

APPENDIX A

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 17 DECEMBER 2020 QUESTIONS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

Question to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Richard Jackson

Given that the National Infrastructure Commission has not yet published the Integrated Rail Plan, and that any recommendation they make with regard to the HS2 (Phase 2b Eastern Leg) line will be advisory pending a final decision by the Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Transport, is it fair to say at this stage that no decision has been made regarding the line?

Response from Councillor Mrs Kay Cutts MBE, Leader of the Council

Thank you, Councillor Jackson for your question, submitted of course prior to the National Infrastructure Commission's (NIC) Integrated Rail Plan being published on Tuesday.

As you correctly state, the report is advisory in nature, setting out a range of packages to meet rail needs across the Midlands and the North for Ministers to consider.

Members may recall that The Oakervee Review, which was published at the start of the year, concluded that a Y-shaped network for HS2 was the right strategic answer for the country.

However, The Oakervee Review also concluded that Phase 2b needed to be considered as part of a wider plan including Midlands Engine Rail, the Midland Mainline, and other large-scale rail projects. This became known as the Integrated Rail Plan, the scope of which was specifically to consider how best to integrate these projects, reduce cost, and deliver the project as part of a wider national picture.

The Government have consistently stated that HS2, including the Eastern Leg, will be built in full. It is therefore somewhat disappointing that the NIC have only included the Eastern Leg and Toton in 2 of the 5 packages they set out in the report.

It is further disappointing that the NIC report fails to take into account the growth plans that partners in the region have developed over the last 4 years, which have unanimous support. Critically, the NIC report doesn't appear to explain whether the East Midlands would be any better, or indeed worse off under each of the proposed packages.

You will note that other major considerations – such as the Government's levelling up agenda, our national ambitions for decarbonisation, and the East Midlands Development Corporation – are beyond the scope of this Plan and barely mentioned in the report, which is solely focused on the operational elements of these projects. These will, of course, have to be taken into consideration by the Government when they make their final decision.

From our own initial analysis of the report, it is quite clear that the packages proposed by the NIC will see the East Midlands become worse off, with fewer new quality jobs created in our economy, with limited increases in productivity and prosperity, a less positive impact on the environment and carbon emissions and less government investment that we so badly need.

To stop the HS2 at the East Midlands Parkway is very expensive due to the topography, but perhaps more importantly it is in the wrong place and its unlikely that Nottinghamshire County Council will support this proposal.

Even before the NIC's review was undertaken, it was well-known that HS2 would be an expensive endeavour. However, given that the line will create £5billion of growth in the region every year I certainly don't think value for money comes into question.

The NIC report is clearly flawed, but will be considered alongside the Sir Allan Cook and Oakervee Reviews. The Government will then publish its Integrated Rail Plan, which will outline their policy response and decisions relating to the delivery of HS2. This is anticipated in the New Year, so until that point you are right to highlight that no final decision has been made regarding the line. In fact, the report references this directly, and I quote:

"If government wishes to take an adaptive approach in the Integrated Rail Plan [...] [they] would need to consider with local stakeholders the best option for the main rail hub in the East Midlands, taking account of economic and regeneration opportunities."

It is clear, therefore, that Nottinghamshire County Council and its partners still have a major role to play in the finalisation of the Rail Plan, and we will continue to be passionate advocates for HS2 and the transformational economic benefits it will bring to Nottinghamshire and the wider East Midlands region and to the further North as well. That's the North-East, not the North-West I am referring to.

Though I know that Councillor Rhodes is often keen to quote me out of context, I have already been lobbying loudly for Nottinghamshire's stake in this project. I have met and corresponded regularly with Sir John Armitt, Chairman of the Commission, and I have spoken to the Secretary of State, Andrew Stephens, who is minister for this line at length on several times, probably 4 or 5 meetings together with colleagues along the further length of the line including Leeds and Sheffield and the Prime Minister to demonstrate how important these infrastructure projects are to the future of our county and of the East Midlands as a whole.

I continue to work with partners locally and nationally to impress upon the Prime Minister and Secretaries of State for Transport and Housing, Communities, and Local Government, the importance of HS2 for the region. We recognise its value in levelling up our economy, as well as other economies that are along its eastern route, and continue to make this case to government.

This Administration would not sit by and let Nottinghamshire miss out on its fair share.

Question to the Chairman of the Communities and Place Committee from Councillor Alan Rhodes

Does the Chairman of Communities and Place believe that LIS (Local Improvement Scheme) funding has been devolved equitably, when 70% of this year's allocations were awarded to applications supported by Conservative Members?

