

APPENDIX A

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 22 JULY 2021 QUESTIONS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

Note – Questions one and two were taken together

Question to the Chairman of the Transport and Environment Committee from Councillor David Martin

With the dissolving of the Communities and Place Development and Review Committee which excellently scrutinised this council's methodologies and processes for the highways improvements and maintenance. Will the Chairman of the new Transport and Environment Committee provide this Council with an assurance that the newly formed cross-party Highway's review Panel will fully explore the latest and most economic currently available methods available to repair Nottinghamshire's broken roads and also actually include PAVEMENTS?

Question to the Chairman of the Transport and Environment Committee from Councillor Callum Bailey

Would the Chairman of the Transport and Environment Committee update Members on progress so far regarding the Highways Review Panel?

Response from the Chairman of the Transport and Environment Committee, Councillor Neil Clarke MBE

Maybe it goes without saying, just to remind all members of the Council here that road safety and the Highways Review particularly are top priorities for this new administration. Roads maintenance was mentioned by the majority of people on the doorstep during the elections, and just to remind you that the reason this item now is coming to us, and we have this Highways Review Panel, is because that was one of the first motions in the first meeting of this Council, to set up this review. So, I think that does give a measure of the importance of this.

We have hit the ground running. We've already had the first meeting of the Review Panel and at this stage it is more fact-finding and information gathering, but then we will gradually move into seeing what actions can actually be taken. So, in the first meeting we have agreed the Terms of Reference; we've also agreed that we will be having an outside consultancy, WSP, who will be assisting us; we have asked the Local Government Association (LGA) to help us with a Peer Review, so they will be a critical friend helping us constructively to look in the mirror at how we perform; we will also be arranging to meet other county councils as well to assess and compare how they do things compared to us.

So, tomorrow, early morning, Mr Chairman, we start our second meeting, which is actually a visit, which will be combined with a depot visit and a meeting to Bilsthorpe Depot, Via's main depot, where we will be looking exactly at how they do things now and how can they possibly be done better or improved, looking at and exploring latest technology, innovation, different ways of working, so I think that is specific to Councillor

Martin's question. We are working on the basis that all options are open at the moment because we want this to be a thorough and comprehensive review, so we want to explore whatever questions we have. At the end of the day we want to make sure that the way that we maintain the roads is the most effective way, and that is what we will be exploring.

I want to make absolutely clear that pavements are included, Mr Chairman, so I don't think we need to have any further questions as things go on with regard to that, because the word 'highways' actually refers to both the carriageway and the footpaths, so it's a combined term. 'Highways' means the bits that you drive on or cycle on, and the bits that you walk on. It's an all-inclusive term.

And I did want – it's a shame he's not in the Chamber, maybe he's listening in the background – Councillor Zadrozny mentioned utilities, and I just wanted to confirm that's one of the things as well that I want to see looked at. In fact, I'm very familiar with that Heineken advert that he mentioned, because I've used that myself in past presentations. For those of you that haven't seen it, I suggest you look at it, because the punchline is 'different', shall we say, or rather interesting. I will leave you to look at that, but it does work on the basis and emphasise the need to ensure that where possible we encourage utilities to work together to minimise the disruption.

So, Chairman, the work is very much ongoing and in progress. We are already getting dates in the diary for September and October for future meetings, because we want to be coming to conclusions and recommendations that we can put to Policy Committee later on in the year.

Question to the Chairman of the Communities Committee from Councillor John Wilmott

The roof at Hucknall Library was repaired some time ago at considerable cost. Just months later it is being repaired again. Can he inform me of the cost of the initial work, the subsequent work and whether this Council is out of pocket as a result?

Response from the Chairman of the Communities Committee, Councillor John Cottee

Hucknall Library is a Grade 2 listed building and the roof was replaced in 2016 at a cost of £300,000 and is expected to last a minimum of 30 years.

Recent work on the building has concentrated on repairing internal ceilings, rather than the roof structure, and has cost £50,000. Whilst these costs are substantial, they are essential to maintain a Grade 2 listed building and fall within the Council's budget as owners of the site.

