

## **APPENDIX A**

### **COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 10<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2019 QUESTIONS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN**

#### **Question to the Chairman of the Communities and Place Review and Development Committee from Councillor Bruce Laughton**

At the Full Council meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> July 2019, the Council agreed to task the Communities and Place Review and Development Committee with examining and making recommendations on Nottinghamshire County Council's vegetation management policies, including our approach to grass verge cutting on rural roadsides.

Is the Committee Chairman aware of recent media reports that Highways England plan to reduce grass verge cutting frequency from four times a year to twice a year, in line with guidelines developed by the plant charity, Plantlife, working with partners including Natural England, Transport Scotland, the Welsh Government, Wildlife Trusts and Butterfly Conservation?

Plantlife argue that a "less and later" two-cut approach would replenish the seed bank, restore floral diversity, save councils money and provide a pollinator habitat estimated to equal the size of London, Birmingham, Manchester, Cardiff and Edinburgh combined.

Will the Committee Chairman ensure that Plantlife's Managing Grassland Road Verges' report is one of the items of information and evidence his committee takes into account during their work?

#### **Response from Councillor Gordon Wheeler, Chairman of the Communities and Place Review and Development Committee**

It is very timely actually, because officers have been working with me to produce the report and presentation to be brought before the next committee meeting. Councillor Henry, my Vice Chairman, is aware of this.

Yes, I did see the Highway's England's new grass verge cutting policy reported in the Daily Telegraph, and I understand it was also covered on the BBC Radio Four 'Today' programme.

From the Telegraph article, I noted in particular the statistic that there has been a 20 per cent drop in floral diversity since 1990, quite alarming really isn't it? Due to poor and inappropriate management of vegetation.

The same article stated that UK road verges are home to more than 700 species of wild flowers including 29 of the 52 species of wild orchid found in this country. These are important food sources for bees and butterflies, and some varieties are relatively rare.

The assertion of the 'Managing Grassland Road Verges' report produced by the plant conservation charity Plantlife, is that the majority of UK road verges are currently cut too often and at the wrong time for such plants to thrive. It is hoped that this new "less and later" cutting approach will greatly enhance biodiversity. The same article, and I will read this with your indulgence if I may, says where once there was a desire to see verges "scalped" to the bone for that nice neat and tidy look, I am sure most of us can appreciate that our residents come to us complaining that the grass hasn't been cut, there is increasing appetite for messier verges that will provide better cover and food for wildlife. As well as offering hope to some incredibly rare flowers that only appear on road verges, a shift in public attitude reflected in the huge support for plant life conditions means you can see more flowers familiar to us.

We will indeed be considering the emerging approach of Highways England and the guidance from Plantlife, and I have asked officers to provide Committee with a review of the practice of other County Councils across the country.

In accordance with the instructions of Full Council we will also be reviewing our current practice around weed-spraying, tree and hedge maintenance. Our aim is to produce a 'fit for purpose' approach for the County's highway network mindful of all considerations, especially the diversity and habitat aspects.

I look forward to beginning this work at the Committee meeting in November and coming to conclusions in good time for the spring of 2020, ready for the new season of grass cutting and weed spraying.

Please Members do feel free to come along to the meeting so we can listen to your views.

### **Question to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Alan Rhodes**

What will the impact of your government's decision to delay HS2 be on the economy of Nottinghamshire and the wider East Midlands?

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

Nottinghamshire County Council and partners continue to be passionate advocates for HS2 and the transformational economic benefits it will bring to Nottinghamshire and the wider East Midlands region. The recent stocktake report by the Chairman of HS2 Ltd has indicated the project could be delayed, with the eastern leg of HS2 opening between 2035 and 2040 (the original date was 2033). This reflects a review of project timescales to ensure a realistic delivery timescale for such a monumental infrastructure project.

The HS2 Chairman's report also more importantly reiterated the immense economic benefits HS2 will bring and the opportunity it offers to rebalance the economy. Regardless of the change in timescale, it still offers an incredible opportunity to bring major investment to the East Midlands region, a region which has suffered from chronic underinvestment for decades. It is an investment in our residents and communities, which will make an enormous positive difference to the prosperity of generations to come.

Our view is that we do not need to wait for HS2 services to arrive, to start delivering economic benefits to our region. Any delay to opening does not impact on our ambitious plans for growth, where work continues at pace. Partners across the region are actively working to realise the early benefits of HS2 ahead of its arrival. The East Midlands HS2 Growth Strategy sets out our proposals to deliver an additional 74,000 jobs and £4 billion GVA. We are already seeing additional investment in the region as a result of HS2. We continue to work closely with local partners, including businesses and developers, to deliver the Growth Strategy vision.

