

CABINET – 26 NOVEMBER 2014

ITEM 4 – QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS

Question received from the following Member:

Question to Councillor Lindsay Gale from Councillor Nick Hards

“Please would the Cabinet Member for Cultural and Community Services explain how the proposed enhanced Home Library Service would be publicised if the service changes in line with the current proposals? I ask because my enquiries suggest that the current Home Library Service is not well known among the potential users.”

Answer

I agree that the wonderful service that the Home Library Service provides should be better known. We do undertake regular promotion to customers, communities and the general public but I agree more could be done. What the current review of mobile library services is demonstrating is that there is a clear interest and demand for this service. Once the consultation has been completed and the results analysed, if we proceed in line with the current proposal, then our enhanced Home Library Service will be strongly promoted through a coordinated publicity campaign with posters and leaflets in libraries, health centres, doctor’s surgeries and other appropriate locations.

We will talk to existing service users and reach potential customers through engagement with Adult Social Services, our delivery partners, AgeUK Oxfordshire and the Royal Voluntary Service (RVS), and referral through the Community Information Network via community events and locality workers. There is a dedicated page on the OCC website which will be updated regularly and we will seek to publicise the service through partner publications, parish and town newsletters and the local press. We would welcome the support of county councillors in promoting the service in their divisions.

Question to Councillor Hudspeth from Councillor John Sanders

“I am told that it will take about half a day of preparation for negotiation of the lease of the Council’s land that would form the site, off Cornwallis Road in my Division, for the proposed City Farm development, to the advantage of children in Cowley and in the rest of Oxford. We have been waiting 15 months for this half-day’s work by the County’s Contractor and seem no closer to achieving it than we were 15 months ago.

I concede that the project will not provide statutory services, however, we are not asking that the Council should provide the project, merely that it facilitates its implementation where it, cheaply, can. If it will help, I am prepared to contribute money from my community budget to pay for the Contractor’s time and I should point out that I and Cllr Gill Sanders have already contributed

£3000 of previous Community Budget money to facilitate earlier work on the project.

While this matter remains unresolved the project is in grave danger of losing substantial funding from other sources and may be cancelled.

Will the Council now negotiate with the Contractor to facilitate a speedy resolution to this impasse?"

Answer

I'm sure that Cllr Sanders is aware of my personal support for this project. I first met with the project team in 2010 when I was Cabinet Member for Growth & Infrastructure and was impressed with their vision. When a funding issue was identified last year I was able to find a solution which should have unblocked the process. Unfortunately, there was a disconnect in the process and the history behind this was lost until recently. I can now report that the work has been reviewed and the papers should be completed by 24th October.

Organisations do need to recognise though, that while schemes may be a priority for them, we need to consider them along with all other schemes requiring input. We only have a limited resource to pay our contractor and need to be clear that we will not be able to progress everything as quickly as we would like.

Question to Councillor Nimmo Smith from Councillor John Tanner

"The infuriating road-works on the Oxford southern by-pass, next to my division, are way behind schedule, again over budget, and are imposing huge costs on local businesses and disruption to family life for tens of thousands of road users in and around Oxford. To what extent does the Cabinet agree it would have been better to shorten the number of weeks of traffic chaos by making sure the work was carried out over-night and at weekends, as well as during the day?"

Answer

It is infuriating that yet again Cllr Tanner has his facts wrong and is jumping on yet another band wagon, we sympathise with all those people who have suffered delays during the work, particularly while the contraflow has been in place. However you must keep in mind why the work is being done – the road network in and around Oxford is already at capacity and we need to introduce extra capacity to ensure that the city is able to thrive now and in the future. This project has the backing of the business community as it was part of the successful funding bid by the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership.

Trying to construct a complex scheme such as this in a location where there are already peak time delays without increased disruption is unrealistic. We have put a lot of effort into ensuring we communicate with the public to

encourage them (and their employers) to plan their journeys where possible, such as using other forms of transport, routes or travel times, and will be continuing to keep them informed through the remainder of the scheme.

The road works on the Oxford southern bypass are on schedule and the contraflow is planned to come off at the end of November, the advertised completion date for the scheme.

For this final phase of the contraflow which started on Wednesday night, there is a lot less highway work to complete on the roundabout, and this phase will be a lot shorter than the first. The removal of the contraflow will bring more road capacity and ease journeys for many people. There will be a few remaining works taking place in early December, but these will be completed overnight to avoid any disruption to road users.

It is true to say that the intended start of the scheme was delayed on several occasions by nine months due to issues with Thames Water's infrastructure which were beyond our control, and during the scheme when an unmapped electricity cable in poor condition was discovered which put a key area of the site on hold for over four weeks while SSE disconnected it. As you know, we have allocated extra money to the scheme partly so that this recent discovery could be dealt with and the work accelerated further to ensure that the contraflow could come off as scheduled at the end of November.

