

APPENDIX A

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 22 SEPTEMBER 2022 QUESTIONS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

Question to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Jonathan Wheeler

On Thursday 28th July Members and staff were evacuated from the County Hall building following a fire on the first-floor members corridor. Could the Leader please give an update on the works that have been carried out, any costs that the authority may have incurred and if the disruption caused by the fire has had any impact on the delivery of our services?

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

I've been through some of this in my Executive report as I've said, I won't go through all of that again, but just to reiterate a huge thank you to fire marshals, Emergency Planning Team, Emergency Services who all did a truly sterling job safely escorting staff out and away from the building, arranging taxis and shuttles for many people who had left their belongings in County Hall, communicating and co-ordinating the safe collection of those belongings, which was a task, and re-locating staff members into temporary accommodation.

In terms of the works to the building following the fire, properties and emergency planning teams in partnership with Arc implemented a programme of works to decontaminate, to reinstate parts of the building as soon as possible. That consisted of four phases.

Phases 1, 2 and 3 were focused primarily on the decontamination works to allow the safe reinstatement of the offices, although the fire itself was contained to the Members corridor, smoke went through voids and around various parts of the building.

The basement area and print facility area of County Hall was the first to be handed over and reoccupied on 16 August, just two weeks after the fire, which I think was a really impressive piece of work.

One week later, the rest of Phase 1 was handed over on 25 August, all floors of the south wing of the building overlooking the car park including the Chamber and Assembly Rooms.

Phase 2 on 2 September included the ground floor entrance and reception, and members will note that we're now fully able to access the building in that way.

And Phase 3 on 16 September, all remaining areas of County Hall with the exception of the Members Corridor.

For those three phases, an average of 70 people have been on-site, seven days a week, including bank holidays to ensure that we've been able to get back in this building as quickly as possible. That's 30,000 staff hours have gone into doing that, so again, a huge thank you.

The full re-occupation (excluding the members area on the first floor) was originally programmed to be complete in twelve weeks and in fact has been done in under eight, down to the hard work of a huge number of people: Matt Neal, Neil Gamble, Chris Molyneux, Steve and Jeff Crowder, John Nilan and his Health & Safety team, Suzanne Smith, Paul Martin and his IT Team, the team from Arc: Dale Reeve, Dave Smith, Richard Mills, Mark Murphy and many of our own officers, not least our former Chief Executive, Marje, Lucy Peel, Derek Higton who assisted our staff with the recovery of personal belongings and getting things in place to make all of that happen, and our new Chief Executive who kept a steady hand on the tiller throughout.

In terms of service delivery, the evacuation caused minimal disruption after that initial 24 hours. Staff and decision-making officers were able to re-locate into surrounding vacant buildings like Trent Bridge House. Whilst that was a positive in being able to tackle this incident, it does show how important the piece of work Councillor Girling and Scrutiny are currently undertaking around the Council's property portfolio is, to ensure we are using our assets in the best possible way.

We are still processing and assessing the full costs incurred to date, but I can advise that the Council is fully insured, and the vast majority of costs therefore that we've incurred will be recoverable through our insurance, not by the taxpayer. The only cost to the Council is in respect of that officer time, as I have described.

Question to the Cabinet Member for Finance from Councillor Jim Creamer

How will community wealth building be considered as part of this Council's plan for delivering a sustainable procurement policy?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Richard Jackson

The Centre for Local Economic Strategies defines 'community wealth building' as, and I'll quote: "a new people-centred approach to local economic development, which redirects wealth back into the local economy, and places control and benefits into the hands of local people".

The CLES indicates that 'community wealth building' is based on five key principles:

- Plural ownership of the economy
- Making financial power work for local places
- Fair employment and just labour markets
- Progressive procurement of goods and services; and
- Socially productive use of land and property

If you look on Wikipedia, Chairman, which is most people's go-to, it (community wealth building) derives from a model called the Cleveland Model, which no surprise was developed in Cleveland in the US, and that has now developed and turned into the "Preston Model" from Preston in Lancashire.

'It is a form of municipal socialism which utilises anchor institutions, living wage expansion, community banking, public pension investment, worker ownership and municipal enterprise tied to a procurement strategy at the municipal level.'

Don't ask me what all that means!

So, Chairman, I think it's fair to say that we can see where Councillor Creamer's question is coming from, and Jim's never made any secret of his socialist instincts.