Question to the Chairman of the Transport and Environment Committee from Councillor Penny Gowland

Over the past month I've been contacted by many upset residents, who have witnessed what they describe as an excessive use of weed killer containing the herbicide glyphosate. Further investigation revealed that this had been used on

planters and areas which residents are encouraging as corridors for pollinators. Could the Chair please instigate a review of NCC's weed killing programme to try to minimize the use of weed killers generally and to cease the use of glyphosate in particular?

Response by the Vice Chairman of the Transport and Environment Committee, Councillor Mike Adams on behalf of the Chairman of the Transport and Environment Committee, Councillor Neil Clarke MBE

Here at Nottinghamshire County Council we only use weedkiller on kerbs, footways, cycleways, hardened verges and central reserves. This is done to enhance the visual appearance, and I'm sure you've all had reports fairly recently with the weather, how we've had a big uplift in the volume of weed growth. It's fundamental that we do this because it can cause structural damage to the fabric of the highway.

The authority would not normally use weedkiller on verges, planters or any other areas of soft landscaping. I would be grateful if Councillor Gowland could let me know of the specific locations to which she has been alerted, so that our officers can investigate further.

Glyphosate, which in case people don't know is the main ingredient in 'Round-Up' brand herbicides, is currently the only approved non-residual weedkiller for use on highway surfaces. It has been licenced by both the UK Government and EU and is considered safe when used according to the manufacturer's instructions. However, the authority does recognise Members' concerns regarding the product and its continued use. Consequently, our ongoing Highways Review will examine what alternatives may be available.

We all understand the importance of the highways to encourage and promote wildlife. Our rural grass cutting frequencies are already amongst the lowest in the region and our Notified Road Verge (NRV) scheme - which had been in abeyance for a number of years - was recently re-introduced.

NRVs receive a single meadow-grass cut in September, and clippings are collected and disposed of off-site. The best practice guide 'Managing Grassland Road Verges', produced by 'Plantlife', recognises that this technique is one the most effective for promoting wildflowers and providing corridors for pollinators. I'm incredibly excited to tell you that the NRV scheme is being extended and work with Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust, collaborating with them, goes on and we look to introduce some more in the future. I am also currently working on plans to see how much further and extended work we actually can do with Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust as we all know that biodiversity is important for us all.

Question to the Chairman of the Finance Committee from Councillor Tom Hollis

The house prices on Sudbury Drive in Huthwaite are three times the average house price in Sutton-in-Ashfield. Despite this, the Council have purchased a house there. The property is one of the most expensive in the town and it has been bought to house just 2 looked after children at a time. The Council have bought this house without planning permission for its intended use. Does the chair believe taxpayers got

value for money purchasing a house on Sudbury Drive, Huthwaite without consultation with the divisional councillor?

Response from the Chairman of the Finance Committee, Councillor Richard Jackson

High quality accommodation for Looked After Children, for whom this Council and all of us as Elected Members are Corporate Parents, is one of our highest priorities.

For the majority of children in the care of this Council, keeping them close to their school, their friends and the community is extremely important. There are vulnerable children from Ashfield, as well as from the other six districts in the County, whose best interests will be served by achieving this aim, and we are continually looking for opportunities to improve our capacity to do so.

I find Councillor Hollis' question a little surprising to say the least. He seems to be pre-occupied with the relative cost of this purchase, rather than the benefit an additional Children's Home will bring to our Looked After Children if planning permission is granted.

I recall the days when Conservatives here were falsely accused of "knowing the cost of everything and the value of nothing", yet in this case, Councillor Hollis seems to be far more pre-occupied with the cost of the house in question, rather than the value that the additional, local, specialist accommodation could provide to our most vulnerable children.

Nevertheless, I seek to address his concerns.

When we need to expand our residential estate, a property search is undertaken within the geographical areas identified to find properties that meet, or that can be adapted to meet the need of the required specification.

The average price for an average size detached house in Huthwaite is currently £201,000 according to Right Move. The detached, above average size 4-bedroom property that we purchased on 12th July in Sudbury Drive was the only one in the area that met the specification that we need, and rather than the £300,000 that Councillor Hollis referred to in his three minute speech at the beginning of today's session, it cost us £265,000.

The property was purchased in advance of the planning application being considered, because anyone operating in the open housing market must act with speed to secure a purchase when their desired property becomes available. Planning processes take considerable time, and vendors cannot realistically be expected to wait for a prospective purchaser to obtain planning consent. In fact, it would be a waste of public money to pursue a lengthy planning application and hopefully gain approval for a target property, only to find that the property had since been sold.