Many people have called for 24 hour working and increased hours, as there has been a perception that works have only been taking place within 'normal' site hours. In fact works have taken place over longer daytime site hours and the majority of weekends, including Sundays, for some time now, although hours and numbers of personnel will vary - at times people won't be able to see them depending on where they are working, collecting materials off site/in compound, on breaks, weather etc.

Night-time work has also been taking place for some activities, for example works have been taking place last week on Thursday/Friday night to plane off all the existing surfacing, and other night-time works are planned. Material and labour availability for full 24 hour working is limited in the short term due to the volume of road works being undertaken within the industry at this present time, which particularly affects some of the specialist subcontract resource required for parts of this project.

Some of the delays we experienced during August due to a fragile unmapped electric cable would have meant that increasing resources/night time working would have resulted in a large additional cost for very little benefit, as we were dependant on this cable to be disconnected to allow us to complete work in a key area at Kennington Roundabout. We also have had to consider noise issues, as there are residential properties at either end of the scheme, and we have had complaints over noise during night time works earlier in the scheme.

We have also reviewed the traffic management plans for this new phase of the works to see where further changes could be made to the layouts to

relieve some of the pinchpoints on the scheme, whilst maintaining safety. Initial observations are that the main contraflow and the delays to the A34 are significantly improved. However there are still inevitable delays affecting other local routes – we will be reviewing these over the coming days as drivers will inevitably make their own adjustments to their routes/times. Where beneficial we will make further adjustments to signal timings/signage/layouts.

Question to Councillor Stratford from Councillor John Howson

“Can the Cabinet member explain the background to the Catering Investment Reserve Fund revenue reserve mentioned in paragraph 84 of the Report by the Chief Financial Officer including the source of funds for the reserve?”

Answer

The Catering Investment Fund is the historical Trading Account surplus from Food with Thought, accumulated prior to the service being delivered via the CCS contract. The surplus achieved was the difference between the DSG funding allocated to schools and the cost of delivering the catering service. This earmarked reserve is used to fund the investment needed to meet basic statutory H&S requirements of kitchens and essential upgrades.

Question to Councillor Nimmo Smith from Councillor Fooks

“It is hard not to be pleased that at last there is government money to improve the road network in and around Oxford. It is, however, at least as hard not to be appalled at the current chaos around the city. Oxfordshire residents and businesses need an apology and an explanation as to why all these works have to be done at once, leading to maximum congestion and delay. Would the Cabinet member please take advice from highway experts as to how to reduce the congestion, whether by working much longer hours or stopping some work until others are finished, and implement it right away before Oxford grinds to a halt?”

Answer

I sympathise with everyone who has been delayed in traffic in recent weeks and I am sorry that the work we are doing is meaning longer journeys for people in the short term. I also understand why people are asking why so much needs to be done so quickly.

To understand the scheduling of the work you need to look at how the future of Oxford is shaping up. The council was successful in bidding for money from government in making much needed investment into the area’s transport infrastructure. We have major developments at the train station, the Westgate and Westway and Barton on the horizon. Our improvement works need to be done before those schemes happen – doing them at the same or afterwards would not be good planning.

In addition, timescales to deliver all the schemes are constrained by milestones laid out by the government.

There is no getting away from the fact that there is a massive amount of work which must be done if Oxford and Oxfordshire is to continue to thrive. Work has to be carefully coordinated to ensure a minimum of overlap between each activity and ensure certain schemes are completed in time to enable other schemes to be undertaken.

On the subject of working hours, I can assure you that we work very hard to strike the balance which means we get work done efficiently, at a reasonable cost and with a level of disturbance that is acceptable to residents. Where we can work longer hours, or do tasks more quickly during a job, we do. However, you can work longer hours up to a point, but when you need to employ extra gangs and bring in materials round the clock the cost becomes unaffordable. The impact of night time working on local residents also has to be taken into consideration.

Finally, you asked about stopping work on projects until others were finished – in effect doing one job at a time. Doing this is not possible as it would mean not only that it would take a great many years to deliver the improvements needed right now but also that funding would be lost as deadlines were not met, so schemes would never happen. To do nothing is not an option, the residents of Oxfordshire have been requesting improvements to be made and we are now delivering them.

Question to Councillor Hibbert Biles from Councillor Phillips

“The minutes of the Cabinet meeting 16th September advise that Cllr Hibbert Biles would provide me with a written answer to my question about the opening times of the Sexual Health clinic based in Rectory Road Oxford. When can I expect to receive this information?”