I'm guessing at this point, Chairman, that having been knee-deep in words like 'progressive' and 'municipal socialism', Councillor Creamer and others would not necessarily be anticipating me to be overly positive in responding to this question.

However, we do seek to be constructive, and I am happy to comment on aspects of the progressive procurement of goods and services where the sustainable procurement policy that we are establishing does offer some common ground.

When it comes how money is spent and services are commissioned locally, some feel that cost is often the dominant determining factor in who gets the contracts. I am pleased to say that for many years, we have always ensured that quality has played a more important part in determination than cost. It is important that environmental credentials and social value are higher on the list of considerations, and that brings me to the proposed policy that we wanted to discuss at the cancelled Cabinet meeting on 15th September.

The Council's commitment to social, economic and environmental wellbeing is reflected in the Nottinghamshire Plan. To help us achieve our aims, we are determined to gain additional community benefit from the £600 million-worth of spending each year (by this Council) on buying goods and services. The new Sustainable Procurement Policy, when it is presented to a future Cabinet meeting, will build on this Council's current Procurement Strategy and has been subject to wide consultation with stakeholders including representatives from service directorates, councillors, the voluntary and community sector and the local Chambers of Commerce.

It will reinforce best practice that we are already achieving, delivering significant local spend and working with our local partners to support young people into apprenticeships. We will continue to work in partnership with our suppliers and the wider supply chain to consider whole life-cycle, environmental, social and economic impact on our communities from the goods and services that we procure.

So, Chairman, as is the case I hope for all of us who serve the public, the positive outcomes that we are seeking to achieve for our residents and our local economy are often not all that different, even if we have, sometimes, contrasting ideas about the way that we get there.

Question to the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment from Councillor Tom Smith

On behalf of Blidworth and Rainworth residents, can I ask the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment to pass on to his officers our thanks for their successful efforts in saving the 141 bus service?

Would he agree that the preservation of this service is welcome news for all current and potential bus users on the 141 route, demonstrating Nottinghamshire County Council's ongoing commitment to supporting local bus services despite significant financial pressures facing this and many other local authorities?

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

I am indeed happy to indeed pass on the thanks of Councillor Smith's division residents to our officers for their excellent work in securing the future of the 141 bus service.

Stagecoach have taken over this bus route following an extensive procurement tendering exercise run by Nottinghamshire County Council to find a new operator. That search was begun by our officers in July, the moment that TrentBarton, at short notice, announced that it would be withdrawing its provision.

The new Stagecoach 141 bus service commenced on Monday 5 September, following the same route from Sutton to Nottingham via Mansfield and Hucknall at the same times. The previous TrentBarton service ran until Saturday 3 September, so there was a seamless transfer resulting in no loss of service for passengers.

We made it clear to residents from the outset that we would work around the clock to secure a new company to run the bus, and we delivered on our word. We know how important this service is for local communities and businesses in north and central Nottinghamshire, helping people to shop, work and meet friends and loved ones.

The agreement between Nottinghamshire County Council and Stagecoach will initially last for twelve months, with an option to extend for a further year after this period. I'm sure this news will be welcomed by current bus users along the entire 141 route, but I also hope it inspires many more people to use the service, which will help us to keep it running in years to come. I hope we can encourage people to get out of their cars and use the buses, Mr Chairman.

I heard quite a lot about a petition to save the 141 service, although the petition has never been presented to me or indeed to this Council, so it remains something of a mystery to me. It didn't change the intentions of TrentBarton, and it played absolutely no part in the decision-making process. Maybe that petition got lost in a hot-tub and is still drying out, Mr Chairman.

The 141 service was saved as a direct result of the work of this council's officers and the commitment of this administration. We initially instigated meetings with TrentBarton which I chaired and where senior officers were present, but more

significantly, we conducted the successful negotiations with Stagecoach whereby they agreed to become the new operator of the service.

Councillor Smith is correct about this Council's ongoing commitment to supporting bus services throughout Nottinghamshire despite the very significant financial pressures we face.

There are over 200 bus routes in this County, and under normal circumstances before the pandemic there were around 28 million passenger trips per year. Sadly but inevitably, passenger numbers collapsed during the Covid lockdown and are taking time to fully recover, which does put more of these bus routes at risk.

The County Council currently plays a vital role in keeping these routes running by providing financial support for services that cannot be sustained by private bus companies on commercial income alone. We support as a County Council, 80 bus routes, spending £4.1 million a year to do so, but we are facing significant financial pressures of our own, and the money we spend ultimately comes from taxpayers.

