



meeting **COUNTY COUNCIL**

date **Thursday, 17 May 2007**

agenda item number

from: **Cabinet Member for Environment**

REPORT FOR PERIOD APRIL– MAY 2007

1. Building Better Communities

I am delighted to report that 06/07 saw the third highly successful year of the Building Better Communities initiative and we are continuing to see real improvements in the Environment across the County. Our total number of completed schemes is now in the region of 670 with 215 of those being delivered last year. During 2006/07 projects were carried out in 50 of the 54 electoral divisions and I am hopeful that this year all 54 divisions will benefit directly from the BBC initiative.

To date I have approved a large number of schemes for 2007/08 with more to follow around June or July when the Project Team have carried out further assessment work. Many Members will already have received a letter with details of schemes that are approved for 2007/8. Once again I expect over 200 projects to be delivered in year four.

May I also take this opportunity to remind Members that the annual BBC event this year is being held on Tuesday 12th June at Boughton Pumping Station. I very much hope to be able to welcome as many colleagues as possible to the event which begins at 10am and ends with lunch at around 1:30pm. Please can I ask that you confirm your attendance with the project team as soon as possible.

2. A612 Gedling Transport Improvement

Work is progressing well on the £11.8 million Gedling Transport Improvement, and the new road is due to open in early May. This scheme, whilst bringing major transport benefits to Gedling also marks a major change in civil engineering procurement. Alfred McAlpine Project Services, the Contractor, were involved in reviewing the design before the work started, and a fully integrated site team was formed. This ensured that everyone's energy was directed at solving the engineering problems on site, rather than getting involved in detailed contractual discussions. As a result issues with very complex ground

conditions and unexpected underground services have been quickly dealt with, and delay and additional costs have been minimised.

The scheme is the first on a County road in Nottinghamshire to involve the construction of reinforced earth abutments for a railway bridge, a technique that has saved time and significantly reduced the impact of construction on the operation of the railway line. The new road also crosses the Stoke Bardolph Sewage Works, and was constructed without disrupting the operation of the largest treatment plant in Nottinghamshire. The road is carried over the main inlet pipes into the works on a specially designed structure, to keep the pipes totally isolated from any vibration caused by the work.

Part of the project has been constructed on a floodplain, which required major reshaping to provide a flood compensation area, and ensure the road is not likely to be flooded in the future. Carlton Town FC's pitch, stand, changing rooms and other facilities have been successfully relocated away from the line of the road and a new artificial training pitch has been provided to compensate for the loss of the old training pitch. This has proved very popular.

The experience gained by our staff on this project will be of significant benefit to the authority in future projects, as it endeavours to lead the way in developing best practise in Civil Engineering.

3. **Civil Parking Enforcement**

I have updated Cabinet on the latest developments in the work towards Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE). The main benefit of CPE is considerably improved traffic management, reducing incidents of illegal parking that cause congestion and road safety problems. This will help the Highway Authority meet its new statutory duty to keep roads clear and traffic moving. After extensive negotiations with the district and borough councils a Partnership Agreement has been developed on the detailed method of application.

The County Council, as Highway Authority, remains ultimately responsible for issuing Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) on-street but this will be undertaken on its behalf by the district and borough councils in conjunction with off-street enforcement. All authorities agree to abide by a consistent countywide enforcement policy based on national guidance and will share an IT system capable of processing PCNs procured by the County Council. The County Council will manage the Central Processing Unit (CPU).

It has been agreed to introduce parking enforcement in the County via an external parking enforcement contractor procured by the County Council and made available to the district and borough councils under a framework agreement.

Prior to submitting the Final Special Parking Area Application to the Department for Transport the Authority will seek to agree a start date of early 2008. Once this is agreed a wide-reaching publicity programme will be launched.

4. **Greater Nottingham Congestion Delivery Plan**

Tackling congestion is one of the Government's priorities for transport and in order to ensure that it delivers its national urban congestion target, the 10 largest urban areas in England are required to set limits on the growth of congestion as part of their Local Transport Plans. Following submission of the LTPs the Government announced a new £60m Congestion Performance Fund and invited the 10 largest urban areas to access this fund over the next four years by developing a congestion delivery plan.

