

APPENDIX B

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 21 MARCH 2024 QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER, CABINET MEMBERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

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

Would the Cabinet Member for Transport & Environment join me in welcoming news that Nottinghamshire has been named the top county in the Country for bus passenger satisfaction according to a major survey conducted by Transport Focus, the independent watchdog for Transport Users?

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

Yes, I absolutely will join Councillor Smith in welcoming this news.

The report to which Councillor Smith refers is 'Your Bus Journey – the independent bus user survey', published this month. The survey included 34 local transport authority areas, speaking to passengers about their experience on more than 35,000 journeys up to the end of 2023.

The survey provides a robust, comparable benchmark that can be used by transport authorities, bus operators and the Government to identify what really makes a difference to a bus passenger's journey.

The report contains a lot of information about the bus passenger experience across the country, including specific groups of passengers across a range of categories, but Councillor Smith's eye has quite rightly been drawn to what the report says about bus passenger satisfaction levels in our county, because it's great news.

The report categorises areas as either 'rural' 'semi-rural', 'urban metropolitan' or 'urban other', within which Nottinghamshire is categorised as a 'semi-rural' area. We are particularly proud to be ranked the highest of all the 'semi-rural' counties in the Transport Focus overall journey satisfaction table.

For 'Overall Journey Satisfaction by Area', Nottinghamshire has an 85% satisfaction rating placing it as the highest-ranking county, the highest-ranking semi-rural area, and 5th out all 34 local transport authority areas.

For 'Satisfaction with Waiting Time by Area', Nottinghamshire has 74% satisfaction, again placing it as the highest-ranking county.

In the league table for 'Overall Journey Satisfaction by Bus Operator', two operators serving the Nottinghamshire and Nottingham area – namely Nottingham City Transport and Trentbarton, are ranked in the top six operators in the country.

In the category of 'Satisfaction with bus driver overall by operator', Trentbarton with 93% satisfaction is ranked Number One in the country, with Nottingham City Transport not far behind in eighth place with 90% satisfaction.

Chairman, I'll be the first to acknowledge that a lot of the credit for these outcomes should go to the actual bus operators themselves, whose vehicles and employees serve residents of both the County and the City every day, but this is also a tribute to the overall bus transport strategy across Nottinghamshire, overseen by both the County Council and the City Council working with those operators.

And let's remember, Mr Chairman, there are some counties that have stopped any involvement in providing bus services, so I'm proud of this achievement.

Question to the Chairman of the Nottinghamshire Pension Fund Committee from Councillor Lee Waters

Do you believe that a Smokefree Nottinghamshire is possible by 2035, whilst the Nottinghamshire Pension Fund still has stocks in tobacco companies?

Response from the Chairman of the Nottinghamshire Pension Fund Committee, Councillor Eric Kerry

The goal of achieving a Smokefree Nottinghamshire by 2035 is ambitious and commendable and one we should be able to achieve. However, it requires concerted efforts from various stakeholders, including government bodies, health organisations, and the community.

Nottinghamshire Pension Fund having investments in tobacco companies presents an interesting challenge, and you are right to raise it here.

On one hand, divesting from tobacco stocks aligns with the goal of reducing smoking-related harm. On the other hand, divestment decisions involve complex considerations, including financial implications, fiduciary responsibilities to our pensioners, and ethical concerns.

My personal experience of the impact of smoking has been devastating, and you know that from me having to say this in other meetings that are not as public as this. Both my parents died from the effects of years of smoking untipped Park Drive cigarettes. My father succumbed at the age of 47 when my youngest brother was 11.

So, you can see why I absolutely support reducing smoking rates and achieving public health benefits by preventing tobacco-related diseases and improving overall well-being. A smoke-free environment contributes to healthier communities. And I'm sure that smoking by my mother contributed to me being born a month early in 1952 at a weight of 3lbs 3oz. I'm very lucky to be here, so I take this incredibly seriously.