There will be nothing done to the property in terms of establishing it as a children's home unless and until planning consent has been granted for this. Now I am aware that some local residents have witnessed activity taking place at the location, but I can

clarify that these visitors were staff from Arc, conducting routine assessments on behalf of the Council in line with our vacant property management regime.

The local member has had dialogue with a number of officers across the Council about the purchase of this property and made his concerns clear, all of which have been fully considered. He has also been invited to visit a children's home being run by the proposed provider, to better understand how some of his concerns would be addressed, should planning permission be granted.

As members are aware, all planning applications are required to follow a due legal process where the proposed use of a property is subject to rigorous and impartial examination, carried out by the Planning and Rights of Way Committee. If the proposed use of this property as a children's home does not pass these tests, then the Council will either have to identify another use for the property, or re-sell it in what remains an active and open market where it is highly unlikely to lose any value.

I am clear that the Council has followed the correct processes, and that our proposals for the property's future use will be examined and determined in the proper way. Any interested party with concerns about our proposals will have full opportunity to submit their evidence through the usual planning process.

I readily admit that nothing is more important to this administration than providing our Looked After Children with the most appropriate and suitable accommodation. I am sure I speak for the Chairman of the Children and Young People's Committee, just as much as myself and all of my colleagues on this side, in saying that we would not purchase a property or propose its use as a children's home unless we were confident that this would provide huge benefit to the children concerned, that we could deliver the service at best value, and that it would not have a detrimental impact on those living in the vicinity.

It is a compliment to the area that we have identified this property and this location as the most safe and suitable environment to locate such an important facility. Our judgement will now be tested through the planning process in a fair, impartial way.

Question to the Chairman of the Transport and Environment Committee from Councillor John Wilmott

Could the Chairman answer why Titchfield Street in Hucknall is so unkempt? Two years ago, this Council announced that it was going to be turned into a car park – could he provide an update on this?

Response by the Chairman of the Transport and Environment Committee, Councillor Neil Clarke MBE

The question talks about why a street, Titchfield Street, is so unkempt, and how do you judge, how do you define unkempt? I'm sure that we can all use different phrases to describe how a street is unkempt – is it the state of the road surface, is it litter, or is it even households? What does he mean by the street being "unkempt"?

So, I note that the question is about the street, initially, but I also note that a car park is mentioned, so perhaps if I just deal with the car park issue and then I'm going to return to the street issue in a little while.

In terms of the car park that was mentioned, this is part of our assets, not least looked after by the gentleman on my left-hand side, as part of our continuing review of property assets, the County Council did examine the potential for using the Titchfield Street site in Hucknall as a car park. That work has led to other options being identified by the property service, based on constructive engagement with the Chairmen of Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee and the Children and Young People's Committee. Several committees involved here, Mr Chairman, so it's obviously very comprehensive.

Under my Chairmanship, officers have been directed to work through these options to identify the most suitable use for the site, and this will be reported to Councillor Girling's Economic Development and Asset Management Committee in due course.

With regard to the site's current condition, I will however ask officers to ensure that it is regularly inspected and kept in a clean and safe state whilst the work is going on.

In terms of the condition of the street, Mr Chairman, Titchfield Street, I actually happen to know this street extremely well. Why do I know that, I hear you ask, Mr Chairman? Well, I was there only three or four weeks ago delivering leaflets to lots of the households, and in fact I know every letterbox, Mr Chairman, never mind about the street. Despite my bad hip I was grateful for having terraced streets – it wasn't just Titchfield Street, it was Co-Operative Avenue and Parker Avenue and a couple of other streets, but I remember noticing in what good condition Titchfield Street was. It is divided into two sections, and the bit with the car park is on the other side of the new link road, but even so, I am amazed that in actual fact the road surface and the pavements are in very, very good condition. I did actually encounter one or two of the residents and in fact I chatted to one and tried to hand this leaflet to him, Mr Chairman, but he said "I don't want any of that, I'm not interested, I have nothing to do with the local councillors!", so I just wonder who it is that they were referring to, Mr Chairman, but it's amazing how he should have chosen a particular street I've got myself very well acquainted with.