Response from Councillor John Handley, Vice-Chairman of the Communities and Place Committee on behalf of Councillor John Cottee, Chairman of the Communities and Place Committee

The short answer to your question is yes. Local Improvement Scheme funding has been devolved equitably in accordance with the published criteria, also taking into account the likelihood and practicality of projects being completed in the current, highly challenging circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Local improvement Scheme is a Member-led initiative where bidders are expected to contact and then seek the consent, support and signature of their local councillor or councillors for their application.

Almost 70% of the applications to this round of the LIS were sponsored by Conservative and Mansfield Independent Group councillors, who represent 55% of the Council. In comparison, Labour Group councillors make up 33% of the Council but sponsored only 18% of the LIS bids received. Given these proportions of bids coming in for assessment, it is unsurprising that bids sponsored by Conservative and Mansfield Independent Group councillors formed a comparatively larger percentage of the approved allocations.

There is no limit, except a time deadline, on how many bids can be made to the Local Improvement Scheme. I am certainly not going to deter members of any group from sponsoring applications just in case members of another group may be less active in doing so. Whatever the total number of bids received, each application is considered on its merits against the criteria and recommendations are then made to the Communities and Place Committee.

Most of the applications recommended for funding through this year's LIS were approved at the November meeting of Communities and Place Committee where it was stated that a small number of bids were undergoing further analysis. The outcome of this work saw a further 27 applications approved by committee in December.

In determining which applications are recommended for approval, a robust assessment process is undertaken to ensure that applications meet the criteria. Applications are assessed, moderated and reviewed by officers to help the Committee with its decisions. I'd like to say here thank you to the office for the hard work they put in on the LIS scheme. Support is given to the applicants, when requested, to help them understand the process and make the best possible case for their project.

The LIS criteria stated that applicants were encouraged to secure at least 50% of required funding from other sources, known as "match-funding".

Given the reality of the financial and practical circumstances in which approved bids would have to be delivered, a high weighting was given during the assessment process to bids that not only promised a good share of match-funding, but already had that funding in place.

In the case of applications where a significant amount of promised match-funding was unsecured, it was considered that the ongoing COVID lockdown measures could significantly impair the ability of those applicants to raise match-funding in time. It was not therefore considered appropriate, at this time, to commit public money to bids that appeared some way from being “shovel ready” and at high risk of not being completed even within the lengthened timeframe for the 2020-21 scheme.

The bids recommended for approval therefore tended to be those that met the criteria and already had a significant amount of match-funding secured.

I am delighted to report that the 2020/21 Local Improvement Scheme will be delivering more than £680,000 of funding to local projects at a time when other councils are not offering any such discretionary funding. This is a success story of which we should be proud.

Question to the Chairman of the Children and Young People’s Committee from Councillor Liz Plant

Can the Chairman of the Children and Young People’s committee assure members that all pupils in Nottinghamshire maintained schools have the appropriate technology to access online learning when the need arises?

Response from Councillor Philip Owen, Chairman of the Children and Young People’s Committee

The Government has put in place several mechanisms to support Headteachers to ensure there are sufficient IT devices for those children who may require them. Due to the nature of the governance arrangements of academies and maintained schools, the Council does not monitor uptake of IT devices in school. However, Headteachers and Governing Bodies remain committed to ensuring access to education when children are learning at home. It should be noted that even when devices are offered, some parents are still requesting access to paper based resources.

There have been, and remain, a number of schemes to provide laptops and internet access to children and young people during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of these have been delivered via the Department for Education (DfE) and others have been private enterprises. If I can just illustrate some of the ways in which this has been done:

DfE (Department for Education) Laptops for Children and Young People with a Social Worker

The DfE provided Local Authorities with laptop devices to distribute to children and young people with a social worker and care leavers who did not have access to their own device. Nottinghamshire’s were delivered from June 2020 and were distributed either directly to the children and young people, or via their school. Care leavers were

given the device rather than loaned, as allowed in the DfE guidance. Tablets were provided to children under the age of 5.

To date, 1,300 devices under this scheme have been allocated, 65 routers and 99 tablets to children under 5. The council continues to distribute these devices as children and young people come into care. These devices are not only to support education but also to facilitate communication with social workers and, in the case of care leavers, to support them in seeking work and/or undertaking further study. In relation to the DfE provision of routers to access the internet, it should be noted that this data lasts until July 2021.

