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| Meeting | ENVIRONMENT STANDING SELECT COMMITTEE | |
| Date | Monday, 10 January 2005 | agenda item number |
| From: | Cabinet Member for Environment | |

REPORT FOR PERIOD NOVEMBER 2004 – DECEMBER 2004

I reported the following issues to Council on 16 December 2004:

- MARR Opening
- Beacon Council Bid for Sustainable Energy
- Commemoration of Nottinghamshire's Coalfield
- Oakham Business Park

1. Local Transport Plan

Over the past 5 years the County Council has consistently performed highly in the delivery of transport improvements and maintenance. In the recent announcement of funding allocations for Nottinghamshire the Department for Transport again assessed the Council as performing 'above average' which places the County Council in the top 20. Nevertheless, funding allocations have been cut back, particularly for road maintenance which has been reduced by £3m. Funding allocations for transport measures have been limited to £7.5m, with £10m available for maintenance of the network.

Although I am disappointed with this reduction, it is in line with the national picture and it should not be forgotten that the Authority has benefited substantially from very favourable settlements in the last few years. This has been crucial in helping the Council have a better road network, promoting sustainable travel and regeneration through major projects such as the Rainworth Bypass and MARR. As a result the Environment Service Block is regarded as 'Excellent' by the Audit Commission in the CPA.

2. Building Better Communities Update

2.1 Rainworth Housing Estate

The Avenues Housing Estate in Rainworth has benefited from a £25,000 environmental improvement scheme via the Building Better Communities initiative. The appearance of First to Fourth Avenues has been substantially enhanced by dressing the roads, relaying the pavements, repairing or replacing damaged street lights and signs and pruning trees. The scheme has considerably boosted the appearance of the estate and I hope that residents will take a pride in their area. Further improvements may be carried out next year.

2.2 Newark Town Centre Improvements

I am pleased to see that improvements to Newark Town Centre have been carried out with the laying of new paving blocks along a substantial number of streets around the town centre. The works cost £45,000 and included yorkstone paving in the Market Place to conserve the historic character of the area. The scheme is part of an ongoing effort by the County Council to repair paving in the town centre which is continually being damaged by vehicles illegally parking on it.

A major environmental improvement scheme is being considered for Kirk Gate, Middle Gate and Stodman Street to provide wider pavements for pedestrians and prevent drivers mounting the pavements.

2.3 Gateway to Eastwood

I am pleased to see that the Gateway to Eastwood was opened in November. This is a three and a half metre high steel archway erected near Morrisons supermarket and features 'Eastwood Town Centre' along the top of the arch. It aims to direct supermarket shoppers, who may otherwise return to their cars, to the town centre's other amenities.

3. Interactive Speed Limit Signs

The County Council has been using permanent vehicle-activated speed limit signs for some time now and the criteria for their use is set out in the NCC Highway Network Management Plan. More recently short stay, moveable signs have been introduced as a short term measure to raise awareness of speeding at particular locations around the County.

I have agreed that the criteria for installing the short stay signs should be less restrictive than that for the permanent signs. In particular

- The one-way traffic flow requirement is reduced from 400 to 250 vehicles an hour peak period
- The 85th percentile speed of through traffic is reduced from 20% to 10%+2 mph over the speed limit.

In addition only one installation per District will be allowed at any one time and the maximum time any sign can be displayed at one location is three months. These additional requirements are designed to stop the proliferation of signs which will significantly reduce their effectiveness. I believe that these criteria will allow the short stay signs to be used flexibly and to best effect over a wide range of communities and different road hierarchies and significantly contribute to improved road safety around the county.

4. **Gamston Park and Ride**

An area of Green Belt land at Gamston has been safeguarded for a park and ride site since September 1997. Re-assessments since that time confirmed this site as the most suitable location and a planning application was submitted in October 2001. However, the application has been on hold pending the outcome of the Highways Agency A52 Multi-Modal Study (MMS). This study recommended a park and ride site in the vicinity and bus priority on the A6011 corridor into the city. Consequently discussions with stakeholders on the scheme recommenced.

In these discussions the Highways Agency expressed concern at the proposed position of the site because it obstructs their short and long term proposals for improvements to the A52 Gamston Roundabout. There are, therefore, now considerable risks associated with promoting a park and ride site at the preferred site.

A second site east of Regatta Way is now being considered and I have agreed that a feasibility study should be undertaken to assess its suitability.

5. **Greenwood Community Forest**

The Greenwood Community Forest (GCF) is one of 12 national community forests. It covers 161 sq miles of western Nottinghamshire from Mansfield in the north to the River Trent in the south. The County Council is the principal funding partner and employs the team of officers who have co-ordinated the project for thirteen years. There are many benefits from having an area designated as a community forest. In 2003/04 over £4 million of Government money was invested in Nottinghamshire as a direct result of the GFC. The GCF also attracts funding to projects which would not otherwise be available to the County Council. The GCF is firmly based on partnership working and contributes to many wider quality of life initiatives such as better public spaces, healthier communities and so on.

After March 2005 Countryside Agency funding will cease and transitional funding from the Forestry Commission will only be available if alternative funding can be secured for 2007/08 and beyond. I am very pleased to approve funding that will guarantee the long term future of the GCF and allow the temporary contracts of the staff to be made permanent.

6. **MAKING SPACE FOR WATER CONSULTATION DOCUMENT**

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has issued a consultation document "Making Space for Water" (MSW) which provides a national strategy for flood and coastal erosion risk management. The document considers the probability of flooding alongside the level of damage that may result. It proposes to limit the amount of new development on floodplains and promotes the use of sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS). It also emphasises that there will be occasions where flood defences should not be maintained, or should be realigned to protect and create wetland habitats.

Clearly this strategy will have a major influence over the development of local priorities for investment on flood defences and I have approved the County Council's response to the consultation. The overall aims and vision for MSW are fully supported, but we have also asked DEFRA to take account of the following issues:

- Measures to minimise flooding - eg proposals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and combat climate change
- Measures to minimise the impact of flooding on people and property – eg tighter development control within the floodplain
- Enhanced emergency planning
- the fate of small rural communities when higher weighting is allocated to protecting peoples homes and livelihoods
- the role that minerals development in the floodplain can play in reducing flood risk.

7. **Changes to the Recycling Credits Scheme**

DEFRA is seeking comments on its consultation paper Changes to the Recycling Credits Scheme. The current scheme was introduced under the Environment Protection Act 1990 to encourage waste collection authorities (WCA) to recycle waste. Payments were designed to reflect the net saving a waste disposal authority (WDA) makes by not having to dispose of waste that has been diverted for recycling.

Since that time the economic, technological and regulatory framework within which local authorities fulfil their waste management responsibilities has developed considerably and there is much closer joint working between collection and disposal authorities. In this

climate the recycling credit scheme has become a divisive factor and allows WCAs to independently pursue their own recycling schemes which may not be cost effective and undermine WDA statutory targets and the Municipal Waste Strategy.

The consultation paper offers three options:

1. replace the duty to pay credits with a power
2. allow the duty to be revoked where alternative arrangements are in place
3. a combination of paying credits for existing schemes and a power to pay credits in respect of additional recycling.

I have approved the County Council's response which supports option one. This is the most flexible approach and supports joint working. Furthermore it effectively stops WCAs from pursuing their own recycling schemes. The County Council has achieved considerable improvements in recycling over recent years through successful partnership working with the collection authorities and welcomes any changes that will facilitate this. As a result we are in an excellent position to meet Government targets for waste reduction.

Councillor Terry Butler
Cabinet Member for Environment