Question to the Chairman of the Planning and Rights of Way Committee from Councillor Elizabeth Williamson

Can the Chair please give an update on the status of the 2 footpaths off Main Street, near the Foresters Arms in Newthorpe leading to Greasley Church and the Moorgreen Reservoir? What can this Council do to reopen these footpaths that residents value so much as soon as possible?

Response from the Chairman of the Planning and Rights of Way Committee, Councillor Richard Butler

Officers are working hard to resolve the ongoing obstruction and reinstatement of these public paths and have spent a considerable amount of time and effort, including time in Court, to establish exactly where the paths run.

There are two main issues.

Firstly, the erection of a building in the 1960s that is partly situated on one of the paths. This issue wasn't apparent for many years because record keeping wasn't as detailed at the time. Therefore, over the years since, walkers have used the available footpath rather than the historically recorded path.

Secondly, in 2013, further obstructions were placed on the routes that people have been using since the 1960s. These things together mean that the routes are now unavailable.

Officers have been looking into ways of fitting these paths into the modern landscape to ensure that good, usable routes are in place as soon as possible. The Council has made a Legal Order to divert both footpaths onto a better, modern alignment. However, an objection has been received, and as a result, only the Secretary of State's Inspector can make the decision as to whether the paths can be diverted.

Therefore, the matter is currently with the Government's Planning Inspectorate, and unfortunately, we understand that consideration has been delayed by the impact of the pandemic. That said, the County Council is continuing to do everything it can to bring this case to a satisfactory conclusion as quickly as possible, for the benefit to both to users of the path and the relevant landowners.

Question to the Chairman of the Transport and Environment Committee from Councillor Helen-Ann Smith

Parts of Sutton-in-Ashfield resemble racetracks with no traffic enforcement whatsoever. Alfred Street and Howard Street are prime examples as they see a huge amount of traffic accessing the estate off Farndale Road. When will this Council adopt a proactive approach to speeding rather than the current reactive one where you wait for accidents to happen before taking any action?

Response from the Chairman of the Transport and Environment Committee, Councillor Neil Clarke MBE

I was a little bit surprised by this question from Councillor Smith because she has been on this Council long enough to know, I think, what the answer is going to be. She will be aware that speed limit enforcement is a matter for Nottinghamshire Police and not this Council. However, the County Council is proactive in trying to address speeding issues in a number of ways within the powers available to us, and within the limited resources available to us.

Where practical, we use road engineering measures ranging from traffic warning signs and road markings, through to higher cost installations such as interactive speed signs, assessing the need by measuring traffic flows and average speeds.

Pedestrian facilities are also prioritised on the basis of traffic flows and the number of pedestrians crossing who might potentially come into conflict with them.

It is a fact that the most intrusive and controversial measures, such as traffic calming and speed cameras, are reserved primarily for sites where accidents are involving serious and fatal injuries.

This ensures that the very high cost of these types of schemes is justified and only implemented as a last resort when other speed reduction techniques have been tried and failed.

We are very proactive in listening to public concerns about speeding and other traffic issues. Councillor Smith and indeed any member of the Council may wish to visit the County Council website, in particular the page specifically dedicated to speed limits, and she will see a statement there which I quote:

‘If you believe that traffic travels too fast along roads in your area, make a record of when and where the problem occurs. You can then report it online, using our ‘make a new highways request form’.

When such a problem is reported to us, it will be investigated to gauge the seriousness of the problem, and whether the powers we have at our disposal might provide a solution, or whether it is essentially an enforcement issue, then of course we will raise it and pass it on to the Police.

The measures that the County Council can take are dictated by national criteria and guidance, so for instance if the public request a change to a speed limit in an area, we cannot just do this arbitrarily or instantly. I’m sure we are all well aware we need to have a Traffic Regulation Order that takes time - a legal procedure – and it can be over a year for that to happen. That regulation order process I certainly would agree could be quicker, but we are governed by the national law as it stands.

We have to govern by consensus to a degree. The speed limit chosen for a particular road must be appropriate for the conditions, and most drivers must obey the limit without the need for constant Police enforcement. The purpose of the Police as speed limit enforcers is to identify and catch those who brazenly disregard what drivers and residents regard and respect as sensible speed limits.