Answer

The sexual health service that is in place is a different model to the services that were previously available to the local population. It is not appropriate to compare the previous contraceptive and sexual health services that were delivered by the previous provider and their clinic opening times of the old site in East Oxford.

The service model for this service is in accordance with current best practice providing a network of clinics across the County which provide different levels of service to the public. As part of this service the Rectory Road site is a second site in Oxford for the public to access services.

Both sites in Oxford now provide both contraceptive and sexual health, and sexual transmitted infection testing and treatment, which are a more comprehensive range of services than was available at East Oxford under the previous Oxford Health service, which only delivered contraception services.

From October 2014 there will be a phased increase in the opening hours of the Rectory Road clinic as new staff are recruited into the sexual health service to provide safe and quality sexual health services and as more residents avail of the services from this site.

It is anticipated that the clinic will have completed the phased increase in opening times early in the New Year. Residents can continue to access sexual health services nearby at the main Churchill site which is open six days a week or can contact their local GP. Details of the current and future opening times of all the clinics in the sexual health service across the County are available from the service website which is the most commonly used point of information for service users.

Question to Councillor Nimmo Smith from Councillor Phillips

“Can I be supplied with the following information?

- a) the list of new pedestrian crossings agreed since May 2013
- b) the criteria used to agree to provide each pedestrian crossing
- c) the source of funding”

Answer

For (a) and (c) Please see chart below, the ones shaded in green are sites installed since beginning of 2013 and in yellow, the ones either approved for construction, or otherwise reasonably firm in terms of design etc. Please note that these only include ‘free standing’ signalled crossings / zebras, and not pedestrian phases at signals or pedestrian refuges.

There are a number of other crossings planned as part of developments etc., but these are still at a reasonably early stage.

(b) The criteria used to agree to provide each pedestrian crossing are provided in the Department for Transport guidance on the provision of zebra and signal controlled crossings – see specifically Local Transport Note 1/95 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-assessment-of-pedestrian-crossings-ltn-195> supplemented by any specific local considerations as deemed appropriate by officers and as a result of local consultation etc.

Parish Name	Location	Crossing type	Funding	Installation
ABINGDON	SPRING ROAD	ZEBRA CROSSING	Locality	May-13
ARDLEY	B430	PELICAN CROSSING	Developer	Dec-13
BICESTER	FIELD STREET / QUEENS AVE / ST JOHNS ST	ZEBRA CROSSINGS (3)	Developer	Apr-13
CARTERTON	ALVESCOT	ZEBRA CROSSING	Locality	Apr-13

	ROAD			
CARTERTON / BRIZE NORTON	CARTERTON ROAD	ZEBRA CROSSING	Locality	Feb-13
CHIPPING NORTON	B4026 OVER NORTON ROAD	ZEBRA CROSSING	Developer	Mar-14
DIDCOT	B4493 FOXHALL ROAD	ZEBRA CROSSING	Locality	Apr-13
DIDCOT	AVON WAY	ZEBRA CROSSING	Locality	May-13
DIDCOT	TYNE AVENUE	ZEBRA CROSSING	Locality	May-13
MARCHAM	A415	ZEBRA CROSSING	Locality	Aug-13
OXFORD	B4495 WEIRS LANE	ZEBRA CROSSING	Locality	Apr-13
WANTAGE	LIMBOROUGH ROAD	ZEBRA CROSSING	Developer	Mar-13
WARBOROUGH	A4074 HENLEY ROAD	PELICAN CROSSING	Locality	Mar-13
WHEATLEY	LONDON ROAD / PARK HILL	ZEBRA CROSSINGS (2)	Developer	Nov-13
ABINGDON	A415 OCK STREET	PELICAN CROSSING – approved (CMD 9 October) - decision called -in	Developer	
BICESTER	A4095 LORDS LANE	TOUCAN CROSSING - pending consultation	Developer	
CHILTON	A4185	TOUCAN CROSSINGS (2) – pending consultation	Capital	
CUMNOR	CUMNOR HILL	PUFFIN CROSSING - design stage	Developer	
EAST CHALLOW	A417 MAIN STREET	PUFFIN CROSSING - approved	Developer	
EAST HENDRED	A417 READING ROAD	PUFFIN CROSSING - pending consultation	Developer	
EYNSHAM	WITNEY ROAD	ZEBRA CROSSING - pending consultation	Developer	
KINGSTON BAGPUIZE	A415 WITNEY ROAD	ZEBRA CROSSING - pending consultation	Developer	
STANFORD IN THE VALE	A417 FARINGDON ROAD	PUFFIN CROSSING - approved (but deferred)	Developer	
WITNEY	BRIDGE STREET	ZEBRA CROSSING - approved	Developer	