However, Pension funds have a duty to maximize returns for the beneficiaries, and as Members of the Fund know, there are complex regulations that apply to the management of investments. In addition, we should note that divesting from tobacco

stocks may have an impact on investment returns, potentially affecting our pensioners' financial security. That's all part of wellbeing too.

Interestingly there are tobacco companies that have diversified into the Vape market, and we want the Vape market to work because that's part of our strategy for reducing smoking, so divestment could have a negative impact on our policy of promoting vaping as a way of kicking the smoking habit. This initiative involves encouraging smokers in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire to quit for good.

A recent survey commissioned by the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Smoking and Tobacco Control Alliance revealed that many people who smoke do so to cope with stress, despite the fact that smoking can actually increase anxiety.

While some respondents expressed a desire to cut down or quit, only a small percentage could easily imagine themselves as ex-smokers. The cost of smoking and its impact on prioritising basic needs like food were also concerning findings, so we talk about cost of living, and people that say they don't have money are still smoking because of this terrible habit.

Fortunately, local services provide free stop-smoking advice and support. Nottingham City residents can access support through Stub it!, and Nottinghamshire residents can find assistance through Your Health Notts.

Nottinghamshire County Council is committed to supporting residents in their journey to quit smoking. Our support includes assessing individual needs, explaining the effects of quitting on the body, and offering free stop smoking aids like nicotine replacement therapy (NRT). You can also access this support through the specialist stop smoking service, Your Health Notts. This service is commissioned by us to assist residents, including children, young people, adults, and families, in various health-related goals, including quitting smoking. They offer personalised support and resources to help you succeed. This in addition to national campaigns.

However, we, the Pension Fund Committee must not confuse the Council's work, with the Nottinghamshire Local Government Pension Fund and the Regulations that exist surrounding the management of its investments. Nottinghamshire is the administering Authority for the funds held on behalf of our Pension Fund members. This includes active contributors, i.e. those working for our scheme employers, deferred members and actual pensioners who receive their monthly pension.

At the Pension Fund meeting on 7th March 2024, a couple of weeks ago, that you Councillor Waters attended, a report was presented following a detailed review of tobacco investments by a Members Working Party held on the 11th January 2024, again a meeting you attended.

This report set out the following: A detailed review of tobacco investment was made in winter 2021/22. The Fund's listed exposure to tobacco at 31st December 2021 was less than 0.5% of the Fund. The majority of the Fund's exposure was through passive funds, i.e. ones that track movements in the overall index rather than by active stock investment, so we're not actively looking for investment in tobacco stocks.

The transition cost of moving these investments to alternative passive funds would be significant, I am advised by officers and experts, but more importantly the ongoing management costs of the passive investments against a more expensive index would be considerable, especially relative to the scale of investments excluded. Moreover, to introduce a formal exclusion across the Fund would require changes to some of the Fund's other investment arrangements at significant one off and ongoing costs, including to some funds where there is no actual exposure to tobacco currently. So, as a result of this, Members acknowledged that under these circumstances it would not be possible to justify the costs and risks of an exclusion policy, but to keep the Fund's exposure under review, which we will do so.

Exposure has continued to be reviewed and has remained low. However, in response to the Member's question a formal review was undertaken for the Working Party. This found that the exposure to tobacco has reduced even further.

Consequently, the Working Party agreed that no further action was recommended, and that recommendation was formally approved at Committee two weeks ago on March 7th. We will of course continue to consider our investment strategy in future, as we do all aspects of the Fund.

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

Does the Cabinet Member accept that the fact that Roadmaster carried out works in his own picturesque village of Hickling on FOUR separate occasions since 2019 does not reflect well on Nottinghamshire County Council?

