

ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

10 February 2015

Answers to Written Questions (standing order 16.12.1)

Agenda Item

10(a)

1. **By Councillor D Kendall of the Cabinet Member for Highways Maintenance and Small Scheme Delivery**

'County Road Condition Results – Brentwood

The most recent County Road Condition Results survey for 2014/15 show that the Brentwood Borough still has the second worst figures for the whole of the County, just behind Epping Forest.

How much of the £32 million Brentwood residents pay the County Council in Council Tax each year is being spent on improving our roads and footpaths each year, and when are Brentwood residents going to get the serious investment in their road surfaces that they deserve?'

Reply

The County Road Condition results for 2014/15 showed an overall improvement in the condition of PR1 and PR2 routes across the County, demonstrating a return on the investment ECC has made in maintenance of these routes this year.

Council Tax precepts are collected and then allocated using asset management principles and where appropriate on a needs or priority based assessment; as such it is not possible to determine what will be used in which way from each district.

2. **By Councillor D Kendall of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation**

Public Realm Investment in Brentwood and Shenfield Stations

Recent meetings my colleagues and I have had with officials from Crossrail to discuss the proposed construction works in Brentwood and Shenfield have revealed that the construction work is going to be

completed long before the public realm improvements are made at both Brentwood and Shenfield Stations. This delay will result in even more upheaval and disruption for local residents and businesses which many people believe could have been avoided if the works and funding had been properly co-ordinated.

- Why is it taking so long for the County Council to pull a funding package together to deliver the Public Realm improvement works at Brentwood and Shenfield Stations?
- How much is the County Council prepared to commit itself to the public realm works?
- When do you expect the Public Realm works to be completed?

Reply

We submitted a bid to the LEP in November 2014 which was unsuccessful and we are working with a large number of partners to try again, preferably underpinned by a commitment from each of them to part fund the bid. Some smaller public realm improvements could meanwhile also be funded by ECC through the LHP (should the LHP so recommend) but ECC would, in principle, also be willing to part fund a reasonable share of the larger bid.

3. By Councillor K Smith of the Leader of the Council

Basildon and Brentwood Borough Councils are conducting a joint consultation entitled Dunton Garden Suburb. This consultation is looking to build 6,000 new dwellings and a traveller site on greenbelt land along the borough boundaries of Basildon and Brentwood by 2022. If this scheme were to happen, what extra resources (such as secondary school education places) would Essex County Council have to provide to accommodate this new and isolated community?

Also, would the Leader agree with me that the proposed Dunton Garden Suburb traveller site is yet another slap in the face to the people of Basildon following the Dale Farm debacle?

Reply

I thank the Councillor for his question and for the opportunity to further explain our position on these matters.

The Councillor will be familiar with our position as on 9th December 2014, Full Council passed a motion outlining our support for district,

borough and city councils to protect Green Belt sites from inappropriate development or where there is insufficient infrastructural provision. I have since personally written to the Minister for Housing, Brandon Lewis MP calling on him to provide assurances that the Government endorses the approach taken to plan for housing growth while protecting our valuable Green Belt areas.

With regard to the consultation in question, the suggested “Garden Suburb” is only one option being considered and the Councils will need to decide whether or not it has potential and if so, how to proceed in relation to the Local Plans they are currently preparing.

This is a very high level consultation, with limited details available at this stage on the nature and scale of the concept, which is for a range of development types including between 4,000 – 6,000 dwellings of a mixed size and tenure (for sale, rent and affordable housing); a mix of new industrial and commercial developments and new infrastructure (such as the potential for a new railway station and green paths).

The County Council will be responding to this consultation and will need to gauge the response having regard to the level of information and detail available. At this stage, it will not be possible to determine the exact requirements in terms of extra resources required, other than to identify issues to be investigated and considered further.

However, I can assure the Councillor that the County Council will only support a plan that makes appropriate provision for infrastructure, including schools and transport.

ECC will continue to discuss any implications of these proposals with local authorities, as we always do, under our ‘duty to cooperate’ requirements.

May I also thank the Councillor for the opportunity to draw his attention to this year’s budget where we set out plans for record levels of investment – £1 billion over the next five years – into the infrastructure Essex needs to prosper well into the future, including the provision of 20,000 new school places.

4. By Councillor K Smith of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation

‘Will Essex County Council continue to exempt the seven vulnerable estates in Basildon from the part-night lighting scheme for the foreseeable future?’

Reply

Yes - and we also remain receptive to fine tuning the scheme to allow some other lights to remain on all night in exchange for others to be switched off between midnight and 5.00 am.