This administration remains absolutely committed to ensuring every community in Nottinghamshire is served by public transport, but we are pursuing new ways of achieving this. We are accessing new national funding streams and developing innovative approaches at a local level to protect and increase bus travel options.

For example, further funding for bus services will be provided from a new instalment of the Government's Bus Recovery Grant, announced in August, of which we await further details. This grant is available to help routes struggling to recover to pre-Covid passenger levels, supplemented by existing council-held transport funding.

Working in partnership with local bus operators, and with the help of this Government funding, we will provide financial support to 19 key bus services across Nottinghamshire that would otherwise be at risk. These are listed on the Council's website and include the 141 bus service.

Nottinghamshire County Council has developed an ambitious Bus Service Improvement Plan to encourage bus use, and through this we hope to secure further central government funding to invest in bus services and infrastructure. One of the key objectives of the Improvement Plan is to deploy innovation and new technology in the provision of rural services.

For example, earlier this year, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire was confirmed as one of the areas that would receive a share of a new £200 million central government funding pot for zero-emission buses. This money is purchasing a total of 943 buses across the country and is helping recipient councils to invest more in electric charging points or hydrogen refuelling infrastructure.

Just three weeks ago on 30 August, the County Council began trials of its own new 'Nottsbus On Demand' bus service, giving residents a more flexible way of travelling by bus. 'Nottsbus On Demand' is being piloted in the villages around Retford, Ollerton and Newark, and an evening service is also being launched in Mansfield.

The new services replace the current 136, 190, 195, 200, 330, 332, 333, 334, and 335 bus routes, as we seek to ensure people still have bus services when they need them, whilst ensuring value for money.

Unlike traditional services where buses follow a set route and can sometimes pick up very few passengers, 'Nottsbus On Demand' doesn't have a fixed route or timetable. Instead, the buses can travel anywhere between bus stops and designated points within their operating zones. Passengers will be able to choose when they would like to travel, by booking their journey through an easy-to-use 'App' or over the telephone.

In areas that are currently serviced by a two-hourly bus service, such as Wellow, Egmanton and Caunton, residents will be able to enjoy more frequent bus travel. Also, because our buses will not follow a fixed route, they will provide a new transport option in those areas that are not currently served by our bus network.

As I've said, we're in the pilot stage, but we hope that this new service will offer residents a reliable, affordable, greener way to travel. By giving passengers the choice over when they want to travel, we are able to offer them greater flexibility with their travel plans.

So, Chairman, it's fair to say that this Council is at the forefront of efforts to protect and improve bus services and promote more bus usage, but we are looking to do this in a new, innovative and more efficient way. We must encourage and promote bus use as much as we possibly can Chairman, and let's save the environment and get people out of cars.

Hitherto, when bus routes and services have become commercially unviable, we have worked reactively, seeking in effect to prop up those services using public money. Now we intend to be more proactive, offering a different type of provision better matched to the individual needs of potential passengers, especially in outlying rural areas. This will provide improved public transport options for the public and better value to them as taxpayers.

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

How long can people expect to benefit from the Council's recent announcement of fixed £2 bus fares?

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

Just to be clear, it was the Government, rather than this Council, that recently made an announcement regarding £2 fixed bus fares, but of course it is relevant to all local authorities with an interest in bus service management and delivery.

I'll therefore quote from the official Government website:

'Millions of bus users across England will save money through a new £2 cap on single bus journeys from January to March 2023, backed by up to £60 million to ensure affordable transport across the country.

The move announced by the Transport Secretary on 3 September will help passengers with travel costs for work, education, shopping and medical treatments over the winter months while they are facing pressures from the rising cost of living.

Bus fares vary across different parts of the country and between bus operators and can reach almost £6 for a single journey in rural areas. The new cap means passengers in those areas could save more than £60 a month if they took 4 single trips a week.

The average single fare for a 3-mile journey is estimated at over £2.80, meaning that the new fare will save passengers almost 30% of the price every time they travel.

The funding to keep fares down follows the government's announcement of £130 million last month to protect vital bus routes and services across the country, which those on lower incomes in particular rely on...'

'...ensuring the public can access affordable bus fares will encourage more people to choose buses for local journeys, which helps to reduce carbon emissions as the country moves towards Net Zero targets. The scheme is estimated to take at least 2 million car journeys off the roads, cutting congestion and pollution for everyone.'

You may remember I mentioned that in the previous answer, or would you like me to repeat that previous answer, Mr Chairman? No?

