

CABINET – 12 FEBRUARY 2018
ITEM 4 – QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS

Questions received from the following Members:

From Councillor John Sanders to Councillor Constance

1. There is considerable disappointment that Frideswide Square is about to undergo disruption due to proposed road works. Why has this been deemed necessary so soon after the completion of the current design?

Answer

Frideswide Square is an innovative scheme, specifically designed with tight corners to keep the traffic speeds low so that it is safe for all. Unfortunately, as a consequence of unlawful driving, some damage to kerbing and slabs has been caused which require repairing.

At the same time we are taking the opportunity to install new dropped kerbs near the railway station to assist cyclists and to introduce improvements to help visually impaired users at all crossing points.

Phasing of the works will however be supported by tailored traffic management and whilst some delays can be expected disruption will be kept to a minimum by using manual traffic management during the daytime.

2. There is concern that the widened pavement in Oxford High Street near Turl Street has obstructed bus traffic. What measures does the Cabinet Member's department propose to carry out to ameliorate this problem?

Answer

The pavement widening was proposed because we and the bus companies knew these bus stops would become more popular after Westgate opened, and we all wanted to provide extra space for the waiting passengers.

However the stops are in fact so popular that bus dwell times are long and this is exacerbating the blockages.

We are therefore considering changes to bus stops, loading bays and taxi bays in the area as well as changes to the pavement itself.

Proposals are being drawn up now, there will be consultation on the proposals as soon as they are ready.

3. From Councillor Howson to Councillor Hibbert Biles

'In light of the recent Section 8 report from Ofsted on St Gregory the Great School what steps can the county council take to reassure parents that the school will provide a satisfactory and safe education for their children?'

Answer

The situation at the school is clearly very concerning and the council is seeking assurances from the school / academy sponsor that every effort is being made to improve standards for pupils. We have also expressed concerns to the Schools Commissioner, who oversees the performance of academies.

Clearly the council cannot offer reassurances it is not in a position to make. It is ultimately the role of the Schools Commissioner to step in where necessary to ensure academies are providing an acceptable standard of education.

4. From Councillor Buckley to Councillor Hudspeth

' The proposal for an Oxford-Cambridge Expressway is currently causing alarm and inflicting planning blight on many residents in the county, living in locations where this new road could potentially be routed. Depending on the choice of corridor, it could for example mean bulldozing of homes in Botley, or loss of huge areas of Green Belt south of Oxford, with massive impacts on communities affected.

Thank you for writing to Highways England (HE), expressing this Council's concern and its wish for a Public Inquiry into the need for the road. The Chair of the Oxfordshire Growth Board has also written to HE, urging HE 'very strongly, to engage in a full public consultation' on the choice of corridor. I understand that HE have recently written back to yourself and the chair of the Growth Board, refusing to engage in a full public consultation until after the corridor has been chosen later this year.

Could you please confirm that this is the case, and indicate what steps you will now be taking as our representative, to protest to HE about this dismissive

treatment of Oxfordshire residents, and to persuade HE to reverse their decision to exclude the public from their decision-making, at this pivotal stage of planning the new road.

Answer

I realise that council members were disappointed at the response from Highways England and with that in mind whenever I have been at meetings with Highways England I have pressed the representatives to take note of the request for a public enquiry.

From Councillor Kirsten Johnson to Councillor Hudspeth

5. Councillors were informed at the Growth Deal Briefing on 6 February that the infrastructure portion of the Growth Deal monies would be spent as prioritised in the most recent OxIS report. Having looked at this report in detail, I am unsure which cycle infrastructure projects will be prioritised. Could Cllr Hudspeth clarify which of the Oxford Cycling Network strategic cycle network proposals are being supported through the Growth Deal?

Answer

The infrastructure funding from the Growth Deal will be prioritised by the cost benefit of each scheme, which is linked to housing delivery and is not modal specific.

6. £60m of the Growth Deal is apportioned to Affordable Housing. Could this please be apportioned to 50% Keyworker Housing, and 50% truly affordable housing for local residents with local jobs, with an exclusion clause which prohibits buy-to-let?

Answer

The apportionment of the Affordable Homes funding has yet to be finalised and will depend on the development and type of housing. I will pass your suggestion on to the Growth Board for consideration.