

APPENDIX A

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 19 JANUARY 2023 QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER, CABINET MEMBERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

Question to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Jason Zadrozny

In the Executive Report it states, "As we look to set our budget for 2023/24 it is extremely important that we hear the views of residents across the county." The budget consultation closed on January 2nd. On 10th January you informed the local media that the rise in Council Tax will be 4.84%. Can you inform the Council what percentage of Nottinghamshire residents responded to the consultation, give examples of how their responses informed the decision to raise Council Tax and tell us how many people explicitly told you they wanted to see a significant rise in Council Tax?

Response from the Leader of the Council, Councillor Ben Bradley MP

I'm pleased we've managed to establish the premise of being able to ask questions about the Executive Report in the questions section, it's something I have been talking about for a while.

In terms of the consultation, absolutely right that we want to include the voice of our residents and make sure that what we're doing is broadly in line with residents perceptions and their wishes for the future of our council and our services. I am pleased to be able to say the consultation heard from almost twice as many people this year as it has in previous years - around 2,500 responses. Previous consultations for several years haven't ever got above 1,400, so, I think that speaks to a good direction of travel in terms of engagement.

Of those residents who responded, when you exclude the 'don't knows', 71% said they would support an increase in council tax and 68% said the same about the adult social care precept. Three quarters of residents were clear that they didn't want to see any cuts to adult social care, two thirds of residents very similarly said the same about children's services and other community based services like our libraries etc. So, we're pleased that we are able to deliver on those things, protect front line services in the budget, find some sustainability for those into the future and instead find significant savings from things like rationalising our office estate, for example, moving money from maintaining buildings into the delivery of those front line services.

I think these responses make clear, if you exclude the 'don't knows' 71% said they would rather see that rise which I think will equate to about £1 a week for most residents across the County, which is what most of us will see, rather than us cut those front line services.

Question to the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment from Councillor Callum Bailey

Winter is obviously a very challenging time for our highway maintenance and repair services, with bad weather and low temperatures increasing the likelihood of road surface deterioration and damage.

Would the Cabinet Member for Transport & Environment make a statement to inform Members

- how the current conditions are affecting our highways
- how Nottinghamshire County Council and Via East Midlands are responding to the current challenge; and
- what effect, if any, this has on our Highways Improvement Plan?

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

I welcome the opportunity to give an update on our highway maintenance activity across the County. As Members will know the electorate told us at the last election how the roads were their number one priority, and it's a key priority for this administration that we improve our highway condition, ensuring it is safe for travel and supporting the local economy.

The roads in Nottinghamshire are no different to roads in other parts of the country in that the winter period causes additional damage to the fabric of the highway. This is particularly the case for roads in weak condition that are scheduled for future repairs. As a result of the current very cold weather followed by periods of heavy rainfall makes them obviously more susceptible to physical damage due to that weather, through the freeze / thaw action, and delayering through ingress of water into deteriorating surfaces. Therefore, this time of year always presents more of a challenge.

I absolutely recognise that damaged highways and potholes are, at the very least, an inconvenience to road users and we are working as hard and as fast as we can to tackle these issues, but Nottinghamshire is not alone in facing this problem.

Just this week, the RAC released statistics confirming that this is a national issue, reporting the most pothole-related breakdowns in Quarter 4 since 2019, up 25% from 2021, following the coldest start to winter in 12 years. And I just want to quote, less there be any doubt, Mr Chairman, quote part of the RAC report which says "the threat of a plethora of potholes appearing over the next few months is now very real indeed given how much rain there has been either side of December's sub-zero temperatures. These are the perfect conditions for creating potholes, as water makes it way into cracks which then expands when it freezes causing the road surface to crumble" and then a little later on the Head of Roads Policy says, "The wet weather we've had both before and after the coldest start to winter in 12 years, in December, is a perfect recipe for potholes to start peppering the roads." So, that is a quote from the RAC report, Mr Chairman.