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

No, of course I don't accept what I view as a very derogatory insinuation in that question, and clearly those shouting 'Shame!' do not know what the facts of the matter are, because you don't want the facts to get in the way of a very misleading headline. Councillor Carr seems to be implying that I directed the Roadmaster to be deployed excessively in Hickling. Well, the facts are these, Mr Chairman:

- The first event was agreed, scheduled, and implemented before I was even in the post of Cabinet Member;
- The second event was also scheduled before I came into post albeit, to be fair, the actual work was carried out a month after I came into post, but bear in mind that the scheduling was done in the previous financial year, before I came into post, so I had zero influence on any of those decisions;
- Then the last two events were actually one event, it took place over two days because they didn't finish it in the one day, but that was scheduled and implemented after I came me into post, but it was just actually one job.

All the roads that were repaired were single-track lanes in between three villages, namely Hickling, Upper Broughton and Hickling Pastures. To use his words, all 'picturesque' villages. None of them were actually within the village of Hickling itself.

Via District Managers, working with their Inspectors and operatives, decide what repair method is used. I have absolutely zero influence on any method of repair that is used. The methodology could be for example: Roadmaster, Patch Repair, Micro Asphalt, Resurfacing or ViaFix. Such decisions contribute towards a comprehensive operations programme not just focused on one specific machine.

The Roadmaster is designed to carry out repairs on rural roads and semi-rural roads. As such, it is deployed accordingly across Nottinghamshire, visiting different parts of different county divisions multiple times, but it is just one tool within a much larger toolbox, Mr Chairman, that provides comprehensive repairs.

The Roadmaster is not designed to be used in built-up suburban residential areas, because it sprays tarmac widely, whereas other equipment and techniques are designed and better suited to repair roads in more confined spaces.

It is much more suited for areas such as Rushcliffe, Newark & Sherwood and Bassetlaw, because they are primarily rural areas. I'm sure that Councillor Carr would probably be one of the first people to complain if the Roadmaster came into the centre of Beeston or the centre of Sutton-in-Ashfield and sprayed cars and houses with tarmac and grit all over the place, so that is why it is used very sparingly in the more built-up areas, because it can only work in very isolated rural roads.

This Conservative administration seeks to serve the interests of the whole of Nottinghamshire, yes including "picturesque" villages, and yes including more built-up areas in districts like Ashfield and Broxtowe, and we are proud so to do.

Through this council's democratic processes, we set budgets – you may remember the last meeting - and overall strategies, including highways maintenance policy and strategy, and this is then delivered operationally by our officers in a proper and responsible manner.

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

Can the Cabinet Member tell us precisely where the £260,000 Roadmaster machine will be carrying out works on Friday, 21 March 2025?

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

It's great that we're having a question about what's going to happen a year from today. I wonder how many people will know what they're going to be doing a year from today in this Chamber?

So, I suspect that the Roadmaster machine, on 21st March 2025, will be in Bilsthorpe Depot, being stored over winter and also then being prepared and maintained for when

it starts work in April, because of course, as everybody knows, it works between the warmer months of April and October, and so I'm sure that preparation will include carrying out the planned servicing and checking of all the specialist parts such as bitumen emulsion tanks, chipping hoppers, and high-pressure spray lines and jets, in addition to completing safety inspections.

Question to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources from Councillor Jim Creamer

A Decision to extend the Highways contract for a further five years is due to be taken in the coming months.

In addition to this, how many contracts which materially affect this Council's financial position are due for extension or renewal in the next 12 months?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources, Councillor Richard Jackson

Currently there are a total of 203 tender processes anticipated during the next 12 months, of which 70 offer the potential to extend within the existing contract.

Question to the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment from Councillor André Camilleri

In late 2019 a cliff forming part of the iconic Mansfield landmark, the Old Rock Houses, collapsed, causing the gardens of nearby residents to collapse as well.

The incident also made the adjacent highway and pavement unsafe, requiring Nottinghamshire County Council to install "temporary" safety barriers on Rock Hill at a cost of approximately £190k.

