



meeting **COUNTY COUNCIL**

date **Thursday, 29 March 2007**

agenda item number

from: **Cabinet Member for Environment**

REPORT FOR PERIOD JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2007

1. Building Better Communities

The Building Better Communities brand has been extremely successful in securing greater profile and recognition for the authority's locally based improvements around the county and I took a progress report to Cabinet earlier this month on the success of year 3.

Around 215 schemes will be delivered during year 3 bringing the total number to 700 since its inception in 2004 and this means that the programme is well on course to achieve 1000 schemes over the full five years. The vast majority of projects have been requested directly by local communities and endorsed by the county ward member.

During year 3 schemes have continued to be delivered under the three headings: highway schemes, flagship projects and conservation projects. Flagship projects this year include the new bus station at Retford and major town centre improvement projects at Middle Gate, Newark and Church Street, Mansfield.

Over 135 applications have now been received for year 4. I am very pleased to see that these are of a high quality and good variety. Very few this year are outside the remit of the BBC initiative which suggests a greater understanding of its aims and objectives.

The 4th annual event this year will be held on Tuesday, 12 June 2007 at Boughton Pumping Station and members should already have received early notification of this.

2. Mansfield Ashfield Regeneration Route – Traffic Impact Survey

The Mansfield Ashfield Regeneration Route (MARR) opened to traffic in December 2004. Before the impact on local traffic can be accurately assessed, traffic patterns on the new road need to become firmly established and it is normal practice to wait at least a year after the road has opened. Surveys have now been undertaken at the same

locations as those taken prior to the construction of MARR, thereby enabling a direct comparison.

I was very pleased to see that since the opening of the new road traffic volumes on all the radial routes into Mansfield town centre have fallen substantially. Furthermore, the Berry Hill area has also experienced significant reductions in traffic bringing considerable environmental benefit to that community. There are, of course, also a number of notable traffic increases on some roads as traffic re-routes to take advantage of the new road.

Traffic flows on MARR exceed earlier predictions, partly because there has been greater than average traffic growth in West Notts. At present the busiest section of MARR is operating at about 53% of its capacity and this will allow it to accommodate future traffic growth associated with the anticipated development alongside MARR.

3. **Review of Fiskerton, Sutton and Daneshill Household Waste and Recycling Centres**

The County Council provides a network of 18 household waste and recycling centres (HWRC) around the county which equates to 2.4 sites per 100,000 heads of population compared with the national average of 1.8. In addition, over 95% of the county's population lives within a five mile radius of a centre. The location of the existing centres is usually governed by the planning permission relevant to the centres. The location of new and relocated centres is governed by policies in the Local Waste Plan which state that they can be allowed on industrial estates and within operational landfill sites. The policy (PW5.2) further state that when the landfill site closes the centre should also close so that the entire landfill site can be restored to open countryside.

Fiskerton, Sutton and Daneshill HWRCs are all located within landfill sites that have, or are shortly due to, cease operation. A public consultation exercise was undertaken recently to ascertain local views about future options for the sites. For Fiskerton and Sutton the responses were in favour of retaining the sites in their current location. At Daneshill the majority of respondents indicated that they would choose to have a new centre provided in the locality.

In view of the public response and bearing in mind other issues that influence the provision of centres, I have agreed that the Fiskerton and Sutton sites will remain in their current location, with the minimum of investment to maintain site safety and operational efficiency, for a period of up to five years, subject to planning and licensing conditions and the provision of new centres. During this period further consideration will be given to their long term future taking into account the impact of increased kerbside recycling and the review of the Local Waste Plan.

The Daneshill site cannot remain in its current location after 2008 and the cost of providing a new site in the locality is prohibitive given the current levels of usage. Users will be directed to the new centre at Worksop and the improved facilities at Retford.

4. **A46 Newark to Widmerpool Improvements**

The Highways Agency (HA) published draft Orders and Environmental Statement (ES) for the A46 scheme back in December 2005, but a later construction date of 2012 is now planned and the scheme programme has had to be revised. Consequently new draft Orders and a revised ES have had to be published.

The scheme involves a dual, two lane, rural trunk road with a 70 mph speed limit and is generally supported by the County Council. However, a number of comments have been made, for example:

- The County Council has requested further discussions on the traffic modeling details at the appropriate time and there needs to be close co-ordination with other committed trunk road and local authority road improvements
- There is inadequate provision for non-motorised users commuting into Bingham and there should be a toucan crossing where the National Cycle Network crosses the existing A46
- The level of mitigation offered at certain locations, most notably at Roehoe Wood, is thought to be deficient
- congestion on the Newark Relief Road requires careful monitoring

I have asked Cabinet to approve the County Council's response to the Highways Agency.

5. **Planning and Climate Change and Building a Greener Future – consultation documents**

The draft Planning Policy Statement (PPS) and Building a Greener Future have both been published for consultation as part of a package of action by the Government to help deliver its ambition of achieving zero carbon development. The Cabinet Member for People and Performance and I have reported to Cabinet and sent a joint response on behalf of the County Council.

The draft PPS sets out key planning objectives and decision making principles for regional planning bodies and local planning authorities and emphasises that climate change should be an integrating theme in Regional Spatial Strategies. It highlights 2 key areas for Local Development Documents to address: identifying land for development and assessing potential for accommodating renewable and low-carbon energy supply.