Like all County Councils, we've experienced an increase in reports of potholes over the start of the winter period. Unsurprisingly, this is much the same as previous years and our teams from Via East Midlands prepare for the winter by increasing resource to tackle the necessary urgent repairs that occur. I'm grateful for the work of our front-line staff and I hope all Councillors will join me in thanking our dedicated operatives who not only work in all weathers to repair our roads, but also provide a 24/7 service for winter maintenance and flood response throughout the winter period. And I have to say Mr Chairman, that the people, the workers that I have talked to on the roads are extremely conscientious and are very helpful and considerate towards the residents of the roads that they are repairing.

On December 7th, I visited Gamston Depot and witnessed for myself the preparations in place for the winter season. I also travelled on a gritting lorry during a gritting run with Tony (Anthony Brown), one of our long serving, dedicated winter maintenance team, who has been plying that route for decades.

On average, over the last 11 weeks, we've had 78 staff out on daily basis working hard to repair our roads in Nottinghamshire. I am pleased to confirm that our eight gangs, because we doubled the productivity of each team and we doubled the number of gangs working Mr Chairman, so I am pleased to confirm that our eight gangs delivering permanent repairs have completed over 150,000 metres squared of permanent repairs so far this financial year. This is four times the amount in the previous year, achieved through investing an extra £3 million per year over the next four years, an extra £3 million per year Mr Chairman. So that investment is over the next four years in highway maintenance as well as improving the efficiency of the gangs as a result of that very comprehensive cross-party Highway Review.

Our use of Viafix last calendar year was down by over 60%, though of course over the winter period we will need to use and we do use extra cold lay materials in some instances for urgent emergency repairs. These are then followed up with more permanent repairs.

I'm pleased that Councillor Bailey asked about the Highways Review, because the LGA (Local Government Association) Peer Review Team revisited the Council in December to consider progress on our cross-party highways review work. We also described to the LGA that the improvement and innovation journey on our highway services will carry on.

Chairman, we've started to see the benefits of the extra investment in our local road network over the last year and we are now keen to roll this approach on to our main road network as well over the next 12 months. We are also continuing to improve our approach to communications – our website will be refreshed in the next couple of months so that residents can see where we have deployed the new resource and view the Forward Plan of works for their area.

So, in summary, we've made good progress so far, we are aware there is more to do, and I am confident that we will see further positive outcomes from our extra investment on the network and the continuing impact of the improvements from the highways review.

Finally, I would like to thank Nottinghamshire residents for continuing to report potholes to us and I would like to ask that they continue to do so, either through our website or via the My Notts App.

Question to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Kate Foale

The North East have secured £300 million more in investment funding as part of their devolution deal than the East Midlands.

The North East have a smaller population and currently contribute less to the economy than the Nottinghamshire & Derbyshire footprint.

As the East Midlands Devolution Deal is no longer the “largest of its kind on offer” as claimed in December, is the Leader surprised that securing a position at ‘the front of the queue’ has resulted in a worse deal for the people of Nottinghamshire?

Response from the Leader of the Council, Councillor Ben Bradley MP

Frustrating that we’re having this conversation again, there seems to be a lack of, or misunderstanding about some of these deals and how it works, there doesn’t seem to be, and I’ve had it, we talked last time about a councillor in the city who talked about this deal in terms of how many MacDonalds a year it would buy residents, there doesn’t seem to be any vision or understanding of what’s feasible with it, and I’d like to help you get to that point and I hope we can have some more conversations about that.

But it’s not right to suggest that the North East deal is equivalent to ours, each deal is bespoke, the themes and trends that run through our deal and the conversations we’ve had in the past about amounts of funding stand true for the North East deal, it’s a bigger more rural geography than ours that was one of the factors that we discussed before. Similarly in North Yorkshire or Cumbria where they have so much rural area, far bigger than ours, that’s one of the factors that leads into the conversations about funding, that’s all perfectly in line with what I said in the past.