Despite pressure from myself as the local County Councillor and officers from the County Council, there has been no visible sign of progress by Mansfield District Council towards making the site safe, so this situation has caused inconvenience, distress and worry to affected residents and road users for over four years now.

Could the Cabinet Member confirm whether any action is thought to be imminent from Mansfield District Council to make the site safe, and if not, what can we do to oblige the district council to act, so this council can finally remove its safety barriers?

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

Our Officers have been in regular contact with those from Mansfield District Council ever since the cliff collapse, which Councillor Camilleri described in his question.

In June 2022, a site meeting was held between the County Council and Mansfield District Council officers. After this meeting, Mansfield District gave an undertaking to carry out works to make the site safe – which in turn would allow the barriers to be removed and the adjacent footway to be re-opened.

Since that time, our officers have made a number of follow-up requests to Mansfield District to clarify the details of the proposed works including programme dates and design details.

We continue to liaise with Mansfield District Council on the subject and have recently received positive indications that a contractor has now been selected to undertake the works. The dates of the works are still to be confirmed, but I will share details as soon as I have them.

Question to the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment from Councillor Paul Henshaw

Can the Cabinet Member provide an update on the number of insurance claims against this council received in the last year for damage to vehicles due to potholes and the poor overall state of highways in Nottinghamshire?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources, Councillor Richard Jackson on behalf of the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment

I can confirm that the number of vehicle damage claims received by the Council this financial year to 19th March is 1,943.

1,923 of these claims related to direct pothole damage, while the remaining 20 are other highways matters.

All insurance claims are carefully considered and dealt with by our Risk and Insurance professionals in line with our established processes and procedures, Chairman.

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

It is now clear that the vast majority of people want traffic to travel calmly down their streets.

Fast (and heavy) vehicles also create more potholes and pollution, particularly when braking.

Does this council support the introduction of 20mph speed limits in neighbourhoods where there is a clear demand for such restrictions?

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

Firstly, I suppose the answer really depends on what Councillor Gowland means by "clear demand", because I think the implication is more about "public demand". However, "clear demand" could equally mean practical or circumstantial.

For example, this Council has broadly accepted that there is "clear demand", and good 'evidence', for 20mph speed limits outside schools, because of the risks inherent in

such environments where there are: children present in substantial numbers; multiple vehicles dropping off or picking up those children; and the reality that children may not be aware from experience of the dangers posed by traffic.

Those factors could be said to “clearly demand” extra safety measures such as 20mph speed limit zones, and in many cases we have taken them.

However, if I assume from this question that Councillor Gowland is referring specifically to clear public demand, say from a particular residential area, then this leads to the question: “Who?” and “How many”?

A lot of people have a vested interest in our roads and strong views on what road policy should be: residents, visitors, pedestrians, car drivers, lorry drivers, cyclists etc.

It is completely right that all their views should be respected, but we also need to be conscious that sometimes a loud minority group can create an impression of greater or clearer ‘demand’ than truly exists, while a majority remain relatively quiet.

I’m sure Councillor Gowland is right that “It is now clear that the vast majority of people want traffic to travel calmly down their streets”. I’m sure we all agree with that, indeed I can’t think of a time when residents would not want that, but I’m not sure every type of road user would define “calmly” as “no more than 20mph”.

Councillor Gowland will recall that I co-signed a motion with her on this issue two years ago, so I am certainly not against 20mph zones in the right place, when appropriate.

If this County Council has consistent data and evidence demonstrating a clear, well-proven demand from – to use Councillor Gowland’s words – “the vast majority” of people for a 20mph restriction in their particular location, then we should feel compelled to “listen” to that demand.

Our response would be based on examining all the evidence, based not just on “want” but on “need”. Evidence such as characteristics of the road, traffic volume, KSI statistics, national criteria compliance and any other information that is available.

It would be far too general to make a blanket statement or policy that merely said: “This council supports the introduction of 20mph speed limits where there is a clear demand for such restrictions”.