley. We are currently seeking updates on the build out and occupation rates and this will then inform when and where the secondary provision will be required.

Where Academy Schools require capital maintenance to address condition needs, to keep buildings safe and in good working order, they can apply for [Condition Improvement Funding \(CIF\)](#) in an annual bidding round.

### Supplementary question

In response a concern about the impact that building a new high school would have on the existing schools in St John's, Worcester, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education commented that consultation would take place on the building of any new school and existing provision would be taken into account when a decision was made.