But the key thing that I think you’re missing here, unfortunately, is you’re comparing apples and pears, in that the North East deal isn’t a new deal at all. It’s not a new premise or negotiation for them, they already have a deal, North of Tyne deal and this is an expansion of an existing deal.

North of Tyne Mayoralty will amend their Constitution to take in the new geography and so, I mentioned earlier on Jamie Driscoll, the Mayor of the North of Tyne, who I’ve been on a number of national panels and discussions with in recent weeks, his current mayoralty will grow into a new North Eastern Combined Authority, so they already have a structure, they already have a full term of office, they already have a mayor, they already have established working practices and relationships with government and with local authorities and they already have a record of delivery. And, we have none of that, because this is new for us and as we have discussed all the way through, just as West Midlands and Greater Manchester have grown and expanded over time, just as they have over time got more powers, more funding, now the North East is growing and expanding. Actually, what this says is that we, cross-party across the region, what we’ve been saying is right actually, that once you have the structure, once

you have the infrastructure and the accountable figure that government asks, you can have and grow and attract more power and more funds, West Midlands, Greater Manchester as examples, now North East is another example of that.

And as I have said from the beginning our £1.14 billion is a starting point. Unlike the North East we have to start from scratch because we weren't able to do that when they did, either when the West Midlands did in 2016 or when they did in 2019 and they're four years in now to their programme whereas we are still at the start. And as I've said, it's not all of the money either, it's seed funding for us to invest and grow and attract private sector investment.

In Greater Manchester that £1 billion became £5 billion and these are all things that we have rehearsed and discussed, before. But what is absolutely clear is that you can't get £1.14 billion unless you've got what the government requires which is the clear and accountable structure or the mayoralty, and therefore we have to plough on with what we're doing.

We have to agree the structures now to put our deal in place, and that will be a great starting point for us to build and grow and get more money and more powers just as the North East have announced. I think that's a good thing for the North east it's good for the East Midlands and it proves the point I think that we were right to say that the government wants to pass more powers and more funds to regions which I think is really positive, so it would be really really good I think given that across all of our tier councils most of our districts and boroughs are publicly supportive I don't think that there are any who are publicly not supportive, certainly not in Nottinghamshire, it would be really good now to try and stop picking those faults out of it and comparing apples and pears around the country but actually to get on board and help us get maximum benefit from that £1.14 billion starting point that we can then seek to grow over time to the benefit of our residents.

Question to the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment from Councillor Steve Carr

This Council claims that the use of Vialfix has gone down 61% in the last year. Given that this Council has the statistics to be able to publish this figure. Can you use the same statistics to tell me how many pot-holes have been treated by Vialfix over the last year, how many pot-holes have been revisited and how many times by location? Further to this, can you inform the Council how many pot-holes were tended to using VialFix in 2022 by Borough / District?

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

The number of Category 1 urgent safety defects needing repair within 24 hours where Vialfix material was used in the last year, 2022 was: 7,858.

For Category 2 and 3 defects, which have longer repair times, larger area repairs are now routinely completed using hot material, with the majority of these being completed

by the preventative maintenance teams, who plane out the highway surface and inlay with new hot material providing a higher quality permanent repair.

There's no information available regarding return visits to repaired defects. This is very difficult to capture, typically, visits to repair defects at locations where work has been completed are to address further highway defects which have arisen adjacent to the completed repairs.

This was explored in detail by the cross-party member panel as part of the Highways Review. Repeat visits do occur but incidents are reducing through the use of the preventative maintenance technique which seeks to repair larger areas, including those of potential adjacent deterioration, within one visit.

Number of Viafix repairs in each District in 2022 are as follows:

Ashfield = 1,399 (17.8%)
Bassetlaw = 1,430 (18.2%)
Broxtowe = 495 (6.3%)
Gedling = 817 (10.4%)
Mansfield = 684 (8.7%)
Newark & Sherwood = 2,027 (25.8%)
Rushcliffe = 1,006 (12.8%)

Question to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health from Councillor Paul Henshaw

In 2016 this Council signed up to the Ethical Care Charter, committing to decent pay, training and working standards for care workers in Nottinghamshire.