5. By Councillor M Mackrory of the Cabinet Member for Customer Services, Libraries, Planning and the Environment

'Will the Cabinet Member consider nominating a member from the opposition parties to sit on the Essex Community Initiative Fund judging panel?'

Reply

Judging panels are local; the annual judging panels for the main CIF held in each district are made up of members from the local charitable and voluntary sectors and parish clerks. Judging panels are chaired by the Mayor or Chairman of the appropriate district/borough/city. This process disburses the vast bulk of the CIF funds. Myself, or Cllrs Twitchen or Page as my deputies, attend these meetings; we are only present to guide and observe and have no vote. The exception to this is the "Response" process for urgent items, where I make executive decisions on projects which require urgent attention; this is only a small percentage of the Fund. Representations and support from local members on particular projects are always welcome, from whatever party, as the process is totally non-political. It would be inappropriate to politicise the current judging panels.

Ahead of the main judging panels we have a process which verifies the various bids for compliance with the Fund's criteria. This process is reviewed at a meeting of myself as the Cabinet Member with responsibility for the CIF along with my deputies Cllr Twitchen and Cllr Page, and three officers. I can see no reason why a nominated member from the opposition parties should not attend.

6. By Councillor M Mackrory of the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth, Infrastructure, Waste and Recycling

'Will the Cabinet Member advise Members the reason why Essex County Council has withdrawn from the Thames Gateway South East Partnership?'

Reply

May I thank Cllr. Mackrory for his question. The decision to withdraw from the Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership (TGSEP) is about securing the best possible economic outcomes for all of south Essex. By streamlining our governance arrangements, we can more effectively engage business leaders and accelerate the delivery of economic growth in all of the south Essex area.

This is reflected in our Economic Plan for Essex. ECC is keen to work with all partners to exploit the potential of key economic drivers within the area, including London Gateway Port, the Saxon Business Park, Southend Airport, ARUs med-tech campus and major centres of employment such as Basildon, Castle Point and Rochford.

We are working to establish a single, streamlined partnership structure across Greater Essex and we want the Greater Essex Business Board (GEBB) to provide a countywide vehicle for business to have a single voice to help us shape and deliver growth programmes. We also want GEBB to be supported by local partnerships that reflect Essex's economic geographies and growth corridors as they are by the Haven Gateway Partnership, West Essex Alliance and Heart of Essex.

As a result we are now establishing a new South Essex Economic Alliance which will reflect better the economic and infrastructure ambitions of businesses, residents and local authorities in this important part of Greater Essex.

7. By Councillor T Higgins of the Cabinet Member for Highways Maintenance and Small Scheme Delivery

'Following my question on 6 October, 2014 regarding lamp column stumps in my division of Parsons Heath and Eastgates, would you please advise what date has been set for the removal of these columns?'

Reply

Outstanding lamp column stump works in this area are as follows:

- 6 stump removals
- 11 column removals
- 1 cut and capped signpost for replacement

These jobs should be completed by the end of the financial year.

8. By Councillor T Higgins of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation

‘Will the Cabinet Member revisit the Equality Impact Assessment for Part Night Lighting? The Deaf British Sign Language [BSL] Community has been particularly affected by this decision – one cannot sign in the dark.’

Reply

There are no current plans to revisit the Equality Impact Assessment for Part Night Lighting (PNL), as no concerns were raised during consultation and none have been raised with the Council since implementation. However, if any particular group of people has evidence based concerns about the impact of PNL which cannot be mitigated, we would of course consider them.

9. By Councillor J Young of the Cabinet Member for Adults and Children

‘Would the portfolio holder clarify what the current status is of our Better Care Fund submission since it failed to get approval? Could the portfolio holder outline how much was provisionally allocated from the Better Care Fund to go towards the implementation of the Care Act 2015/16 and what plans does he have in place to mitigate against this funding availability?’

Reply

I am very pleased to announce that our Better Care Fund Plan was approved by NHS England on 6th February. In approving the Plan NHS England described it as “strong and robust” and that as a consequence Essex is in a strong position to deliver its BCF change programme.

A total of £3.4million has been allocated from the BCF for the implementation of the Care Act.

10. By Councillor M Danvers of the Leader of the Council

‘Given the comments by the Archbishop of Canterbury about the impoverishment in our society in which many are being left behind, would the Leader re-examine the case for a living wage to Essex County Council employees at the cost to the authority of £160,000 a year?’