In July 2018, the Department for Transport (DfT) announced £1.8m of additional support to develop plans for growth around Toton. The first tranche of funding has already helped to develop our plans for growth, critically delivering two major master planning and local connectivity commissions, which identified a range of improvements and investments we can make ahead of HS2's arrival to unlock growth. Based on the outcomes of these commissions, Toton Delivery Board endorsed a series of proposals for the second tranche of funding at its September 2019 meeting, which will help to deliver further infrastructure improvements. These include detailed highway design studies and developing the case for investment in Junction 25 of the M1.

Following the Chancellors announcement of a locally led delivery body in October last year, I have worked alongside Sir John Peace, the Chairman of the Midlands Engine to drive forward the creation of an innovative development corporation. This new body which we anticipate coming into force next year will offer certainty to private sector investors, broker investment from Government and secure the delivery of internationally significant developments in our region, with HS2 at Toton one of the 3 initial investment locations. This project has the full support of Government. I recently met with the Secretary of State for Local Government and Communities along with regional business leaders and Sir John where we updated the Minister on progress.

Local leaders will continue to make the case for delivery of HS2 in full and at the earliest possible opportunity. An independent review into HS2, chaired by Douglas Oakervee, was commissioned in August 2019. Under my leadership, as Chairman of the East Midlands HS2 Partnership, I wrote to Douglas Oakervee, inviting the review team to come to Nottinghamshire to meet local partners. The Chairman of the review came himself, to the region on Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> September. This provided an excellent opportunity to share more about our exciting plans for growth including ongoing work to explore establishing a locally led development body. This visit included a tour of Toton where they were able to see the scale of opportunity on offer for themselves. We also have the support of our colleague Tricia Gilby who chairs the Chesterfield board.

It is my strong belief that the Government cannot pick and choose which parts of the HS2 network to deliver and which to cancel. The upgrade of the railway network is especially important across the Midlands and the North and we are all in this together. That is why I have personally supported Midlands Connect, the West Midlands Combined Authority and the Constellation Partnership to present a joint prospectus about the opportunity that HS2 will bring across our whole regions. We are united in

this cause and I believe the Oakervee review panel have heard that message loud and clear.

HS2 is about investing in the people and prosperity of Nottinghamshire and the wider region. The potential delay should be seen in this context, where the investment being made will provide transformative benefits to our communities and future generations in the long term.

**Question to the Chairman of Communities and Place Committee from Councillor Kate Foale**

Can the Chairman reassure members that all the money due to every child who is eligible for a free school meal in this County is used for its intended purpose: that is for that child's sustenance and nutrition?

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

Nottinghamshire County Council School Catering Services operate to the highest nutritional standards as set out by the School Food Trust.

All of the revenue from this service is reinvested in the provision of meals for school children in Nottinghamshire. In addition, a large proportion of our food budget is spent in Nottinghamshire to support local producers and local businesses.

National funding for free school meals is sent directly to schools. As such our school catering service has no direct influence on the use of this funding. Each school sets its own policy and practice with regard to the use of the funding.

The service is working closely with the Public Health team to promote good nutrition and the best use of this funding for schools, in support of a national programme to reduce obesity. Nottinghamshire County Council has also been chosen as one of five Councils in England to be part of a National Obesity Trailblazer programme.

**Question to the Chairman of the Communities and Place Committee from Councillor David Martin**

Would the Chairman of the Communities and Place Committee please inform me when the Parish of Selston is likely to have the electronic, real time bus information signs at bus stops on our main bus routes?

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

This County Council has been very successful in securing external funding to enable the roll out of real time information in a number of locations around the County. In recent years, this has included S106 developer funding to introduce real time information particularly along the Rainbow One corridor in Broxtowe, and Regional Development Funding for the Threes corridors in Ashfield, which is the Mansfield, Sutton, Kirkby, Hucknall to Nottingham route.

In the recent Transport Focus passenger survey, Nottinghamshire County Council was highly rated for the provision of information at its bus stops and the investment in real time information has undoubtedly contributed to this recognition.

Nevertheless, we are mindful that we don't yet have full coverage across the County and whilst I am not able to give a date for Selston at present, I can assure Councillor Martin that this administration remains committed to securing funding at every opportunity to do so.

### **Question to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Jason Zadrozny**

A recent HM Treasury report confirms that the East Midlands is continuing to lose out in terms of public investment. Of particular concern is the continued poor level of transport funding with obvious implications for future rates of local and regional economic growth.