'Introducing the fare cap by January enables the government to work with operators and local authorities to implement a scheme that most effectively delivers real savings for passengers. Operators representing around 90% of the bus market have expressed support for the scheme and we hope that all bus operators will participate. The fare cap builds on lots of offers around the country in areas with high bus demand, which include daily, weekly and monthly ticket options and promotional offers. Single fares which are already lower than £2 will not be affected by the cap.

The Government will continue to work closely with bus operators and local authorities and consider future support to help passengers continue accessing reliable and affordable bus services after March.'

Chairman, the final details of the operation of the scheme are yet to be announced, but our understanding is that the scheme will operate from 1 January 2023 to 31 March 2023.

Question to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Asset Management from Councillor Dave Shaw

Could you provide an update on costings that relate to the new council offices at Top Wighay Farm, Linby? Is Nottinghamshire County Council on track to complete work on time and within the original budget?

Response from the Leader of the Council, Councillor Ben Bradley MP on behalf of the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Asset Management, Councillor Keith Girling

As the Chairman said, Councillor Girling is flogging himself half to death currently in Belgium – rather him than me, but for a good cause – so I’ll answer the question on his behalf.

The proposed development at Top Wighay as I think we’ve discussed many times achieved planning consent in July. That was a key milestone in terms of the new building’s delivery. It enables our partner Arc to take the project through the latest detailed design stage.

The next stage of the process is to issue a ‘Latest Estimated Cost’ report for approval by Councillor Girling in his role as Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Asset Management. The project is currently on track and currently in line with all the original budget approvals.

Of course, we can all see the potential into the future in the current economic climate for challenges, but as it stands, everything is on track.

Obviously, this project represents a huge investment in Hucknall, where it’s likely to create jobs and help to fund new infrastructure for the town. We are committed to ensuring that we are delivering services from appropriate, modern buildings, reducing our footprint from seventeen buildings down to nine so far, which is saving a significant amount of money and also improving Hucknall residents’ access to the County Council, to our services, and it’s far greener too, reducing our carbon footprint.

As Councillor Shaw will know, we deliver our core services from our revenue budget, that’s the day-to-day bank account that ensures we can fund children’s services, social care, provide the help and support that our residents expect. That budget also funds things like the maintenance and running costs of our buildings and it’s always very tight. We have some significant care priorities in particular in that budget so it makes absolute sense to spend a little bit of capital – a one-off investment – to help reduce our annual running costs for buildings. I’m sure Councillor Shaw will agree we would much rather be spending that money on supporting and helping people rather than heating or fixing old buildings that we don’t need.

We’re going to debate a motion later on, on the rising costs of energy to heat people’s homes. I for one would much rather spend money on supporting residents in that way, than heating big, half-empty, inefficient office buildings.

I say this, Mr Chairman, because the Ashfield Independents have consistently referred to this project as something that is happening at great cost to taxpayers, when I think most of us, and I’m sure they if they were being honest about it, all know in fact it represents a very significant saving over the medium-to-long-term that will help us to continue to deliver high quality services for people across the whole County and make sure that this Council continues to be managed and run sustainably to the benefit of local residents.

Question to the Cabinet Member for Personnel from Councillor John Lee

As the County Councillor for Balderton division, and personally being a disabled man with a Blue Badge, I recently applied for a replacement badge and was pleasantly surprised how quickly I received it, having previously been in meetings where some opposition members criticised the length of time these badges take to process.

Does the Cabinet Member for Personnel think my experience was typical of our response times, and could he explain the most common causes for delays in processing so that, as members, we can advise applicants how to maximise their chance of the fastest response?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Personnel, Councillor Gordon Wheeler

When Nottinghamshire County Council receives a Blue Badge application, we generally allow five days for assessment and approval, which includes Department for Work & Pensions checks for applicants who are in receipt of benefits.

Once an application is approved, ten working days are assumed for printing and fulfilment, which is completed through a third-party supplier.

In practice the turnaround is often very much quicker, Mr Chairman, and from your question Councillor Lee I assume you may have been a case in point. That said, no two applications are identical, and some do take longer for a variety of reasons. For example:

- Residents do not always provide all the information required or sufficient details about their mobility issues and health conditions, so sadly we have to make further checks;
 - In some cases, relevant payments are not always included so our team has to resolve this with the applicant;
 - Some applications, as you can imagine, are quite complex and need professional oversight, which again takes additional time;
- and
- Some applications may need a full mobility assessment with an Occupational Therapist.

