

QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 14 JULY 2021

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

a) Question from Olivia Ramsbottom to Councillor K Athwal, Cabinet Member for Highways Assets and Transport (Not attending)

DCC's mission includes the following:

'to listen to, engage and involve local people ensuring we are responsive and take account of the things that matter most to them; to create an environment for 'happy, safe and healthy people '.

In Matlock, the noise and safety issues caused by excessive speeding are having a detrimental effect on lives. Children and the less mobile are 'running the gauntlet' as they try to cross roads or walk along the town's narrower pavements. Sleep and normal life are being impacted by speeding traffic that causes houses to vibrate and road furniture to rattle. Many are wary of pulling out of side roads and driveways because of their expectation of speeding motorists.

Whilst the proposed extension of the 30mph zone on Chesterfield Road is welcome, it is not as a result of planning and foresight but after 19 collisions, including 1 fatality.

How can residents supply sufficient evidence for the need for improved signage and other speed mitigation in 30mph areas, to encourage you to take strategic, proactive action to create the environment as set out in your objectives? The local CSW group is happy to assist in any data collection exercise.

Response: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Thank you, Olivia Ramsbottom for your question.

As you will appreciate this Authority receives hundreds of requests for consideration here each year and all the residents making these enquiries believe they have a genuine need for some form of action.

Clearly it is not practical, nor sustainable, to accede to every single request that is received. Given this demand a system of prioritisation must be employed using information, including the number and severity of collisions. This helps ensure that the resources available are firstly used in those locations where there is the greatest need and where most benefits can be achieved.

How we implement. Measures are identified on an evidence based need. The limited funds that are available must therefore predominantly be directed to those locations where there is a history of reported injury collisions and where a Highway Improvement Scheme can effectively reduce the number of injury collisions. The use of identifiable known hard facts and figures provides robust and transparent justification for the investment of public funds that are available. It is understood that this can often be received as having to await road collisions prior to action being considered, but prioritising locations that are already experiencing road injuries ensures that the resources are being invested as effectively as possible.

In terms of the speed limit review on the A632, the collision figures relate to the whole of the route between Matlock and Chesterfield and other intervention measures have been deployed in the specific blackspots along the route. For example, interactive signing at Spancarr crossroads etc.

Although grateful for your offer of assistance in data collection via your Community Speed Watch Group this Authority is constantly monitoring collisions on the network, identifies areas for investigation based on these studies. The statistics surrounding the County Council's performance in respect of casualty reduction can be found in the Derby and Derbyshire Annual Casualty report which is on the website. Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Supplementary question:

As resources are the main issue identified by the Councillor, would it not be possible for local CSW groups to raise funds to place signs in areas identified, by them, as hotspots. These signs could be approved by the Council, produced locally and affixed in line with any regulations. These signs are used in other areas (seen recently in Oxfordshire and Wiltshire, for example).'

Response: Most of the roads in Matlock, with the exception of a 20 mph zone in the area close to the main shopping area, are of course subject to a maximum 30 mph speed limit. Unfortunately, the legislation does not permit the use of repeaters or reminder signing in such areas as the general principle is that if a system of street lighting is present in any built up environment the public should know it is the default of 30 mph. The Council would thank you for your kind offer of providing signage, but I am afraid the signing use on any highway must be consistent with The Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2016. I assume the signs seen in Oxfordshire and Wiltshire may have either been positioned on private land or are contrary to the regulations.

b) Question from Lisa Hopkinson to Councillor B Lewis, Cabinet Member for Strategic Leadership, Culture, Tourism and Climate Change

On 14 June the Council leader was interviewed by the BBC and challenged about having a climate denier, Cllr Rose, on the Council's Climate Scrutiny Committee. On 23 June I asked the Chair of that Committee to investigate the allegation and was assured that Cllr Rose doesn't hold that view. On 25 June I sent the Chair a number of tweets from Cllr Rose's personal twitter account from 2015 to 2019 that indicate a fairly consistent pattern of climate denial. While Cllr Rose is free to hold those views or express those privately, it is totally inappropriate for that Councillor to be appointed to a Committee set up to hold the Council to account on climate action. It is essential that all Climate Scrutiny Committee members believe that DCC can help to reduce emissions across Derbyshire and that climate change is serious and human-caused. Please could you inform the Council (a) why the serious allegations of climate denial first learnt about on 14 June were not followed up on? And (b) if Cllr Rose will not publicly denounce his stated views that climate change is a hoax will he be asked to step down from the Climate Scrutiny Committee?

Response: Thank you for your question. You have written to me and the Chairman of the Committee, Councillor Major gave you an answer to this at that time and nothing has changed in a sense.

Thank you too for supplying a list of social media posts that Councillor Rose shared that dated back from 2015 up to 2019. I looked through his tweets last night. Councillor Rose has some strong views and shares some interesting thoughts here and there on many issues (including the occasional one on climate change) but they did not seem to be the main event in terms of the volume of his tweets. I don't necessarily share all of his views on a wide range of topics that he tweets about and I am sure he doesn't share all of mine.

I don't know Councillor Rose that well. I am afraid Covid-19 hasn't helped much of late in that process but I am sure we will have some lively discussions about many topics over the coming years. We might even strongly disagree with each other on one or two topics, maybe to the point of shouting or wagging our fingers at each other, but there is one thing I am sure of, is that we will walk away from those discussions respecting each other's point of view or opinion, remain on good terms and remain strong colleagues getting on with doing our jobs for our residents. I might even change his mind on some topics, he might change mine. That is the joy of being human.