Laptops for Pupils in Year 10

The DfE also provided laptops and routers to Year 10 pupils. Laptops for Multi Academy Trusts were delivered directly to academies and therefore the council does not know how many were either ordered or secured. Regarding the one secondary school for which this local authority did order, that is the one maintained secondary school, the Headteacher requested 18 devices and 4 routers and these were secured and delivered to the secondary school.

DfE Laptops for pupils (aged 7+) where education has been disrupted

Since the start of the Autumn term 2020 the DfE has provided laptops to schools when face-to-face education has been disrupted, such as when a group or 'bubble' are required to isolate due to a COVID contact within the school, or as a result of a school closure due to COVID. Nottinghamshire's Maintained Schools order the devices themselves but NCC can view the allocation for each school. The allocation was changed due to global demand for devices, however it has now increased again meaning many schools may have ordered some but not all of their allocation to date.

The DfE spreadsheet suggests that Nottinghamshire maintained schools can order up to 2,596 devices. 156 maintained schools have been identified by the DfE to order devices when bubbles are self-isolating or in the case of a school closure. To date, 65 maintained schools have ordered at least part of their allocation.

Multi-Academy Trusts are responsible for ordering their devices directly from the DfE and therefore Nottinghamshire County Council does not know how many devices have either been ordered or allocated.

It should be noted that all Headteachers can continue to order devices should they be required.

Nottinghamshire Libraries

On behalf of the Communities and Place Committee Chairman I can also add that following the easing of the first lockdown early in July, all Nottinghamshire Libraries provided access to its public computers via a booking system.

At implementation of the second lockdown in November, libraries were allowed within the restrictions to provide essential access to computers, which was provided at nine

of our libraries via a booking system. Since coming out of the second lockdown on the 2nd December, all libraries are offering access to computing again.

Inspire learning study programmes are providing young people with laptops where required to undertake their courses.

Question to the Chairman of the Finance and Major Contracts Management Committee from Councillor Mike Pringle

Can the Chairman of Finance and Major Contracts Management Committee please explain how this authority can comprehensively plan for the long term sustainability of the vital services it provides to our residents, when this government has repeatedly failed to deliver any guarantees on future funding structures, and instead insists on sporadically plugging the gap with temporary sticking plasters?

Response from Councillor Richard Jackson, Chairman of the Finance and Major Contracts Management Committee

Did you think through the implications of using the word “comprehensively” in the present context? It strikes me as rather naïve, or something said for effect.

I doubt there’s a Government in the world, let alone a Council in this country, that can claim to have a “comprehensive” plan for the future at present. Yes, the nature of the COVID pandemic requires administrators to be proactive wherever they can, but there’s also a degree to which local and central government is having to react and adapt to changing circumstances, so the notion of “comprehensive” planning in the literal sense of the word is pretty unrealistic.

What I can say, however, is that Nottinghamshire County Council is in a better place to plan for its long-term sustainability than most other local authorities. Due to the ongoing pandemic, no councils are in the position they would ideally wish to be, but Nottinghamshire is in a relatively very good position thanks to our own efforts and help from the Government. For example:-

- The important, sometimes difficult decisions we have taken in previous years to streamline and modernise our services delivered savings which amounted to £300 million over the past decade, putting this council in very good financial shape as acknowledged by our peers in a recent LGA Review;
- This meant we were in a stronger financial position than most going into the pandemic and will emerge from this crisis still well ahead of many other authorities - not that this is a competition - but it means our residents will see less disruption to their services during and after COVID than those elsewhere;
- We are in constant dialogue with Government and all eight Conservative Nottinghamshire MPs and have lobbied successfully for funding, the result being that we have levered in £80.2 million of additional funding to keep the people of Nottinghamshire safe during this pandemic; and

- Despite the challenges of the pandemic we are still delivering £7 million of planned budget savings this year, only £800,000 short of the target set in very different circumstances in February – a remarkable effort by our officers.

Basically Chairman, for the past four years this Conservative and Mansfield Independent administration has rolled up its sleeves and got on with the job despite facing ever more difficult circumstances.

We have been helped greatly by the foresight we showed in the past to prepare for rainy days such as the COVID crisis, and by the Government in the form of four tranches of non-specific COVID grant funding and several other specific COVID-related grants. I admit that there was a time during the summer when I questioned whether sufficient support would be forthcoming from a national level, but the cavalry did arrive, and it means we are on course to balance our COVID-revised books this year.

It also means we will be able to propose a balanced budget for the year 2021/22, after which the next council administration, which I intend to be Conservative, will have to decide how it wishes to maintain this relative economic stability in these uncertain times.

