

CABINET – 16 NOVEMBER 2021

ITEM 4 – QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS

Questions	Cabinet Member
<p>1. COUNCILLOR BRAD BAINES</p> <p>To ask the Cabinet Member whether the Cabinet currently intends on providing a specific budget allocation within the upcoming Budget Cycle towards accelerating planning and delivery of the Connecting Oxford project, in recognition of urgent need to alleviate chronic traffic within Oxford City, to ensure a modal shift to active travel and public transport, as well as to fulfil key policy commitments of the Fair Deal Alliance.</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR DUNCAN ENRIGHT, CABINET MEMBER FOR TRAVEL & DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY</p> <p>Funding for the planning of Connecting Oxford has already been secured via the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal. Delivery costs are expected to come from several sources: the Oxfordshire Bus Service Improvement Plan includes a budget allocation of £3 million to cover the cost of implementing the Connecting Oxford Traffic Filters. Costs associated with introducing the Connecting Oxford Workplace Parking Levy (WPL) are expected to be funded by borrowing against future income raised by the levy and following scheme approval by the Secretary of State (Department for Transport). Income raised by the WPL is also expected to fund supporting bus, cycle and pedestrian improvement schemes in and around Oxford, and to secure additional external funding including from the DfT.</p> <p>The desire to implement Connecting Oxford as quickly as possible is understood, however, given Connecting Oxford would be the biggest change to the city's transport network and traffic management arrangements in the city's history, it is vital the programme allows sufficient time to carry out the detailed scheme design and assessments, and more importantly, allows the council to engage and consult with the public before proceeding. This is planned to take place throughout 2022.</p>

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<p>2. COUNCILLOR BRAD BAINES</p> <p>The new LTCP commits this Council to a “well maintained highways network”, yet such a target needs to reflect the growing financial cost pressures of doing so because of Government cuts and the relative risks to different user groups of poorly maintained roads. As such, can the Cabinet Member commit to ensuring that the upcoming Highways Asset Management Strategy or the final version of the LTCP will include a financially sustainable plan for managing our highways stock and will prioritise the repair of cycleways and well-cycled roads ahead of those almost solely used by motor traffic?</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR TIM BEARDER, CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAY MANAGEMENT</p> <p>Some difficult decisions need to be made about where and how to most effectively invest the limited funding available not only to ensure compliance with our various statutory responsibilities as the Highway Authority, but also to make a positive contribution to this Councils priorities for a more accessible, active and integrated transport network.</p> <p>This is outlined in our 9 priorities.</p> <p>In order to achieve the right balance, we will be working with elected members to inform a revised Highways Asset Management Plan, which will lead to a programme that addresses the concerns such as you are raising.</p> <p>The revised Highways Asset Strategy and Plan will indeed see a greater focus and a proportionately higher level of investment for infrastructure that supports walking, cycling and other more sustainable transport choices.</p>
<p>3. COUNCILLOR DAVID BARTHOLOMEW</p> <p>South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) is proposing to borrow £ millions to build a new HQ at Didcot. Given that there are six councils across Oxfordshire (four district, one city, one county) with much existing surplus office space between them, surely effective consolidation and reallocation of property based on the principle of 'One Public Estate' might mean that no new building is needed. Could the Cabinet Member please advise how much he</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR CALUM MILLER, CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE</p> <p>The County Council's property team are actively engaging with estates colleagues across the public sector organisations operating in Oxfordshire under the One Public Estate Initiative to further develop our partnership agenda. Officers are working with all councils in the county, including SODC, to focus on and understand collective needs in respect of workforce planning strategy (agile working) so that challenges and opportunities</p>

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<p>has explored this option with SODC which would not only save money but would also be a much greener alternative.</p>	<p>for collaboration can be explored to achieve cost saving, revenue generation and a reduction in our carbon foot-print.</p>
<p>4. COUNCILLOR SALLY POVOLOTSKY</p> <p>I welcome the latest report on our Climate Targets and would like to thank officers and the Climate Action Team for their diligence. However, I am concerned around the reliance of gas in our schools and estates and whilst I embrace the challenges faced by energy system evolutions, we have heard from members and the public alike (Shrivenham residents address to Full Council in November) around the lack of progress in our schools to reduce carbon by design and installation of Gas Boilers. I would like to ask cabinet, when can we expect to see our administration ban the installation of gas boilers in our education settings and embrace options such as Heat Pumps, Electric Systems and retrofitting of PV solar options or exploration of Biomass and Geothermals? It's time we fuelled our education and not old fossil fuel powered boilers, I urge this cabinet to not only ban the installation of Gas boilers on new build schools alongside our district partners but also would like to know when we can expect to see a programme of retrofitting our 126 schools with new, lower or zero carbon solutions and embrace the renewable heat incentive grants to help sustain a rapid payback in technology investment. When can we expect to see action from this cabinet on zero carbon fuel for schools?</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR PETE SUDBURY, CABINET MEMBER FOR CLIMATE CHANGE DELIVERY & ENVIRONMENT</p> <p>The County Council is developing proposals for the introduction of a policy that will demand that all stand-alone new buildings including new schools are designed and constructed to carbon neutral standards. This would effectively remove gas boilers as a heating option. It is expected that this policy will be considered by Cabinet for adoption in early 2022. It is recognised that existing legal agreements in place, that fund or directly deliver new schools, are set against historic performance standards which will bring capital pressures.</p> <p>Projects already in design development continue to be designed to minimise the carbon impact wherever practicable to do so in light of funding and/or programme constraints, for example the project noted at Shrivenham is currently within the design phase where use of air sourced heat pumps is being proposed and Carterton Fire Station where funding has been secured to upgrade electrical infrastructure serving the site and enable air sourced heat pumps to be the heating source for the building. It should also be noted that the council has, for many years, embraced many new technologies in schools including air and ground sources heat pumps, PV's, solar not water, biomass and combined heat and power systems where appropriate and practicable to do so.</p> <p>The county council has supported our schools to secure Decarbonisation Grant at 4 sites which will result in the installation a heat pump system on one site and photo-voltaic /</p>

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	<p>battery systems at all 4 sites which are programmed for delivery by March 2022. We have also helped seek Decarbonisation Grant under phase 3 of the programme at 5 further school sites which could enable heat pump and insulation measures to be delivered. We will know in early 2022 whether we have been successful. The county council will continue to seek grant funding where practicable to do so but it is however recognised that ongoing bids for government grants are oversubscribed and there is not a published timetable for funding rounds. It is also the case that Decarbonisation Grant Funding is becoming more restrictive; it is now only available as top-up grant for low carbon solutions where “end of life” fossil fuel heating replacement is already funded.</p> <p>Whilst it is recognised that ongoing investment in schools sites is restricted (through revenue funding from central government used by schools to keep buildings water tight and operational, through a school condition allocation from central government that is prioritised for major capital works to ensure schools remain operational and through central government grant or planning obligations from developers which can only be used to provide additional pupil places), the county council is about to let a contract that will deliver support to schools to help them understand their energy use, and look for energy saving opportunities in their buildings.</p>