Later today, we will discuss a motion seeking to explore the feasibility of implementing a 20mph speed limit in all of our conurbations. The motion is similar to one that was agreed towards the end of the last administration, and I intend to approach this one in a similarly constructive manner, by asking the Transport and Environment Committee to look carefully at what is practical, feasible and achievable.

As the new Chairman of the Transport and Environment Committee I welcome constructive ideas about how we can set the most appropriate speed limits to suit the needs of particular areas of the county, such as Alfred Street, Howard Street and Farndale Road, and address any particular problems which occur, but I do stress again, within the available resources.

Therefore, I reject the suggestion that we are not already proactive in our approach, within the confines of the powers that we have at our disposal.

Question to the Chairman of the Economic Development and Asset Management Committee from Councillor David Shaw

Spending £28 million on new council offices at Top Wighay Farm, Worksop and at County Hall and doing up others was agreed in February 2020 – just before the pandemic. Bearing in mind, the report on hybrid working practices agreed at the Policy Committee on 15th July and the ongoing review of the Council’s Estates – does the chairman agree with me that now is the time to pause these plans until we have a clearer picture of whether new offices are actually needed?

Response by the Chairman of the Economic Development and Asset Management Committee, Councillor Keith Girling

I hope Councillor Shaw would not wish to mislead the public, so in the interests of openness and transparency I must point out that the £28 million he mentions is for investment in the whole Nottinghamshire County Council estate, not just Top Wighay.

The Top Wighay Farm and County Hall developments are all part of the wider ‘Investing in Nottinghamshire’ programme. The programme is currently under review to ensure it aligns with the Hybrid Working Model, and a report on the outcome of this review and next steps will be submitted to the Economic Development and Asset Management Committee in the Autumn.

I can assure Councillor Shaw that all Members of the Economic Development and Asset Management Committee will be able to consider the proposals at that time and provide constructive input to ensure we have an office estate that is fit for purpose, but it would be inappropriate to presume the outcome of this before members have had the chance to consider it fully.

Question to the Chairman of the Transport and Environment Committee from Councillor Elizabeth Williamson

I’ve raised my concerns with the footpath officer before on several occasions about the lack of disabled access at the north entrance on Cordy Lane of the mineral line that connects to the Brinsley Headstocks site. A circular route is not possible for people in wheelchairs, mobility scooters or with push chairs. They have to travel the length of the path then turn round and go back again because of the gate at the north entrance. The gate should be moved to allow a radar key gate to be installed. The Footpath Officer says the landowner doesn’t want the gate to be changed. Surely a footpath should be accessible to all, not just people with 2 working legs. What can the Council do to ensure this footpath is accessible to all?

Response by the Chairman of the Transport and Environment Committee, Councillor Neil Clarke MBE

Nottinghamshire County Council is committed to maximising the accessibility of public rights of way wherever this is legally and physically possible, especially with consideration for people who have wheelchairs, mobility scooters and other equipment which requires suitable space and no insurmountable barriers.

I understand that the current gate at Brinsley is an authorised structure on the Public Highway, which means that the landowner is allowed to have the limitation on the public footpath.

The Council encourages landowners to replace structures which allow limited accessibility with alternative structures that are more accommodating for people with disabilities. The authority has been successful in persuading a number of different landowners to replace stiles with more accessible 'kissing gates', but we cannot impose the removal of an approved structure or force its replacement.

Regarding the particular gate that you mention, I am given to understand that due to physical constraints and topography of the location, it would not be possible to erect a larger Radar style kissing gate without moving it. The landowner wants to keep the existing gate, as I understand it, in its current location, but officers will continue to maintain a dialogue with a view of trying to resolve the matter and deliver improved access at this location.

Question to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Jason Zadrozny

How much do you estimate setting up a Combined Authority will cost in the East Midlands? Will it, like other combined authorities across the country be funded by charging a levy to all 22 district and borough councils, the 3 unitary city councils and the 3 city councils and how much do you estimate this to be per Council, per year? Minister Luke Hall told you last week that any Local Government Reorganisation must have "...a good deal of support amongst the councils and stakeholders" – how does the Leader expect to demonstrate this public support? Does he envisage a referendum?