The people of our County could of course take a risk on a Labour administration, but a look at our neighbours in Nottingham provides a stark warning of what a Labour administration can do to a council's ability to deliver the "sustainable services" which Councillor Pringle claims to care so much about.

In fact, Councillor Pringle has something of a nerve expressing concerns about sustainability when he and his group vehemently oppose the formation of a unitary authority for Nottinghamshire that would release at least £27 million a year more to sustain and indeed improve local services, at no additional cost to the taxpayer.

As Councillor Pringle seems to attribute great significance to the word "comprehensively", I look forward to his "comprehensive" alternative budget next February, setting out how Labour intends to fund all the hitherto unsubstantiated promises it loves to make.

Question to the Chairman of the Communities and Place Committee from Councillor Eric Kerry

Would the Chairman of the Communities and Place Committee give his understanding of the reasons for the apparent delay in opening the new link road connecting Humber Road South on the western side of the Boots site to Thane Road on the eastern side, via the new bridge over Beeston Canal?

Around £5 million of public money from D2N2's Growing Places Fund has been contributed towards capital works within the Boots Campus, along with some City Council funding, and concerned residents are rightly asking when this new road will open, given that it appears to have been completed for some time.

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

The construction of the new link road is substantially complete and the final legal agreements are being prepared. The Contractors' contract was signed into maintenance by the City Council on Wednesday 9th December 2020.

Nottinghamshire County Council are not party to this contract but have confirmed to the City Council in writing that we are happy for the road to become live.

Prior to the road being opened to the public, the necessary legal agreements must be completed. These are currently being drafted and will be passed to the City Council and Boots for signing by the end of this week. Once all parties have signed those agreements there should be no encumbrance from the County Council's standpoint to the road being fully opened to the public.

Council officers have worked hard to bring forward the opening of the road, but this was not a Nottinghamshire County Council project and therefore we are not responsible for the delays. I'm sure we will all welcome this road opening soon.

Question to the Chairman of the Communities and Place Committee from Councillor Kevin Greaves

Having made a commitment to residents at the start of this administration to improve roads across the county, which required a £20m diversion of funds from the development of extra care for our elderly and vulnerable residents, could Councillor Cottee please inform Members exactly how much this administration have spent on improving roads in the County since they took office in 2017?

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

I can confirm that the actual Highways capital expenditure has been over £95 million since 2017, when Department for Transport funding and the additional investment from the County Council is all taken into account.

This did not come at the expense of capital investment elsewhere in the Council, contrary to the suggestion in Councillor Greaves' question. And in view of Labour's previous botched attempts to deflect attention away from their mismanagement of the Extra Care programme, Councillor Greaves would probably be best advised not to go there, even though he always has to start somewhere!

Under the Conservative and Mansfield Independent administration since 2017, in addition to significantly increasing our maintenance and improvement works, we have also invested in innovative new technology, for example in new spray injection patching machinery and plant. And we have also made it easier for the public to report highway issues, and track their resolution, through the MyNotts App.

Our focus has been, and continues to be, on carrying out the right repair at the right time, and our substantial investment means that we have begun to tackle the

substantial backlog of repairs that has accumulated over many years, especially on the local road network.

Along the way we have faced some exceptional challenges which have put our network under pressure, including intense storms and resultant flooding caused by “The Beast from the East” and other more recent events. And of course, the COVID pandemic this year has presented us with a real workforce and supply chain challenges.

Even so, substantial volumes of work have been completed over the last 4 years, with over 1150 schemes delivered on the local road network, which is of so much importance to our residents.

If Councillor Greaves believes money should be invested differently or work carried out differently, then he has the opportunity to set out “chapter and verse” in an alternative budget and presentation at the next Full Council meeting. I look forward to it.

Question to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Jason Zadrozny

It was recently announced that 67 local authorities can begin enhanced testing support programmes to drive down COVID-19 transmission rates. Does the Leader know why is Nottinghamshire not included?

Response from Councillor Mrs Kay Cutts MBE, Leader of the Council

Lateral Flow Tests are used in a variety of initiatives including the community testing to which you refer. However, this is just one of several such initiatives which the Government has announced in recent weeks, including care home testing, student testing, and testing of staff and students in schools.

The advice of our Director of Public Health is that exploring the potential of such testing should not be prioritised at the expense of existing work on outbreak control and local test and trace arrangements, as these measures deliver the greatest benefits in terms of reducing transmission and creating the right conditions to relax control measures. As such, we have maintained our focus on outbreak control, symptomatic testing, contact tracing, and securing our care homes.