The East Midlands has the lowest level of public expenditure on transport in England, in total per head and the lowest level of public expenditure on our railways per head.

In 2017/18, London received £1,019 in transport funding per head, the North West £528 per head and the East Midlands received only £245 per head.

The unfair funding that the East Midlands faces will only get worse with the cancellation of the electrification of the Midlands Mainline in our region.

Would the Leader of the Council agree with me that this is an absolute scandal, that the Conservative Government have completely let Nottinghamshire and the East Midlands down and make a statement to this Council about what she plans to do to raise this scandal with the Government?

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

I appreciate that as the declared Parliamentary candidate for 'Jason Zadrozny's Ashfield and Eastwood Independents' at the next General Election, you have a greater motivation than ever to attack the Conservative Government or the Labour Party at every opportunity. However, by singling out the Conservative Government in this particular question, I think you distract yourself from what is otherwise a valid point.

I agree with you that the East Midlands receives a level of public investment that is so low as to be demonstrably unfair and inadequate compared with the rest of the country. You cite some examples in your question with regard to transport funding, and I too have drawn attention to this lack of funding on numerous occasions, not just at an election time.

As you know, I include a regular item on the Policy Committee agenda where I invite the Executive Director of East Midlands Councils to update members on the key issues within the region, and in February last year his report included a paper scrutinising levels of public investment in the East Midlands, based on the latest HM Treasury

report at that time. One of the statistics was that the East Midlands had the 3<sup>rd</sup> lowest total of public expenditure on services in total and per head.

As your question confirms, not much has changed in the past twelve months. This was illustrated by the figures presented recently to the East Midlands Councils Executive Board Meeting on 20 September 2019, which I attended.

We must recognise, however, that the East Midlands has not found itself in this position overnight. The underfunding of this region is historic. It pre-dates the current Conservative Government and even the previous Coalition Government by many years. The East Midlands was comparatively poorly funded when the Blair and Brown Labour Governments were spending public money. For example, in 2004-05, public expenditure on services per head in the East Midlands was the third lowest nationally, which is exactly the same position as we find ourselves in today.

This Conservative and Mansfield Independent administration has fought hard for Nottinghamshire and this region. We work with the Government, the Midlands Engine and Midlands Connect to make the case for investment to ensure our County gets a fairer share, with some success, for example:-

- the £150 million investment in the A453;
- over £35m of investment in the Gedling Access Road;
- £5m of maintenance challenge funding for improvements on the MARR; and
- £2.5m on cycle route improvements in Mansfield, Newark, Arnold, West Bridgford and Nottingham Enterprise Zone.

Recently we have secured investment in the A614 through the Major Road Network, a Department for Transport Fund. Through our direct efforts, £20m will be invested in improving the highway between Lowdham and Ollerton, unlocking growth and development opportunities through the centre and the north of the County. Our Major Road Network project was one of the first in the country to be approved.

Without question there is still a long way to go before central government's historical underfunding of our local infrastructure is truly reversed, and to secure more investment it is important to have fully worked up schemes. This administration has prioritised a number of additional key routes for transport and highways investment. Feasibility studies and designs are being developed for potential schemes for the A617, the A38, and the A611 to name but three. When the next opportunity comes for us to bid for Government investment, we will be ready to get our fair share, because our schemes will be "shovel ready".

Our priorities are not just about investment in the major roads for which Nottinghamshire County Council is responsible. Securing investment in the strategic road network is also hugely important. That's why we have continued to lobby Government and develop the strategic and economic case for improvements to the A46 at Newark. I hope Members will welcome the announcement recently made by the Chancellor committing to the delivery of this much needed scheme as part of the Government's infrastructure revolution.

I would add that as well as the investment the East Midlands region is seeking to secure as part of the HS2 programme, a bid is also with Ministers to secure £30m of investment in new roads to connect communities around the station at Toton and unlock development land for employment and housing purposes.

Councillors will recall that this Council previously passed a motion concerning the electrification of the Midland Mainline. We see electrification as a potential solution to problems on the Midland Main Line and will continue to push for options to electrify the entire route to be kept open for future consideration. In the meantime, the Council is willing to be persuaded about alternative solutions which would still involve significant Government investment, so long as they can deliver the same or better outcomes than those anticipated through electrification.

As we discussed earlier today, the Government has launched an independent review into HS2 chaired by Douglas Oakervee. In my capacity as Chairman of the East Midlands HS2 Partnership, I wrote to the review Chairman inviting him to the region to set out our case for investment in transport for the East Midlands. The Oakervee review team were welcomed to the region on Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> September. This provided an excellent opportunity to share more about our exciting plans and make it clear that we expect our share of the investment in rail here in our region.