Is the Council still committed to this Charter?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health, Councillor Matt Barney

Thank you for drawing the attention of this Chamber and this Council to what I view as the very excellent Ethical Care Charter, which I actually have a copy of here in my hand. Now, for esteemed colleagues alongside me here, if you look very closely, you'll see emblazoned at the top of the Charter the words UNISON the public sector union, and it's not often you'll probably get a Conservative holding a UNISON bit of paperwork in his hand and saying that its excellent, the Ethical Care Charter is indeed an excellent document and that's why I'm delighted to be drawing the Chamber's attention to every word of it this morning.

So, just to take you through a little bit of detail about it, because we could talk about this for a very long time, as indeed it is quite a long Charter, but the roots of it go back to 2012, but it was actually taken on board here at Nottinghamshire County Council in 2016 under a Labour administration at that time, and that was following the City Council, who adopted it some months before. But it didn't just stop there, because actually if you look at the signatories on the Charter to this day, across the length and breadth of the country indeed in Scotland, Wales and in England, councils have signed

up to this Charter and I believe for the most part they're doing their best to abide by it, because actually its full of common sense, it's full of everything that we would all expect and all want when it's our loved ones and it's our own relatives that are in receipt of these services, and indeed in some cases, ourselves.

So, to go into a little bit more detail about it, as I say, I'm absolutely delighted that Nottinghamshire County Council have really taken this Charter on board. And, indeed we have, I understand a very positive historical relationship of successful dialogue with the unions, and again, under both Conservative and Labour led administrations. And in these difficult times we face I say, here in Nottinghamshire, long may that continue.

But it's in that very constructive context that this Conservative administration in 2017 viewed the previous Labour administration's commitment to this Ethical Care Charter, in that context and it's in that context today that I view it as the portfolio holder for Adult Social Care.

So, in my opinion, the fundamental principles underpinning the Charter are good and well intentioned and I am going to take a few more moments to dive into them if you'll give me the liberty.

The overriding objective behind the Charter is to 'establish a minimum baseline for the safety, quality and dignity of care. To offer good quality services to people and ensure the recruitment and retention of a more stable workforce through more sustainable pay, conditions and training levels'.

I agree with that objective, and I believe that we, and our wonderful staff and workforce, do everything we can, all of us day in day out, looking at our Lead Head of Service here, to abide by the principles of this Charter.

So just going into a little more detail, stage one of the Charter states that the starting point for the commissioning of visits will be client need, with care workers spending as much time as possible with clients and generally not staying for only 15 minutes or just to complete certain tasks. Taking that extra bit of time to give a real person centred approach showing real care to real residents and real human beings who are at the core of the services that we deliver. And it's my belief that our commissioning providers and all of our care staff do their best, day in day out to abide by that ethos and they work hard in their visits, to focus on providing tailored, personal care to those who so acutely need it.

Stage two of the Charter – so that includes a clause that zero hour contracts will not be used in place of permanent contracts and again, indeed, at Notts County Council, we are working with providers encouraging them to shift the balance towards more salaried contracts and fewer zero-hours contracts, and the truth is that most of the providers that the Council have contracts with currently offer both options to staff.

Stage three of the Charter includes the requirement that all homecare workers will be paid at least the Living Wage Foundation's Living Wage. I note actually that since the Charter was written that's, of course, increased.

So again, we work with the social care market to ensure this happens. The Charter requirements are included in the contracts, monitoring and audit processes that we have with providers. All the providers that we have contracts with pay at this level and many in fact pay above this level. It is important to note that up to 50% of homecare provision in the county is provided to people who fund their own care in arrangements directly with providers and the Council does not have a say in how these companies operate their businesses.