Reply

I thank the Councillor for the question.

I am sorry to say, but he is mistaken on the cost that such a measure would place on the council's finances. The true cost to the taxpayer, and may I remind the Councillor that it is their money not ours, is actually £40.3 million. We are an Authority with a significant supply chain and it would be untenable for us to pay the living wage to only a subset of the people we employ.

We have taken steps to help all people in Essex, including those on the minimum wage, by freezing council tax for the fifth year in a row, a decision that has saved the average household in Essex £335.

11. By Councillor K Bobbin of the Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning

'Could the portfolio holder clarify whether ECC has been successful in receiving the full amount asked for in its bid to the Youth Engagement Fund?'

Reply

Unfortunately, although we made the final shortlist, we found out at the end of last week that we were unsuccessful in our bid. We are awaiting detailed feedback from the Cabinet Office. In the meantime, officers are working on potential implications and mitigations.

12. By Councillor J Young of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation

'Has the portfolio holder considered exploring the use of High Intensity Discharge (HID) for street lighting in Essex? Would he consider exploring this technology which would deliver energy savings and peace of mind for residents?'

Reply

The street lights in Essex already use HID - so I don't understand the question. I am currently exploring LED.

13. By Councillor D Harris of the Leader of the Council

‘Given the widespread use of food-banks in the county, would the Leader consider opening up council property to food-bank operators who are finding it increasingly difficult to pay rent on property in the county?’

Reply

I thank the Councillor for his question.

We will assess our property portfolio and consider what options are available to us, including any legal implications.

Noting that he is a also member on Colchester Borough Council, the Councillor may also wish, if he has not done so already, to ask whether Colchester Borough Council will also look into providing council-owned property for use by food-banks and other community organisations.”

14. By Councillor J Whitehouse of the Cabinet Member for Highways Maintenance and Small Scheme Delivery

‘Would the Cabinet Member please provide an update on the review of the Parking Partnerships, including details of consultation with stakeholders?’

Reply

Consultation with stakeholders was completed in December 2014. These included the Chairmen of the North and South Essex Parking Partnerships, Chairmen of two Local Highway Panels, lead officers and partner representatives from the Parking Partnership Joint Committee.

15. By Councillor J Whitehouse of the Cabinet Member for Highways Maintenance and Small Scheme Delivery

‘Would the Cabinet Member please list Traffic Regulation Orders (excluding temporary traffic orders) affecting Epping Forest that:

- a) have been proposed and are waiting for informal or formal consultation,
- b) have been consulted on and are awaiting decision,
- c) have been decided and await implementation,

and where possible give the dates for consultation, decision and

implementation.

[NB If the whole of Epping Forest is too large in scope I would be content with TROs affecting Epping and Theydon Bois (including Coopersale and Thornwood).]

Reply

Eight Traffic Regulation Orders affecting Epping Forest have been identified, these have all been subject to formal consultation:

Title	Status
30 mph and 40mph Speed limit Manor Road Lambourne Epping Forest	Consultation on-going
Waiting Restrictions Amendment 43 Lower Sawines Epping Forest	Objections received awaiting decision
Waiting Restrictions (Amendment No 42) Centre Drive, Epping	Objections received awaiting decision
Waiting Restrictions Amendment 41 various roads Buckhurst Hill Epping Forest	Awaiting Sealing and operational date
Waiting restrictions amendment 33 Sunnyside Road Epping Epping Forest	Objections received awaiting decision
Waiting Restrictions amendment 34 Ambleside Kendal Avenue, Stonards Hill and Green Trees Epping Epping Forest	Objections received awaiting decision
One way movement Pudding Lane Slip Road Chigwell Epping Forest	Objections received awaiting decision
Waiting Restrictions Amendment 29 & Zebra Crossing High Street Chipping Ongar Epping	Notice of making 07/01/2015 to come into operation 27/03/2015
Coronation Hill, Epping – parking restrictions.	Objections received awaiting decision

NEPP have provided five TROs that they are responsible for that have been subject to formal consultation.

Title	Status
Waiting Restrictions Amendment 30 – London Road North Weald Bassett and Western Avenue	Operational
Waiting Restrictions Amendment 31 Various Roads -Debden	Operational
Waiting Restrictions Amendment 32 Various Roads - Loughton	Operational
Waiting Restrictions Amendment 39 – Epping	Objections received awaiting decision
Waiting Restrictions Amendment 40 – Waltham Abbey and Loughton	Objections received awaiting decision

This list does not include any TROs subject to informal consultation.