Both London and the North West have been successful in securing funding for their regionally important schemes through Transport for London and Transport for the North respectively. Therefore, we will continue to work directly to secure improvements in Nottinghamshire, we will use the power of Midlands Connect to strengthen the case for essential improvements for the region as a whole and to secure funding for transport schemes considered to be the East Midlands' highest priorities.

I shall continue to do everything I can as Leader of Nottinghamshire County Council to ensure the East Midlands receives a fairer and greater share of funding in the future than it has in the past. The way to achieve this is not to pin all the blame for an historic problem on the Government of the day, whatever its political flavour. On the contrary, we need to lobby and work with the Government.

**Question to the Chairman of the Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee from Councillor Muriel Weisz**

In light of the Leaders recent comments in the local media welcoming the 'large increase in funding' in particular for social care, would the Chair of Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee now like to reconsider the possibility of reversing the increase in charges for the cost of care policy which continues to cause misery for residents in our County?

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

You are correct that the Council Leader and I have publicly and justifiably welcomed the additional money for Councils announced by the Chancellor of Exchequer early in September.

As stated in my amendment to Councillor Zadrozny's motion earlier today, the £1 billion of additional investment in adult and children's social care represents a significant sum of money, and Nottinghamshire County Council's share will enable us to maintain services at their current level without the need to find further savings to balance the budget in the short-term.

There are, however, two important reasons why this extra money is not a licence to reverse our previous policy decision in relation to Contributions to Care.

The first reason is that this additional money is still temporary, as has been the case with previous contingency grants in recent years. As I stated earlier today, local authority social care leaders across the country, myself included, still need to hear what the medium and long-term plan will be for social care funding, which is why it remains essential that the Social Care Green Paper originally promised by the Government in 2017 is published as soon as possible. Until we have more information in this regard, it would not be in the interests of Nottinghamshire County Council's service users and taxpayers to make long-term commitments to additional expenditure which might not prove to be sustainable, be that in relation to the Contributions to Care policy or anything else. This was effectively acknowledged by several opposition councillors early today, "sticking plaster", "temporary money", "not enough money in the pot".

The second reason is that whilst the changes to the Contributions to Care policy were undeniably driven to an extent by financial considerations and the need to ensure a sustainable service for the medium to long-term, they also only served to bring Nottinghamshire County Council into line with many other authorities providing social care services across the country.

As stated in the original paper recommending the change to individual contributions to care policy in July 2018, Department of Health Care Guidance allowed for higher rate benefits to be taken into account in contribution calculations. Many other councils had reviewed their contribution policies and either adopted in full, or moved closer to, the guidance provided. In Nottinghamshire, a local decision had previously been made to discount the higher rate benefits paid to people, but this local decision had proved to no longer be sustainable or equitable. In October 2018 the Council therefore agreed to adopt the Department of Health guidance and take higher rate benefits into account in full.

It is a matter of record and of regret that the speed with which this policy was rolled out later in the year was excessive. We listened with great concern to public feedback and acknowledged in December 2018 that insufficient time had been provided to enable people to adjust to these changes, so we agreed to bring the policy in more gradually, in two phases, from April to November this year.

Also, in February this year, we made a further policy adjustment recognising that if the policy originally agreed was implemented in full, it would have a disproportionate impact on adults aged 18 to 25 years. We instead amended the policy to apply two Minimum Income Guarantee levels rather than three – one for people of pension credit age and over, and one for people aged 18 years to under pension credit age.



We further proposed to phase the implementation for those aged 18 years to pension credit age, so from April 2019 the rate used reflected the mid-point between the previous level used by the Council of £189, and the new proposed level of £151.45. This phased rate of £170.23 is being applied between April and November this year.

The financial implication of these changes was that the saving of £3.8 million per annum originally envisaged by this policy would be reduced to £1.3 million in 2018/19 and £2.6 million in 2019/20, with the full saving not now being reached until 2020/21. In other words, the council adjusted its budget expectations in order to iron out the flaws in the original policy and ensure that service users in Nottinghamshire were receiving at least the same service as those in many other authorities, and indeed still better than some.

It is standard policy across this Council that we benchmark our service provision against that of other authorities to ensure that we are delivering such services and spending public money in a fair and equitable way. If Government Guidelines change, or if other councils change their policies regarding the delivery of services, we will take note of this and consider whether this authority needs to make changes also. At present, however, the Contributions to Care policy agreed last October, as subsequently amended, is not an outlier compared with other local authorities.