Response from Leader of the Council, Councillor Ben Bradley MP

The short answer in terms of how much will it cost is, I could not possibly say and nor could anybody else until we engage in a conversation with Government about the detail of what it might look like, because there are all sorts of options, but I'll start with going through your question piece by piece. If you'll indulge me, Mr Chairman, I want to go into this in some detail because it is an important part of the outcomes that we want to get as an administration from today.

I'll start with the benefits of a combined authority and a recent example: in the billion pound devolution deal for West Yorkshire, the new Mayoral Combined Authority was elected to oversee powers over transport, education, housing, regeneration, adult education budget. That means the authority will have access to over £1.1 billion of investment in the region. Every other region in England has a similar deal – Manchester in the North West, Teesside, West Midlands, West of England and of course London in the South East, and I wonder why we don't – it surely can't be for lack of ambition or leadership on our part. Right now, it certainly isn't for lack of opportunity because we're being asked directly by the Prime Minister to come forward with ideas. It seems to me that we are missing out on an opportunity currently.

So, bear in mind that any deal is for us to decide and so these are powers and resources coming down from Government, not up from local Councils. Any powers that might be pooled across Councils can only be done so by the choice and consent of those Councils, that's what's written in the legislation. At this stage all that we are asking, all that local councils need to do is to demonstrate a willingness to collaborate and put aside political differences to explore this opportunity.

I am happy to say, unashamedly, that I intend to push for an ambitious devolution deal for our County and our region because it seems to me we are missing out on significant investment and opportunity. It's early days, but we need to start at the beginning of that process, and the beginning is a conversation and an agreement to take that forward and to talk to Government about it. That's the only way we're going to get the detail to answer your questions.

I can set out the legal framework for the establishment of them because that will help me to answer the other parts of your question. Combined authorities are legal structures comprising two or more local authorities. They can be established with or without a Mayor depending on what scale we choose to go with. As I've said, the Prime Minister has offered a range of scales ranging from a county and a city working together on delivering better bus services, all the way up to huge multi-billion pound deals as in the West Midlands or as in Greater Manchester. The combined authorities that exist currently have been established under two pieces of legislation - the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009, and the Cities and Local Government Act 2016. Under both of them there is a process which determines how it is set up and includes consultation with the public and local stakeholders.

Under the 2009 Act, local authorities were able to establish Combined Authorities through a "governance review" which included local public consultation. Under the 2016 Act, the Secretary of State can decide to establish a combined authority with the consent of councils, and in that case the Secretary of State undertakes public consultation.

In terms of funding, it seems self-evident to me that the constituent local councils would likely have to contribute to the upkeep of a Combined Authority. Frankly, if the Government is handing down multi-billion pound investment packages to our region, it is probably only right that our local authorities contribute to the management of that funding and we want to do that in order to be able to have an appropriate stake and an appropriate say in how it is spent. We already do it, of course, with things like East Midlands Councils, Midlands Engine and Local Enterprise Partnerships where local authorities contribute to those wider regional schemes. So, some of those things could actually be wrapped up in a Combined Authority if we chose to go by that route. The Local Enterprise Partnership, for example, could become part of that organisation, so how it works and how much it costs we can't possibly know because it depends whether we're doing 'two people looking at buses' or a multi-billion pound deal. In terms of examples that are out there, Councillor Zadrozny you will be as able as me to go online and search for some of those public budgets that are available for those authorities and there are countless examples as I said – every other region has one except us.

What I can tell you is that all councils in membership of these authorities will have made a basic value for money assumption – a calculation about the resources that need to go into it versus the benefits that they will receive from it, and they have clearly decided – because unanimity is required – they have clearly all decided that there is value in their involvement, and this includes two-tier structures. Cambridge District Council, Fenland, Huntingdonshire and South Cambridgeshire Council are all district councils in a two-tier structure involved in a devolution deal. If it is good enough for Peterborough and good enough for Cambridgeshire, I think it is potentially good enough for us as well and something worth reviewing.