The draft PPS is welcomed as it firmly establishes climate change as a central issue in the planning system, but the authority did raise a number of issues including:

- Ensuring that emerging spatial strategies and development documents are consistent with the PPS could require significant additional work, as will applying the sustainability appraisals
- The planning profession will need time to develop its skills and expertise
- Whilst the PPS is very detailed regarding the responsibilities of planning authorities, it says very little about the responsibilities of developers
- The objective referring to biodiversity should be framed more positively.

The Government is proposing that all new homes are zero carbon by 2016 and it aims to do this through planning policies, building regulations and the Code for Sustainable Homes. The Building a Greener Future document describes how the Government sees these 3 strands working together. Again, the document is firmly welcomed as it recognises the fundamental role of the planning system in tackling climate change, but there are areas of concern:

- The document focuses on improving the environmental performance of new housing but there is an urgent need for a coherent programme of measures to reduce carbon emissions from the existing housing stock
- The new Code for Sustainable Homes is voluntary and it would be more effective if all the environmental provisions in the Code were mandatory
- There is an urgent need for an equivalent mandatory Code for all non-residential buildings.

6. **Concessionary Fare Scheme**

I took a report to Cabinet in February which reviewed the concessionary fare scheme in Nottinghamshire after its first year of operation. I am delighted to report that to date the scheme has operated very successfully increasing passenger numbers and journeys across the county as a whole with increased take up of concessionary passes. Overall, there are in excess of 115,000 concessionary travel passes currently in use and during the first half of 2006/07 there was a 35% increase in trips.

Independent research carried out on the scheme has shown a 97% satisfaction rating among the 4,500 respondents. Many commented that the pass allows them more freedom, prevents social exclusion and improves accessibility. The Authority's scheme is recognised as one of the best in the country and involved extensive consultation among public transport users, bus, tram and rail operators and the district and borough councils. It allows Nottinghamshire people aged 60 or over, or

with a disability to travel free, with only minor restrictions, on the county's buses and trams.

The Government has announced that from April 2008 the scheme will be extended as a national scheme allowing free travel across England. Detailed discussions are already underway on how this scheme will operate and I will report further when the final national arrangements are announced.

7. **Formation of a Disability Access Group for Transport**

The North Nottinghamshire Local Transport Plan contains an Accessibility Strategy which identified a number of issues disabled and older people experience accessing key services, particularly passenger transport. Under the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 it is illegal for transport operators to discriminate against disabled people.

A number of working groups already exist in the county which include the needs of disabled service users as part of their remit, for example the Bus Users Group. However, it has become increasingly apparent that a single group should be established to specifically look at the transport needs of those with mental health, physical, visual or sensory impairment. I have agreed that a Disability Access Group for Transport should be established.

Many transport operators in Nottinghamshire already have well developed awareness raising policies and provide fully accessible vehicles. However, there is still a need for increased awareness about the specific needs of disabled and older people. I have agreed, therefore, that a partnership between bus operators, GoSkills national training programme (the Sector Skills Council for Transport), users and local authorities will develop a training programme for transport operators. This programme will be monitored by the Disability Access Group for Transport.

8. **Putting Passengers First**

In December 2006 the Government published "Putting Passengers First" which represents the culmination of the Government's review of bus services. The proposals include

- Enhancements to existing arrangements for partnerships between local authorities and bus operators
- Making it easier for local authorities to introduce 'quality contract' schemes
- Improving punctuality and performance, including provisions to hold both local authorities and bus operators accountable for their contribution to the performance of bus services
- Giving more opportunity to the community transport sector

This is not a consultation document, but the Government are seeking views on the proposals which will feed into the Transport Bill due to be published later this year. Buses play a major part in the Nottinghamshire transport system and they are a lifeline for many of our communities. The proposals set out in the document are very welcome and provide a balanced package of reforms. I have approved the County Council's response.

9. **Road Safety Audits**

The Authority's Strategic Plan includes an objective to reduce the number of deaths and serious accidents on Nottinghamshire's road, particularly those involving children, and this is in line with Central Government aspirations. The purpose of a road safety audit is to identify potential problems for all road users and to suggest measures to eliminate or mitigate those problems.

Road safety audits have been carried out in Nottinghamshire since 1990 by the Authority's Accident and Investigation Unit (AIU). I have now approved operational procedures which will be included in the Authority's Highway Network Management Plan. All improvements schemes with an estimated value of over £5000 and involving permanent change to the highway will be subject to road safety audits. Audits will continue to be carried out by the AIU and will involve a three-stage examination of proposals: at the preliminary design stage, the detailed design stage and on completion. This will significantly reduce the potential for death and injury in future years.

10. **Grant Aid to Voluntary Transport Schemes**

The County Council provides funding and support to 13 voluntary car schemes in the county providing over 100,000 trips per year with over 3000 users and approximately 400 volunteer drivers. We also support 10 voluntary community minibus schemes.

Since 2004 a three year agreement for funding has been in operation and in 2006/07 over £200,000 was provided to these schemes. The agreement expires in March 2007. However, discussions have been taking place with voluntary groups about the operation of the agreement and the criteria upon which funding decisions are based. Furthermore, the Road Transport Bill due to be published in the spring may propose changes to the regulations governing community transport. In view of this, I have agreed to extend the current funding arrangements for one year which will allow these worthwhile schemes to continue to operate while the funding review takes place.

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