A further example of this Council's positive, ongoing response to the Ethical Care Charter includes collaborating on how best to use various short-term workforce/winter grants since 2020 to best recruit and retain staff, including managing cost of living pressures.

Additionally, the Council has applied the Charter principles with directly employed adult social care staff. For example; we ensure staff are contracted on a permanent or fixed term basis wherever possible; where relief/casual staff are directly engaged by the council, they receive the same pay, working conditions and terms and conditions, including holiday and sick pay entitlements, as contracted staff; we've adopted the Living Wage Foundation rate for all care staff, currently set at £10.90 and paid as an allowance to eligible staff; we have terms and conditions that include an occupational sick pay scheme that pays staff greater sick pay than statutory sick pay provisions; and we use digital solutions to roster staff and create effective travel routes, sharing access to and information on this with external providers.

So, is the Council still committed to the Ethical Care Charter? And I think you would agree with me that we are, absolutely.

Can we deliver all the objectives of the Charter, to the fullest extent, all the time? Going back to that list of all the authorities that have signed up to this Charter across the country I have to say no, in all honesty, there are some practical limitations for example during emergencies and when providers have to instigate business continuity plans, dictated by factors not all entirely within our control. We continue to work closely with the sector to implement ways to make their services more sustainable.

So, does that mean we are less committed to the Charter now than in the past, are we watering it down? Again, I think in this full answer you'd agree with me that no, we remain absolutely committed to the overriding objectives and go further in our support with some of the current challenges facing the current social care market, such as the cost of living pressures which we all face and competing to recruit and retain staff who can get better paid jobs in hospitality and in the retail sectors.

It is good that we remain a signatory and continue trying to meet/fulfil the Charter's vision and so this council will continue to endeavour to deliver the good quality services to people and ensure the recruitment and retention of a more stable workforce through more sustainable pay, conditions and training levels, because it's in everybody's interests, it's in the interests of those that we love and care about.

So, that's all I've got to say. I hope that's a full enough answer for you, but just to say, that as far as I'm concerned and I am sure Scott (Councillor Carlton) would agree, and

with Melanie in the room as well, our whole approach in Adult Social Care is ethical and it's focused on people, it's focused on helping and supporting our care workers and our brilliant staff delivering day in day out, first class services to thousands of residents in Nottinghamshire.

Question to the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment from Councillor Samantha Deakin

What lessons has this Council learned over the bad publicity caused by the new cycle and footpath on High Pavement in Sutton-in-Ashfield – built at a cost of £535,000?

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

The fact that Councillor Deakin identifies 'publicity' as the most important factor in her question is actually quite revealing, because it shows exactly where Ashfield Independent and Independent Alliance priorities lie.

She asks about lessons learned. Well, I've certainly learned that when this Council receives 'bad publicity', it can often be traced back to the Independent Alliance who have a particular skill for generating it, sometimes even about themselves!

In the case of this new cycle and footpath on High Pavement in Sutton-in-Ashfield, their current narrative is that this project is not wanted, and that the money should have been spent instead on repairing potholes.

Well, Councillor Deakin should know that the Government's Active Travel Fund is specifically for projects that encourage walking and cycling and those that support vulnerable road users to travel safely. As the rules stand, Active Travel Fund money could not have been spent on other highways work, such as repairing potholes.

Both the Government and the County Council recognise the importance cycling can play in delivering its wider strategies, such as those relating to improving the economy, environment, health and wellbeing, as well as developing thriving communities. Expanding our cycling networks is therefore a key action in national strategies and in the Nottinghamshire Plan 2021-2031.

The High Pavement scheme forms part of the proposed D2N2 cycling network and consequently the Department for Transport allocated funding for its construction from its Active Travel Fund.

It is therefore misleading for the Independents to claim that nobody wanted this work to be done. Concerns had been raised with the Council for some time from various quarters about the lack of coherent, safe cycle facilities in Sutton-in-Ashfield including, Mr Chairman, a letter from the then Labour MP Gloria De Piero in 2019.

