

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 22 JULY 2022
QUESTIONS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

WRITTEN RESPONSES PROVIDED AFTER THE MEETING AS THE TIME LIMIT OF 60 MINUTES FOR QUESTIONS WAS REACHED

Question to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Asset Management from Councillor Francis Purdue-Horan

In the light of plans for a new Council Office block at Top Wighay Farm, Linby which will cost a minimum of £15.7million and Nottinghamshire County Council's hybrid working strategy agreed at the former Policy Committee on 15th July 2021 – have the County Council held any discussions about selling any part of County Hall, West Bridgford in the foreseeable future?

Response from Councillor Keith Girling, Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Asset Management

The proposed new council office block at the Top Wighay Farm in Linby will be an anchor building for the wider Top Wighay development, which I am pleased to note Gedling Borough and Ashfield District Councils are both in support of and, will act as a catalyst to unlock a significant employment site as part of an exciting new flagship village.

In my role as Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Asset Management, I recently approved the Master Developer partner for the development, which will include 805 homes, a new primary school, local facilities, and significant open space.

It is estimated that the creation of this sustainable new village will create more than 1,000 new full-time jobs, and over a ten-year period the economic output contribution could equate to more than £873 million. The creation of more than 1,000 jobs will be a tremendous boost to the economic prospects of the whole area over the next decade.

£5 million of our £15.7 million investment will ensure that the new office building at Top Wighay sets a new benchmark for County Council properties in terms of environmental sustainability. The building will achieve BREEAM Excellent status, with low carbon operational standards. This is reflective of Nottinghamshire County Council's Environment Strategy and will see us lead by example, creating a building that will be a model of sustainability.

Our office plans for Top Wighay will also ensure that the County Council can vacate leased premises. Overall, the Invest in Nottinghamshire (iIN) programme has generated gross annual revenue savings in the region of £1.35 million, which was an increase of £400k on previous estimates.

I would also refer Councillor Purdue-Horan to my previous answer to Councillor Helen-Ann Smith about Top Wighay. As part of my response, I referred Members to the Economic Development and Asset Management Committee report in November 2021

which updated the Investing in Nottinghamshire programme and highlighted, amongst other things, the need to review the programme.

With the implementation of our Hybrid Working policy, I had asked officers in the County Council's Property Team to continue to review occupancy in our buildings and to assess whether there are additional benefits that can be derived from the estate.

As part of this, the property team have been considering our working arrangements with other partners, in particular the District Councils. You may have seen, for example, that I recently approved a report around the Mansfield Levelling Up Fund bid, where we are looking to co-locate our services at a hub to be built in Mansfield town centre.

As a result of all this activity, officers are continually assessing and discussing the ongoing use of our office buildings to see if there are additional benefits that can be derived from all of the estate. These include the potential for further disposals such as those we have been able to achieve with Bevercotes House at the Sherwood Energy Village, as well as the potential for leasing office accommodation to Small and Medium Enterprises.

I thank Councillor Purdue-Horan for raising the matter of County Hall. The answer is that we are considering all options for its future as part of the review I've just mentioned. I proposed at the recent Place Select Committee meeting that, as part of their work plan, members might want to look at the use of the County Hall site along with Trent Bridge House in the light of the Council's hybrid working policy. This scrutiny work is likely to be completed over the Autumn. I would envisage this will not only look at property-related information but will also include an assessment of the workforce and environmental considerations.

At Economic Development and Asset Management Committee in November 2021, contingency funding was set aside for feasibility studies and legal advice in respect of the rationalisation and reuse of Council-owned property in the south of the County including Trent Bridge House and County Hall and, I would welcome the Place Scrutiny Committee proposing this as a priority in their work programme.

Question to the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment from Councillor Penny Gowland

Does the Cabinet Member believe that our highways are in a state of disrepair or is this simply a problem of public perception?

Response from Councillor Neil Clarke MBE, Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment

Councillor Gowland asks: Do I believe that our highways are in a state of disrepair?

Well, I'll first repeat part of the [answer I gave to Councillor Zadrozny in March this year](#), where I informed the Chamber of the most recent published data from the Department for Transport:

- Nottinghamshire is ranked JOINT SECOND out of 24 County Councils for having the best A roads in the country;
and
- Nottinghamshire is ranked JOINT FIRST out of 24 County Councils for having best B and C roads in the country.

Those rankings suggest that Nottinghamshire's most significant highways are NOT in a state of disrepair, certainly compared with other similar areas across the country. A, B and C roads are the ones most critical to the economic prospects of this County and all of our residents, so we should welcome the fact we're up there with the best counties for the condition of those types of highway.

The challenge facing Nottinghamshire County Council - similar to many other highways authorities across the country - is to improve the condition of a significant number of our Unclassified roads. We are by no means the worst according to DfT statistics, but it's fair to say that a number of our Unclassified roads are not yet in the optimum state of repair I would ideally wish to see.

Councillor Gowland asks, is this a problem of public perception?

I'd say the answer is yes ... and no.

Most of our poorer quality surfaces are found on residential streets, which are the ones people see every day as they leave their front door to walk, cycle or drive to work or to other destinations. It's therefore understandable that some people develop a negative perception if they live on one of the roads most needing repair. They will probably notice poor surfaces outside their house or in their immediate neighbourhood *more* than they notice the better condition of many of the A, B and C roads they use elsewhere on their travels through the County.

As I've just said, Nottinghamshire actually has some of the best roads in the A, B and C class, but we are investing heavily to improve our other roads. We have invested an additional £12 million of funding into highways to tackle those areas where improvement is needed most – doubling the number of teams delivering permanent highways repairs, establishing a Highways Hub to coordinate activities, and improving the efficiency of our operations across the county.

In total since 2017, Conservative administrations have invested an additional £36 million in highways maintenance above and beyond previous spending levels, but given that we inherited a highways repair backlog approaching £150 million, that's obviously not going to be enough to transform all of our roads overnight. We simply don't have the money to do that.

What we CAN do is methodically carry out many programmes of work over the next three years and beyond, making full use of the extra highways repair gangs we have employed. We are looking to see the equivalent of 20 miles of continuous road permanently repaired during this year – significantly improving roads across the county.

We will still have to carry out emergency repair works on some roads until we are in position to deliver fuller re-surfacing, but we are committed to carrying more extensive re-surfacing over the course of this administration. People will see repairs taking place that are not just functional – i.e. making the road safe – but smoother and more extensive, with complete and more aesthetically pleasing re-surfacing over a larger area of the highway. Over time, this will mean that fewer of our highways are in state of disrepair, and hopefully the public perception of our roads should improve.

Question to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People from Councillor Helen-Ann Smith

Can you update Council on plans for a Children's Home on Saville Road, Skegby, Sutton-in-Ashfield?

Response from Councillor Tracey Taylor, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

A property has been identified and a successful engagement event held with neighbours. This involved officers from Nottinghamshire County Council and representatives from Homes2Inspire who are contracted to operate the home for the Council, together with one of our young people in care. Information was shared on the nature of modern children's homes and the neighbours were able to ask questions and clarify their own understanding of what is proposed.

An application for change of use to enable this property to be a home for children in care has been submitted to the County planning authority. The determination period for applications such as this is 8 weeks from validation of the application. If the Council is successful in obtaining planning permission then Ofsted, which regulates children's homes, will undertake a thorough registration process to validate the property and the staff who will be caring for the young people in the home prior to it being able to operate as a children's home.