

COUNCILLOR QUESTIONS TO CABINET – 22 JULY 2021

Question 1

Councillor Tracy Bowes, Belmont Rural Ward

To: Cabinet member, infrastructure and transport

The questions and concerns being raised by Independents and It's Our County Councillors and by members of the public back in 2016 and 2017 should have led to these overspends being admitted to and action taken to address the ballooning project costs. How was it that their questions and concerns were allowed to be deflected with misleading and dissembling responses from Officers and Politicians?

Response

Thank you Cllr Bowes, that is a fair question. I cannot say whether councillors or officers deliberately set out to mislead or dissemble in their responses but I can say it is my opinion that the Council historically has fallen short in giving clear and fair responses to questions from members of the public and councillors. However, I have full faith in the new Chief Executive's open, honest and robust approach to transparency.

Looking forward, we as an administration have always tried to be as honest and open as possible when responding to councillor and public questions, no matter how embarrassing or otherwise those answers may be because if we are not always accountable to the public what is the point of being elected representatives of the public - being clear and transparent is the least tax payers can expect from us.

Supplementary question

Thank you for your response and in the interests of transparency, are there any other areas of concern the public should be aware of?

Response

I don't know if you mean just relating to the HCCTP or other areas. I think to be honest we're getting to the back of the cupboard of things that we need to tell the public about that have not been entirely transparently displayed in the past so nothing obvious, but if there is it'll go into the public domain because we are publicly accountable. What's the point of being elected by the public to be accountable and the very first thing that we do is seek to protect our own reputation or the reputation even of a different administration? So if anything is looming - and we have always asked for things that were looming to be brought to us and that's why it was very disappointing that it took six months for me to be told that the compulsory purchase mechanism we used meant that we were going to overspend on the land purchases - we are pretty much assured that that won't happen again but in terms of what's in the cupboard I think the door was quite wide open at the moment and the lights in there.

Question 2

Councillor William Wilding, Penyard Ward

To: Cabinet member, infrastructure and transport

Ref the City Link Road.-

Surely the point of the road connecting to a transport hub, is so we could provide active transport measures linking it to the city. At present this road doesn't have a dedicated cycle path. Why was this not designed into the original scheme?

Response

Thank you Cllr Wilding, I concur with the opening part of your question but cannot answer the second. That is a question that should be asked of the previous Conservative Cabinet Member or the previous Leader of the Council.

I do know that when the City Link Road was first being publicly discussed way back in 2009/10 much focus was given by the then Cabinet Member, Cllr Graham Powell, on what an important cycling route this would be – to and from the railway station and transport hub – but by the time we got to actual delivery we got a huge broad road with lost space in a central reservation and a shared cycle path dumped on the pavement. I cannot yet work out where along the process this change occurred or if it was originally always to be a substandard shared path on the pavement. We intend to revisit and improve this poor offering, which is no longer in compliance with the government's guidance, LTN 1/20, which says the government will no longer support shared pedestrian and cycle paths.

Supplementary question

I thank Councillor Harrington for his answer, which suggests that we ask the previous conservative administration to explain: 1) how did they get the design and cost of this road so disastrously wrong, 2) two why did the design not reflect the need to encourage active travel measures linking to the station and 3) where did the money needed to create a modern travel hub go?

Response

I can't necessarily answer that but because the thinkings of the previous administration are for themselves to explain or otherwise. I think in relation to your last question quite simply the money meant for active travel measures, including a decent cycle path if one was originally designed or planned and other elements, has gone on building the road or purchasing the land to build the road.

Question 3

Councillor Paul Andrews, Hagley Ward

To: Leader of the Council

When the link road was completed, the then Conservative Leader of the Council, Jonathan Lester, said it had been built on time and on budget. Was that true?

Response

Thank you for that question. Once again it may be more appropriate to ask that question of Cllr Lester. My own view is that I have a high regard of Cllr Lester as someone who always attempts to speak accurately and truthfully on matters but I think it is not accurate to say that the road was built on time and on budget when we have not finished paying for it and costs associated with land purchases and Compulsory Purchase Orders have increased considerably. It may be he was not presented fully with the facts before he made such statements.