In all these cases there could be a longer delay, and the standard set by the Department of Transport is 12 weeks, but it is very rare that applications take this long.

Postal applications take longer than online applications, but the number of postal applications is reducing year on year. In fact, Mr Chairman, over 64% of applications are now received online, and that really helps with the turnaround times.

There are two additional factors that have recently been affecting our response times:

- One, as we said earlier on today and you're all very well aware of this, the fire at County Hall, it caused system issues which we have been working very hard to resolve and continue to do so;
- The other - the recent industrial action affecting the Royal Mail, which obviously impacts on the receipt of postal applications and the delivery of Blue Badges.

Fortunately, both these factors are temporary, and 'normal' service should soon be restored.

I'd like to take this opportunity, Mr Chairman, with your indulgence, to thank our Customer Service team for the marvellous job they do.

Question to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health from Councillor David Martin

In July, you told the media that new Government reforms into the cost of adult social care are expected to leave Nottinghamshire County Council with a budget black hole of almost £33 million every year. Do you believe Government reforms are achievable without direct Government intervention?

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

Thank you very much, Councillor Martin, for your question, and I'm really keen to not bore the Chamber this afternoon, because at Full Council on 7 July, I delivered an extensive answer to the question presented from Councillor Paul Henshaw, which I was also pleased to answer, where I explained that Nottinghamshire County Council must implement eight pieces of reform to the way it provides social care services over the next couple of years.

A week later, and this is why I say I could get quite boring, on 14 July, I presented a paper to Cabinet setting out that programme of Adult Social Care reform, and explaining how Nottinghamshire County Council intended to respond. The report described the potential requirements, costs, and risks to the Council associated with the implementation of these reforms.

My answer to Councillor Henshaw's question is published in the minutes of today's Council book, while the Cabinet report is available to read in detail online. I don't therefore intend to repeat all of that information over again.

Now, Councillor Martin you are indeed correct that I was also quoted in some media outlets, and I'm starting to get used to the fact that the media pick up on stuff that I say, I can't think why, but I could comment that, Councillor Martin, if you were paying close attention to the previous answers that I've given in full on this, then there would perhaps not be need for you to be asking this question again today, but I only say that in jest, I'm teasing of course, I'm delighted to answer again.

On 7 July, I stated that the Leader of this Council, in his capacity as an MP, had spoken in Parliament and made strong representations to ministers regarding the financial challenge of implementing these social care reforms, and our Corporate Director through ADASS (Association of Directors of Adult Social Services) has used these channels to make the same points consecutively to Government.

We also here in the Council need to be as innovative as possible in seeking to meet these costs through internal transformation.

At the Health and Wellbeing Board earlier this month it was agreed that - pending the receipt of Government implementation funding - £862,000 of reserves aligned to Protecting Social Care could be used to establish new posts and extend existing posts through to March 2023 to progress Social Care Reform.

We are also working with other local authorities, again through ADASS, to reduce duplication and achieve economies of scale wherever we can to release the money needed to meet these challenges.

However, as I stated, and as I believe I have already very clearly answered in my answer on 7 July, we do need to ensure that local authorities with primary responsibility for adult social care delivery receive a realistic amount of new funding to deliver these reforms, especially considering the proactive and effective role we play in reducing the cost burdens falling on our NHS.

I commented that the focus of funding discussions in the past has often centred on the health and NHS side of delivery rather than the excellent and often proactive preventative work done by local authorities such as ours. I said it follows, therefore, that with a large amount of Health & Social Care Funding Levy money now becoming available, we need to ensure that the authorities delivering the 'Social Care' element receive a fairer share than perhaps we have in the past.

Now maybe I was being a little too subtle in my previous answers as I've been over before, Chairman, but I thought what I was saying was clear. If reform proceeds along the lines set out to date, money will need to follow to implement the reform, and given that the major source of new money coming onstream is the Health & Social Care Levy, we are lobbying Government to listen, we're lobbying Government to act, we're lobbying Government to respond, to 'directly intervene' - call it what you will - but we want to ensure that a sufficient portion of that funding comes here to Nottinghamshire County Council.

I'm sorry that this answer was as long and repetitive of the answers I've given before.

Question to the Cabinet Member for Finance, from Councillor Francis Purdue-Horan

Do you believe that the Council are being realistic when budgeting for capital projects?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Richard Jackson

As I think Members should appreciate, setting budgets for capital schemes has always been a challenge for local authorities due to the size of the task, the timing of delivery, and the changing value of materials.