In fact, it is rather odd that Councillor Deakin asks this question giving the impression she previously knew nothing about the High Pavement scheme, or as if she was always opposed to it. The truth is she did know about it, but she did not oppose it.

I have the agenda and minutes here, Mr Chairman, a meeting was held with the local County Councillors at the initial design stage, to set out the strategic context of the project, including its links to Ashfield District Council's own 'Town Deal Accelerated Programme' cycle project. I am told that following discussions about specific design details at that meeting, Councillors Deakin and Zadrozny agreed to allow preliminary design to be completed. Then, a second meeting was held with the local County Councillors once the design work had been completed, at which Councillors Deakin and Zadrozny agreed to the proposals and gave support for the scheme to be put to public consultation. Following the completion of public consultation, officers emailed the results to Councillors Deakin and Zadrozny and did not receive any comments indicating either support or objection. In the absence of any formal objections from those County Councillors, the scheme was recommended in a report to, and approved by the Transport and Environment Committee at its meeting on 13th October 2021, which was attended by Ashfield Independent Councillors Hollis and Wilmott, who both voted in favour of the report.

I suspect, Chairman, that Councillor Deakin and her colleagues only really started to take a close interest in this scheme when it was completed, and when certain concerns were raised by some members of the public.

If there's a whiff of conjecture or public dissatisfaction in the air, then the Ashfield Independents' publicity antennae usually start bleeping and there's a press release out before you can say the words "opportunist" or even "potholes" maybe. Before that, they didn't seem much bothered one way or another.

So, Chairman, I take any 'bad publicity' and noise generated by Ashfield Independent councillors with a pinch of salt, because it's about the only thing they can do well, and they clearly have a political motivation to attack a Conservative-controlled council and a Conservative Government. It really is sensational news, isn't it?

Much more important to me is genuine public feedback, and I think it is fair to say that a small number of schemes funded by the Active Travel Fund have received a less enthusiastic public response at the implementation stage than they did at the earlier planning and bidding stage.

Furthermore, the argument that spending on road maintenance and pothole repair should be prioritised over further spending on cycle lanes is certainly not lost on this administration, Mr Chairman, given that we inherited a significant backlog of road repairs and, as I have said in an earlier response, we have invested an extra £12 million in our budget to fund road repairs as a priority.

Therefore, both myself and the Council Leader have petitioned the Government to continue investing millions of pounds into Nottinghamshire for highways and transport initiatives, but to be less prescriptive in future about precisely how and which highways schemes this money should be spent on.

We believe the Government should give locally elected councillors, and councils, more power to decide what type of work should be prioritised, based on the local views and that those should be local decisions.

While pots of money like the Active Travel Fund remain ring-fenced for schemes of a certain type, such as the scheme in question, we would still sooner spend that money in Nottinghamshire than see it go elsewhere, but we will also keep lobbying for less ring-fencing and more flexibility in the future.

But just to emphasise the point I made before, Mr Chairman, in the Government ring fencing that funding, the lack of Active Travel projects being carried forward would impact on the amount of government funding received for roads maintenance, so be careful what you wish for Mr Chairman.

This Conservative administration will do everything within its power to ensure that the public money we invest is in projects that are in line with the priorities of the residents we serve.

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

Last month a 71 year-old cyclist was killed following a collision with a car on London Road in Retford.

In the last decade, over 1,875 cyclists have been injured by motor vehicles across Nottinghamshire.

Will the Cabinet Member acknowledge that active travel is currently too unsafe in many areas of Nottinghamshire?

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

Obviously I regret, we don't want anyone to be killed on the roads in Nottinghamshire and our condolences go out to the family of the victim involved. But I won't make on further comment on that incident because it's still under investigation.

However, moving onto the more general question, it is rather ironic, and I hope the irony isn't lost on you Chairman, that having just answered a question effectively saying we've gone too far to support safe cycling, I'm now answering a question saying we haven't gone far enough, both from opposition parties. But, the concern Councillor Gowland quite rightly raises is a serious and fair one.