The congestion target for Greater Nottingham is to limit the increase to no more than a 10.5% increase in person journey times in the context of a 4.2% increase in travel (person miles) on the monitored network by 2010. In order to monitor congestion the main corridors within the Greater Nottingham area road network were selected.

I have approved the Congestion Delivery Plan which sets out the actions to be undertaken by the County and City councils, transport operators and other partners. It includes broad measures such as intelligent traffic management control systems, improving the quality of public transport and promoting walking and cycling. The plan also includes details of proposed schemes along each of the main corridors. The Department for Transport requires six-monthly progress reports and Public Service Agreement funding will be awarded based on performance against the target.

5. **English Heritage Policy Position Statement**

English Heritage has published a draft position statement on mineral extraction and the historic environment. For the County Council this statement will be of particular relevance in the preparation of new minerals development plan documents and in giving expert advice on the historic environment to district councils and other organisations.

The statement looks at three main areas beginning with the historical significance of mineral extraction. It suggests that we should give more thought to conserving important former mineral sites and structures and consider sustainable reuse of sites through the conservation of existing buildings. The statement goes on to talk about the adverse impact of mineral extraction on the historic environment, the need to avoid damaging sites of national importance and ensure that restoration schemes take into account the character of the original landscape. The final issue emphasises the importance of maintaining supplies of natural stone and other materials required to conserve the historic environment and maintain local distinctiveness.

The statement is broadly welcomed and may help address issues such as the loss of our coal industry heritage and source of local building stone which are all very relevant to Nottinghamshire. I have approved the County Council's response to English Heritage.

6. **Nottinghamshire Motorcycle and Action Plan**

The Government has set stringent targets for reducing the numbers of killed or seriously injured (KSI) on the roads. Motorcyclists make up less than 1% of road traffic, but suffer 21% of the KSI in Nottinghamshire. To help us better understand the issues faced by motorcyclists the Nottinghamshire Motorcycle Forum was convened in September 2003. The Forum has a broad membership from local riders, local and national motorcycle groups, trainers, motorcycle shops and stakeholders such as the emergency services and city council officers.

The Forum has developed a Motorcycle Strategy and Action Plan for Nottinghamshire which outlines the Authority's aims to make motorcycling safer and to promote it as a choice of travel and also a sustainable means of travel. The Action Plan details how these aims can be achieved and will be monitored by the Forum. I am pleased to adopt these documents on behalf of the County Council.

7. **Bus Services to Robin Hood Airport**

I was pleased to see that the County Council has negotiated a contract with Stagecoach East Midlands to run expanded services to link the north of the county with Robin Hood Airport over the next four years. This is in response to independent research which identified a need for local people to access jobs opportunities at the airport. The County Council has purchased six new buses for the airport services which boast all the latest design features. The new routes will benefit all bus users improving the quality and suitability of local buses in the area.

8. **Changes to the Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle (PHV) Legislation**

I have recently reported to Cabinet on changes to the Private Hire Vehicle (PHV) legislation and implications for the Authority. At present in England and Wales a vehicle with less than nine seats is exempt from the requirement to be licensed as a PHV if it is used for contracts lasting for more than seven days. The County Council makes extensive use of this exemption for the transport arrangements for young people who have special needs and has 143 contracts in place.

The Government has decided that this exemption poses a significant safety risk and should be repealed. The changes will take effect from January 2008 and will have significant logistical implications for the County Council:

- Drivers will need to be licensed which will involve tests, medicals and enhanced CRB checks
- Vehicles will need to be licensed in accordance with district/borough local regulations. These vary and can impose restrictions on vehicle age, type and testing. Many of the vehicles used for current contracts are specially adapted and may not meet PHV requirements
- Some drivers may opt not to renew their contracts

Discussions with the district, borough and City Council licensing officers is continuing so that the County Council is able to adopt a single strategy for implementing the change as effectively as possible.

9. **Rural Rides**

I was delighted to help the Countryside Access team celebrate the 21st birthday of Rural Rides. Rural Rides offer a wide range of free rides which vary in duration from a half-hour trip to whole weekends, following quiet lanes and off-road routes at a leisurely pace. The scheme was set up to encourage people to get fit and explore the county. It began with just 31 rides in 1986 and now boasts almost 100. This is a great success and I would like to congratulate and thank all those who have contributed to it over the years.

Councillor Stella Smedley
Cabinet Member for Environment

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