As Councillor Purdue-Horan is aware, this has been a particular challenge for some projects since 2020, when we began to be impacted by the effects of the pandemic, the effects of which included worldwide shortages of building materials and resulted in increasing prices for those materials. This should not come as a surprise to anyone, especially members of the former Finance Committee where we spent some time discussing these challenges over recent years, and I recall the meeting in November of last year when we discussed a joint report by the then Director of Place & Communities and the Section 151 Officer regarding resource shortages and contract inflation.

That report specifically referenced material and staffing shortages due to Covid, due to Brexit, which were driving abnormal rates of inflation across the construction sector, exacerbated by substantially increased energy and fuel costs. The report set out how Arc and Via were both impacted by these, and how they were trying to manage our capital schemes within a very tough operating environment.

The impacts of inflation are of course more stark now than when we discussed this back in November last year, due to the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Consequently, when capital schemes are first agreed into the capital programme, we all recognise that this is based on assumptions of inflation which are particularly difficult to predict for larger building and highways schemes that stretch over a number of years. When we sat here in this Council Chamber a year ago, we would not have expected the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the level of inflation the world is now trying to deal with.

Some find it difficult to comprehend, Mr Chairman, the size and complexity of some of the schemes in our capital programme and try to relate it to buying a car or building an extension. This is disingenuous. Officers here and within Arc and Via do the best they can to set out realistic budgets for schemes with the knowledge they have at the time, and they should be supported in doing so.

Question to the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment, from Councillor Jonathan Wheeler

Will the Cabinet Member for Transport & Environment join me in welcoming the speed with which Lady Bay Bridge was repaired and fully re-opened after a lorry struck the brick parapet on 4th July?

This prompt response was of great benefit to residents in the West Bridgford area including my division, who not only use the bridge on a regular basis but were also affected by the traffic issues inevitably caused by temporary diversions while the repairs were taking place.

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

I will indeed join with Councillor Wheeler, I was very proud of the efforts and fast response of everybody involved in the repair and re-opening of Lady Bay Bridge in West Bridgford.

Just after 8.50am on Monday 4 July, Police received reports of a lorry leaving the carriageway over the Lady Bay Bridge brick parapet and crashing down onto the road below. I'm sure many of us saw the photographs in the media of the lorry lying on its side beneath the bridge.

The first and most important thing, Mr Chairman, is to say that the driver of the vehicle is out of hospital and recovering well. We contacted the business concerned on Tuesday to receive an update, and it was welcome news. I'm sure we would all want to join in sending the driver our best wishes for the future.

The incident was attended by a number of emergency vehicles and the bridge was closed in both directions with significant disruption to traffic during the rush hour.

Nottinghamshire County Council, working in partnership with Via East Midlands and also Nottingham City Council, immediately began work assessing the damage with a view to repairing and re-opening the bridge as soon as possible.

A complex clean-up operation was followed by the installation of temporary concrete barriers to allow the bridge to reopen in one direction on 11 July, after which structural scaffolding was put in place to rebuild the brick parapet.

Given the local heritage of the bridge, repair materials were sourced which matched the existing style. The parapet itself has been rebuilt to replicate the previous design and wherever possible we re-used original materials.

The final stage of work was the installation of the new safety barrier on the bridge, and after a final inspection, motorists were able to begin travelling in both directions again, from midday on Saturday 20 August.

I would like to thank motorists and nearby residents for their patience while we were working to make the bridge safe. They had been delayed quite a lot, Mr Chairman and this meant now that they weren't delayed. Maybe they could spend more time in their hot tubs, Mr Chairman. I am pleased that we were able to do this well ahead of the original 12 week schedule we had in place.

As Councillor Wheeler has pointed out, this fast completion was good news for drivers, residents and businesses in West Bridgford, but also the wider County and City area and road network. It was especially pleasing that we were able to get traffic flowing in both directions before the Notts County versus Chesterfield football match and the Trent Rockets versus London Spirit cricket match on 20 August.

This incident, and our response to it, demonstrates the value of Nottinghamshire County Council having a wholly-owned highways service provider, Via East Midlands, who are able to react immediately and effectively in such situations.

Of course, this is what local authorities like Nottinghamshire County Council are expected to do in these situations, but we should not take these efforts for granted. I would like to take this opportunity, Mr Chairman, to thank Via, and all our officers and our other partners involved in the accident response and the subsequent fast repair of Lady Bridge. They did an outstanding job.