

CABINET – 19 APRIL 2016
ITEM 4 – QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS

Question received from the following Members:

1. From Councillor Bulmer to Councillor Nimmo Smith

“Could the Cabinet member responsible for rail tell me what representations OCC can make regarding the fact that Network Rail have failed to carry out a landscape impact assessment in the AONB when erecting the gantries?”

Answer

“Further to the question from Councillor Bulmer regarding what impact assessment has been undertaken on the introduction of Gantries along the Great Western Railway through the North Wessex and Chiltern AONB.

OCC can confirm that Network Rail are currently undertaking a review of the Overhead Line Equipment (OLE) design and mitigation options within both the Chilterns and North Wessex Downs AONBs in order to fully address their obligations to have due regard for the impact on the landscapes. Network Rail are working with the Conservation Boards and Natural England on this, and will be setting up an Advisory Panel to include other stakeholders. Network Rail have also committed to undertake a public consultation on these outcomes later this year.

The length of railway in question where gantries have already been erected is the test track section for the route and therefore critical to the delivery of the whole electrification programme. Network Rail have provided written confirmation to undertake retrospective works within the AONBs based on the outcome of the above processes, subject to funding approval, and this is available on their website. <http://www.networkrail.co.uk/great-western-route-modernisation/oxfordshire/> “

2. From Councillor Howson to Councillor Tilley

“How many primary schools in each of the following categories are currently rated outstanding by Ofsted
community
voluntary
academy”

Answer

“The answer to Councillor Howson’s question is as follows:

There are currently 23 Outstanding Primary School in Oxfordshire:

Academy - 8

Community	-	8
Voluntary	-	7”

3. Councillor Smith to Councillor Nimmo Smith

“Would the cabinet member agree that taking away all parking spaces on both sides of highway designated as a B road in residential areas increases vehicle speed?”

Answer

“The speed on any road is predominantly dictated by the environment that the driver experiences and so the impact of removing parking would have to be considered alongside the nature of the road, how bendy it is, what forward visibility is available and how far back the properties are from the road. In addition if the parking is removed but then replaced by alternative measures then the impact could be to maintain the available road space for vehicles and in these circumstances we would not expect any significant change in average speed. However, in the theoretical situation where there is good visibility, a straight road and no additional changes are being made to the environment then the removal of parking from both sides of the road would increase the carriageway width and we would expect vehicle speeds to increase”

4. Councillor Smith to Councillor Nimmo Smith

“Given the large number of significant development that is about to impact the Headington area is the cabinet member confident that the county council officers have sufficient resources to co-ordinate the works so that a minimum of disruption is caused to residents and businesses?”

Answer

“The County Councils Network Co-ordination Team has made positive steps to provide an appropriate level of resource to deal with the demands resulting from the increase of developments expected in the City in order to mitigate their impact on the City’s road network.”

5. Councillor Bartholomew to Councillor Nimmo Smith

“Campaign group Need not Greed Oxon claims that only half of the county’s proposed housing is to meet ‘local need’; the rest is to meet a forced economic growth agenda.

According to the group, even allowing for a normal pattern of jobs growth, just 45,000 houses are required between now and 2031 to meet the needs of local residents – not 100,000 as proposed.

It goes on to say the remaining houses are linked to a 'committed growth' policy drawn up by the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership which proposes to create 85,000 new jobs in a County which already has almost full employment, and that if carried out, these proposals will not address affordability issues, but will change the rural character of Oxfordshire forever.

Could the Cabinet member please let me have his comments on these claims?"

Answer

"The statements quoted in the question are based on a misunderstanding of the status of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment which generated the 100,000 homes figure: Local authorities are under a statutory duty to prepare and maintain up-to-date Local Development plans; As part of preparing the evidence base for these plans, an assessment must be made of likely future growth in employment and of the requirement for new homes established through a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) which balances economic, social and environmental considerations.

Oxfordshire's six local authorities jointly commissioned a SHMA which was undertaken in-line with government requirements and following a separate employment growth forecast also commissioned by the authorities which concluded that growth in employment of 4,000 FTE jobs per year was "realistic". In reality this figure has been considerably exceeded over the past four years.

As such the SHMA conclusions on employment growth and housing requirements are part of local authority statutory planning frameworks and are inputs to and not outputs of OxLEP's Strategic Economic Plan."

6. Councillor Fooks to Councillor Nimmo Smith

"Now that the Northern Gateway plans are being developed, it is becoming increasingly clear that the traffic has to be tackled to make the development viable and to comply with the Inspector's condition of traffic mitigation before occupation. I hear that 100,000 people used the new Oxford Parkway station in its first four months of operation. There are renewed fears about the impact of traffic on Five Mile Drive if it were to be reopened as currently proposed. It is thus imperative that the proposed Strategic Link road from the A40 to the A44 is built as soon as possible to divert as much traffic as possible away from the A40 in North Oxford. Would the Cabinet member commit to making this road a priority and pressing for its being brought forward from the recently announced start date of Summer 2018 to a very much closer date?"

Answer

"The strategic link road proposal remains in the council's approved capital programme for completion by 2020. This has not changed. The link road is

currently in the early stages of planning and design. The county council will not accept development at Northern Gateway unless its transport impacts are mitigated, however the strategic link road is not required to achieve this and an independent inspector has accepted this. The link road proposal is and always has been about meeting growth demands across the county, not just in North Oxford”

7. Councillor Tanner to Councillor Nimmo Smith

“Would the Cabinet member give a date for when the many deep and dangerous potholes (especially dangerous to cyclists) in High Street, St Aldates and Folly Bridge, in my Oxford division, will be repaired? He will know that these roads are much used by cyclists, who daily face the unnerving choice of getting a wheel stuck in a pothole or swerving to avoid a pothole and being hit by a bus.”

Answer

“I am sure Cllr Tanner understands that the repair to Folly Bridge is a complex issue. Given the historic nature of the bridge we will require consent of Environment Agency in relation to the navigation issues and Historic England regarding the Scheduled Monument status along Grandpont Causeway. We have further investigatory work to undertake first to enable us to gain these consents but our best estimate for undertaking the work is late summer/early autumn 2016. With regard to any pot holes that exist prior to this work, and indeed on St Aldates and High Street we will continue to repair these in line with council policy. If Cllr Tanner is aware of specific pot holes that have been reported but are not being repaired in accordance with our policy then I am more than happy for him to take that up with the local area team to ensure the situation is rectified.”