Every loss of life and injury on our roads is a tragedy. That is why we prioritise road safety work to ensure our roads are as safe as possible through a combination of engineering, enforcement and educational measures.

Nationally, there has been a change in emphasis placed on walking and cycling, with priority given to pedestrians at junctions and safe passing space required around cyclists. In Nottinghamshire, we have supported this with campaigns on social media around safe road sharing.

Allied to this work, the County Council has been successful in obtaining government funding to install cycling and walking facilities such as the new cycle lane on Regatta Way in West Bridgford, not far from where Councillor Gowland is.

Being the third largest provider of Bikeability cycle training in the country, safe cycling is one of our top priorities, delivering training to up to 10,000 people each year.

As a result, the latest casualty figures available from the Police for January 2022 to September 2022 show a 48% reduction, down from 37 to 19 casualties, in the number of people killed or seriously injured on pedal cycles compared with the same period the previous year, and a 25% reduction in the number of people with slight injuries.

A stated aim of the Active Travel Scheme is to “make roads quieter, safer and more attractive for people to walk and cycle”, and the more the cycle network develops across the D2N2 area, the closer we hope to get to that aim.

As I said in my previous answer, we want Government to be less prescriptive around such policy, because we also have a duty to serve those who need to drive motor vehicles in Nottinghamshire as well. This should not be seen as a battle of ‘cars versus bikes’, we need to accommodate both.

I think it’s perfectly possible to achieve a safe, harmonious relationship between different forms of transport on our highways, and that’s why we will continue to encourage Active Travel and ensure it is as safe as possible through all the measures available to us.

Question to the Leader of the Council, from Councillor Nigel Moxon

In recently released documents and in the media around the budget, there has been talk about investing in our community based services. Can the Leader please expand on this and how the Councils bid into the Youth Investment Fund might support it?

Response from the Leader of the Council, Councillor Ben Bradley MP

This is something I am always happy to talk about. The budget, as you point out, seeks to make services sustainable for the future and we want to do that by shifting funds from the back office to the front line in terms of community service delivery and improve those services that help people within their place, within their community and particularly within the most disadvantaged communities. In order to reduce inequalities, support those who most need it to have better lives and from a council, corporate perspective also to reduce that demand then on expensive acute care services by helping people to live more independently. That’s the premise of our Council Plan and of our budget and to be able to balance the books for the next few years so we can focus on that change in investment and enhancing those areas.

So, our community assets are really really important to that, as they are the hubs, they are the venues for our engagement with our communities. Our libraries, which we have protected, all 60, in the budget, our children’s centres, our family hubs coming online, youth centres, we’re protecting all these things within this budget. When other councils, as I’ve said, not too far away are slashing them. And we’re doing that

because in my view these are part of our core service and these are the tools that we have to offer services and reduce demand in the most disadvantaged communities. We're able to reduce spending and balance the budget because we have these assets and because we can use them to support people and manage demand, not despite the cost of running those services, but because of that investment in our communities, that's why this is so important.

So, with that in mind, we're now going to look at how we make them even better, so I've asked officers to consider what more we could deliver from our libraries, for example, to make the most of these assets. What could we do to improve the quality of services, both in terms of what's available to residents and also how we work with partners like our districts and boroughs, like charities, community groups to complement each other more effectively. I want to pilot some schemes this year and see us delivering services jointly with partners, getting better value for money which we can then reinvest in further enhancing that work.

You refer to the Youth Investment Fund which is a hugely important part of that. We put a bid into Government to deliver two new youth centres serving three of the most disadvantaged wards in the county. Locations were chosen based on a robust process of identifying the areas of greatest need and overlaying that with the areas that have the least youth provision in the first instance and that rationale was laid out in documents in December. We hope to hear from government on our bids for that in the coming months and if successful I hope it will be an early example of us delivering those improved facilities in the communities that most need them.