From my perspective it is perfectly reasonable the views he may have had between 2015 and 2019, or even views that may predate that may not be the views he holds now. In choosing to write to me and not to him you are not seeking to get to the key matter which is what is his view now, because if that is what we are really talking about or caring about then that is what I would do, so you may wish to write to Councillor Rose and ask him his views on climate change and if he has changed his views on that at all. I am not here to speak

for him and I am reassured by his words and actions to-date that he will approach this Committee's work with a fully open mind and be keen to engage in its work, which is to drive down the CO2 of DCC as an Authority, to get to net zero by 2032 or sooner, and to make sure we do so as a county economy by 2050. Thank you.

Supplementary question: I did have a reply from the Chair of that Committee who suggested that I was trying to silence or not allow people to express their views. I am not trying to do that. Councillor Rose, I don't know him, I don't even know where he is, I am not trying to silence him but what I am saying is I think it is inappropriate for a climate denier to be sitting on a Climate Scrutiny Committee. I didn't write to him I wrote to the Chair of the Committee because I think it is the Chair's role in charge of that Scrutiny Committee to make sure that all his members fully accept that climate change is human caused and that DCC can impact the emissions.

I can go away and I can write to Councillor Rose but if he does not hold those views any more then he should publicly state that, and if he still believes climate change is a hoax do you accept that somebody who thinks climate change is a hoax does not have a position on a Committee that is supposed to scrutinise the Council?

Response: Thank you very much. If I may, Chairman. As I say he may not hold those views and I suggest the first port of call is that you write to him and ask Councillor Rose his views. On your latter part of the question I can only answer that when he responds to your question.

Ms Hopkinson: No no, the question was do you accept that if somebody thinks that climate change is a hoax that they should not be on that Climate Scrutiny Committee regardless of his views?

Cllr Lewis: I have answered the question, Chairman.

c) Question from John Geddes to Councillor K Athwal, Cabinet Member for Highways Assets and Transport

You are quoted as hoping to give rural communities "cheaper and more regular" bus services. Currently, most rural services are provided by operators of home-to-school transport. The Council is already funding the fixed costs of the vehicles, so the middle-of-the-day services are relatively cheap to add on.

The Council's experiment with on-demand minibuses is hard to evaluate because only the most basic data has been collected. But from my analysis of the Ashbourne service, it seems that, outside of school runs, the vehicles are spending most of their time moving just one passenger or family group at a

time. This matches the experience elsewhere: for those who can score a ride, the minibuses offer a service just like a taxi - but using a bigger, more expensive, more polluting vehicle. The costs only balance if many fewer people get to travel.

So will you please rule out any further replacement of timetabled services by on-demand transport until DCC can show the results of a proper independent evaluation demonstrating that the move to demand-responsive transport really would offer a better and cheaper service, without a major reduction in the number of people who will be able to travel?

Response: I would like to thank Mr Geddes for his question.

Yes, as part of the Bus Service Improvement Plan it is my aim that we work towards providing our residents and visitors to Derbyshire with a transport network system that better connects our villages and towns with cleaner modes of transport along with better flexibility of ticketing and value for money for all.

The Government's National Bus Strategy for England "Bus Back Better" makes it clear that there needs to be a greater use of new and alternative forms of public transport provision such as demand responsive transport. This Council is currently developing an ambitious Bus Service Improvement Plan and its response to the National Bus Strategy.

If we are to reverse this cycle of long-term decline of bus usage in Derbyshire we need to develop better transport solutions which work for all. It is also essential that solutions must be appropriate for local transport needs as well as catering for current needs and future demand.

Whilst it is likely that we will see a greater use of demand responsive transport in Derbyshire, particularly in the deeply rural areas and other areas where there is very low demand for public transport at the moment, I can assure you that it is not our intention to implement demand responsive transport as a county wide solution. Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Supplementary question:

Can Councillor Athwal promise that where Demand-Responsive Transport (DRT) replaces timetabled bus services, DCC will ensure that there is a system that allows users to make guaranteed advance bookings for a specific timing many weeks in advance?

(The most common DRT formats - booking a week ahead, or using an app where you can only make a request a few minutes ahead - are useless for journeys where the passenger needs to commit a long time ahead to travelling

at a particular time - eg for an appointment to see a hospital specialist, or to fit with other public transport trips where affordable tickets are only available if you can commit to a specific journey time many weeks ahead.)

I am inviting Councillor Athwal to make this promise so that people in Derbyshire can be sure that they will always have a public transport service that provides the necessary predictability about when they will be able to travel.

Response: Thank you for your commitment to public transport in Derbyshire and for raising these issues. As you will be aware we are currently working with partners in the bus sector on a Bus Service Improvement Plan which will be presented to Government this autumn, following agreement within the Council. We have an opportunity to set the right direction for bus travel within the County, although recognise the challenges around funding and commerciality of services, particularly in rural areas.

On your specific issue, raised, whilst I appreciate the concerns raised regarding the potential greater use of DRT, currently most rural timetabled bus services in Derbyshire offer only an hourly frequency timetable at best, and are therefore often unable to provide a convenient arrival or departure time to fit around hospital or other scheduled appointments. In addition, the finite capacity of vehicles used on timetabled bus services limit the opportunity to travel, although we recognise that outside of peak travel times capacity is rarely reached. Moreover, whilst bus service timetable changes are kept to a minimum, it is sometimes necessary to amend these, for example due to a change of school session times, and these changes are sometimes required at relatively short notice. The current timetabled services are therefore unable to offer the guaranteed opportunity to travel that you aspire to from a future DRT service.

DRT does require a degree of flexibility from the user in the journeys being made, depending on other booking requests received. Notwithstanding, it is not uncommon for DRT service users to be able to specify either an arrival or departure time window, and we would certainly want service users to be able specify key travel times in DRT booking requests should there be any expansion of use in Derbyshire.

This is a live topic and we will be working closely with operators and users over the next few months.