As Lateral Flow Tests are so new, details are still emerging regarding their impact on transmission, community engagement, and the required operational and clinical capacity. Nevertheless, I am pleased to report that a programme director has been recruited to develop the plan for the deployment of targeted community testing in Nottinghamshire. The plan will be brought to Councillor Knight’s committee and will address three needs:

- How best to deploy testing to neighbourhoods with the greatest need
- How best to ensure that vulnerable groups receive timely access to testing, and
- How best to work with employers to pilot routine testing of their workforce

In advance of this report, the Director of Public Health is working with the regional team of the Contain programme to submit an expression of interest to access government support. Until then, he will work with the regional team and with LRF partners to incorporate the learning which emerges from other pilots.

I am sure we all welcome the news that the rollout of the world's first vaccine is already under way here in the UK. Though we all need to remain vigilant and maintain the Hands, Face, Space measures that keep ourselves and our loved ones safe, we can approach Christmas with the very real prospect that in 2021 the protection provided to those most vulnerable to coronavirus will be strengthened.

Question to the Chairman of the Children and Young People's Committee from Councillor John Peck

What arrangements do we have in place as an authority to support schools over the Christmas period, in particular with their obligations to fulfilling track and trace requirements?

Response from Councillor Philip Owen, Chairman of the Children and Young People's Committee

The local authority will provide support for Headteachers during the Christmas break. For the week of the 21st – 24th December, a phone number to a senior officer is being created which can be used if there is any uncertainty about a complex COVID case, or if there has been difficulty in contacting the national Department for Education or Public Health England telephone lines. This number is for use by Headteachers or their senior officer. It will be operational only between 21st – 24th December and again on the 2nd and 3rd January as schools prepare to return to school on the 4th January 2021.

A small number of local authorities may be considering the creation of a centralised contact number (within their council) to be used by the parents of children attending maintained schools. We looked at this ourselves but concluded that there is little direct benefit to the Headteacher of a centralised 'golden number' for parents. This is because Headteachers would still have to undertake the 'tracing' aspect of the call between the 18-24th December, to identify which children and adults need to self-isolate. And from a public health context, having a centralised parent number is likely to further 'slow' the process of identifying those children or adults who need to self-isolate, because it simply introduces another communication layer which is new to parents.

Question to the Chairman of the Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee from Councillor David Martin

Councils face an adult social care overspend of £468m this year as Covid-19 has triggered deepening needs relating to safeguarding, domestic abuse, carer breakdown and hospital discharge. Does the Chairman agree with me that the publication of the Green Paper on Social Care is increasingly urgent, and does he share my view that the overspend is this Council's biggest ticking time bomb?

Response from Councillor Tony Harper, Chairman of the Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee

I refer you to the answer I gave on this subject at the previous Full Council meeting on 15th October 2020, where I explained in some detail my frustrations about the ongoing wait for the Adult Social Care Green Paper.

I criticised the role that successive governments, and opposition parties, have played in avoiding, delaying or undermining a much-needed, mature conversation with the public about a sustainable approach to funding social care.

I am aware of the survey by the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) claiming that councils face an adult social care overspend of £468m this year due to Covid-19. I cannot verify that figure, which perhaps needs to be viewed in the context that it was released just ahead of the Government's Spending Review, when all groups lobbying for more funding tend to feed the media with such claims!

I can however confirm that Nottinghamshire County Council's Adult Social Care and Public Health department is – quite remarkably – still on course to meet its revised budget target of £212, 785 by the end of the year, as reported at this month's Finance and Major Contracts Management Committee. The revised budget target incorporates the additional £47.1 million in COVID grant allocation received from Government, in order to give an accurate indication of the department's performance outwith the effect and costs of dealing with the COVID pandemic.

Thanks to the efforts of our directors, senior managers and social care teams this Council is managing to deliver the services required and balance its books in exceptional circumstances. However, I agree with the thrust of Councillor Martin's question that we cannot continue to perform these 'financial gymnastics' indefinitely, which I said at the last meeting. Regardless of whether the £468 million figure quoted by ADASS is accurate or not, the ongoing lack of clarity around a sustainable, long-term solution to funding social care is certainly a "ticking time bomb" for all councils with primary responsibility for social care and we need urgent progress on this, which will require all parties at national level to work together constructively.

One part of that practical solution would of course be a unitary authority for Nottinghamshire which would release at least £27 million extra each year to spend on services such as adult social care without putting additional pressure on local or national taxpayers!