Chairman, what I have explained today is the way the world works now. The Prime Minister laid out a speech last week that made very clear he sees devolution as a mechanism to deliver investment through this Levelling Up programme, with legislation, a White Paper to come in the Autumn spending review. He laid out that this was a key mechanism for us to be able to consider accessing that funding. I think it is important that we are involved in that conversation for that reason, and having spent the last couple of months consulting leaders around the district, borough and city councils and my colleagues Nottinghamshire Members of Parliament, I can tell you there is a sizeable appetite to review this. Councillor Foale asked at Policy Committee last week 'is this a plan that I am bringing forward and saying it must be 'X'? No, it is not. This is a case of me saying let's approach this conversation together, let's go in with as many stakeholders as we can, and discuss what the opportunities might be, then we can make that value for money decision on the basis of the detail that we can figure out.

Finally, I would just address your reference to local government reorganisation in the question and just reiterate what I've said, and I said it at the Annual General Meeting last time, I've no plans to visit local government reorganisation in terms of our two-tier structures, it is clear there is no agreement, and so it is not on the cards and not part of this discussion. I think this is about what powers and investment we can bring down and bring towards and more local to our region, and not to bring things up from parish and district councils. So, I want to work with you councillor Zadrozny, with leaders across the County, Ashfield District Council on an ambitious plan for our County and for our region. I am sure we are going to get more into this through the motion in a minute, but I am offering collaboration here, I want us to go talk about this openly in the right forum, not seeking an argument. I know you have many questions, as other leaders do, and quite rightly so, but I've said to you privately and I'll say publicly in the Chamber today, the way to answer that, in my view, is to start that initial discussion, to get into the detail to figure out what we can agree what it might look like, and then we can all make that judgement.

Question to the Chairman of the Transport and Environment Committee from Councillor David Shaw

Could the Chair please tell me whether he thinks that there is a correlation between poor street lighting and crime?

Response from the Chairman of the Transport and Environment Committee, Councillor Neil Clarke MBE

It's a matter of opinion, because asking me what I think about it is different to actually asking about facts etcetera.

It's a question of really trying to determine what does Councillor Shaw actually mean by poor street lighting? Does he mean to refer to the brightness, or the number of lights, or are there streetlights out of order, or insufficiency of streetlights? There are so many different ways of interpreting it.

Some people might even be asking whether streetlights should be switched on at all in certain areas in the dead of night burning energy when we've just, in this Council, at the last meeting, unanimously declared a Climate Emergency. So, we have these factors arguing or fighting with each other, if you like.

The problem, possibly, is that the public often perceive that poor or reduced lighting is an invitation to criminals, even though several studies have found this not to be true. There has been research, reported in the media, based on fourteen years of data from 62 local authorities across England and Wales, which found there was no evidence of a link between reduced streetlighting and increased crime, or indeed traffic accidents for that matter.

The study, which was led by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in partnership with University College London, looked at councils that had implemented a range of reduced street light strategies including switching off lights permanently, reducing the number of hours that lamps are switched on at night, dimming lights, and replacing traditional orange lamps with energy-efficient white light LED lamps. They focused on offences more likely to occur at night, including burglary, vehicle theft, robbery, violence and sexual assault. Overall, there was no evidence of an association between reduced street lighting and increased crime.

I've heard comment from Police in the past saying that the criminals don't like the dark either because they can't see what they're doing, so how do you make that judgement? Another report by the Cambridge Research Group concluded that, and I quote, "the evidence pointing towards the limited benefit of streetlights in reducing crime cannot be reversed and used to argue that withdrawing lighting will result in an increase".

The Cambridge Research Group also concluded that: "There is a strong association in minds of the public between the presence of lighting and a feeling of safety", even if this is evidentially not proven.

This reminds me of the long-standing debate over "bobbies on the beat", where the evidence suggests that they are not necessarily the most efficient way to tackle crime, but the public perception was that they wanted a visible Police presence to feel safer.

The County Council eventually decided in 2014 to commit instead to a huge roll-out of LED lights, given that LED technology was advancing rapidly and the price of LEDs was falling. There was early consultation with the Police prior to the change to LEDs. White light has always been used near CCTV as it gives better colour definition, and our lighting teams have worked closely with the Police control rooms to enable this.

Chairman, I could go on a lot further, I'm conscious of time because I've actually got another page worth of facts, but I think it is probably best, because there's a lot of other business that you wish to conduct, so I think I should merely conclude by saying that other lighting also exists within town centres, housing estates and leisure centres that are often owned by district councils as well as county councils, and so it's an issue, I think, that is subject to a lot of opinion and research, and as I've indicated, probably not yet conclusive.