

Questions, Answers and Actions – Chichester County Local Forum 16 June 2022

In Attendance:

County Councillors

*Simon Oakley (Chairman), *Janet Duncton, Jeremy Hunt, *Julian Joy, *Kate O'Kelly, *Sarah Sharp, Pieter Montyn and Andrew Kerry-Bedell.

Apologies

Tom Richardson and *Donna Johnson.
(*member of *Chichester District Council*)

Residents

14 members of the public.

Written Question 1 from Mr S. Lloyd-Williams:

Despite the original pedestrian area's bricks/paving stones/pavements in North, South and East Street now being almost 55 years old, and a report (attached) for their replacement being over a year old, nothing has happened.

Aren't you just plain embarrassed by this state of affairs, if not for yourself, then for Chichester?

Officer Response to Question 1, in consultation with the local members - Cllrs Joy, Oakley, Sharp (members of Chichester District Council) and Cllr Hunt:

The County Council has acknowledged for a number of years that the condition of the City Centre precinct is showing signs of deteriorating. As a result of this we, along with the City Council and District Council, commissioned WSP to undertake a review of the precinct, including the adjacent short pedestrianised areas of West Street and South Street. WSP provided a very detailed and thorough report, which included short term interventions, as well as low, medium and high-cost scheme options for further consideration.

Any long-term option, which involves an overhaul of the existing palette of materials, will cost a significant sum of money and at this stage, the County Council is unable to provide any timescales in relation to available funding for a long-term improvement. Before funding is discussed it is felt that the City Council, District Council and County Council need to agree a strategy around the most viable option, not only in terms of budget, but in relation to what is considered suitable given the current vehicle use of the precinct, the events that take place, markets that are held on a regularly basis and the architectural heritage of the City Centre.

In the interim the County Council is exploring, with City Council and District Council partners, whether a lower cost solution can be delivered to remove the red brick panel through the centre of North Street and East Street Precinct. The current proposal is to replace the central section with a bound material which would be a more suitable option for those more vulnerable pedestrians using the

City Centre. Discussions are ongoing around material finish and funding opportunities from all partners however there is currently no funding secured to progress this proposal at this stage.

In the meantime, we will continue to undertake monthly inspections identifying any defective areas that are considered a safety issue for repair, in line with our Highway Inspection Manual. We will also respond to customer enquiries that we receive in relation safety concerns with specific areas of the high street, raising repairs if the defects identified are considered to meet the minimum investigatory levels set out in the aforementioned manual.

Supplementary:

Reiterated the question and called on members to take pride in their city and influence change.

Response to Supplementary:

County Councillors sympathised with the three residents who submitted questions on this matter and acknowledged the frequency of accidents reported. Cllr Hunt, Cabinet Member for Finance, stated that there is currently no capacity within the Council's £755 million five-year Capital Programme (2025/26) to earmark funding for a re-paving project. Cllr Hunt highlighted Chichester District Council's plans to secure funding to re-pave North and East Streets by submitting a bid to the Government's Levelling Up Fund, designed to support improvement schemes including high street regeneration. The application deadline is 6 July and decisions are expected to be made in October 2022. Cllr Joy explained his preference to find a sustainable long-term solution in his profession as an architect. He highlighted the damaging impact had by HGVs and pressure put on pavements by the regular markets causing the Yorkstone paving to break up in the shopping precinct. Cllr Joy suggested that consideration is given to introducing outer city loading bays and raised crowdfunding as an alternative idea in attempt to attract project funding.

Written Question 2 from Mr J. Harding:

Following a serious accident to my wife due to a trip on some unstable paving in South Street (20 April), I've been trying to get answers as to who is responsible for Health and Safety issues and maintenance of the pavements. I've fully documented this to many councillors, WSCC Highways department and even our MP. I've been told that the area in question did not warrant intervention as it failed to meet the criteria set out in the WSCC Highways Inspection Manual.

I fail to understand the logic as to WHY the offending paving is NOT fixed as a matter of course so that a repeat accident does not occur again with maybe even more serious consequences. Surely an in-depth review of the criteria within the Inspection Manual should include an element of flexibility when an accident has been reported?

Money/Finance has to be found from somewhere to rectify this thereby giving assurance to residents, visitors and businesses that Chichester is a safe place.

Officer Response to Question 2, in consultation with the local member Cllr Oakley:

Firstly, may I state at the outset that I am sorry to hear of your wife's fall and I hope she makes a full recovery.

As a Highway Authority, West Sussex County Council has a duty to ensure the highway is maintained to a reasonably safe condition for all users, and as part of this duty all our assets are routinely inspected.

If during these inspections a defect is observed which meets our Highway Inspection investigatory levels, then these would be logged and programmed for repair. The response times assigned are based on risk, which vary between 2 hours to 28 days.

We are aware you have reviewed our current Highway Inspection Manual, and this details the levels we will maintain our highway to. I hope you can appreciate, we are not resourced, and it would not be practical to maintain the highway at perfectly smooth conditions at all times as we do have over 4,000 km of roads with associated footways, trees, streetlighting, traffic signs, signals, road markings, drainage etc. to maintain with limited resources, hence we need to set reasonable investigatory levels.

A rocking slab becomes an investigatory level defect when the upstand is greater than 10mm from the horizontal. I can confirm that South Street, Chichester is subject to monthly walked inspections. This location has been inspected several times since the fall, both by walked inspections and an ad hoc visit (after we were made aware of this fall) by a Highway Steward and no investigatory level defects were identified. Our Highway Inspection Manual does allow us to consider any issue that falls below our investigatory level, however this was not considered appropriate during recent inspections.

I appreciate it is of relatively low value to you or your wife but please be assured that we will continue to inspect and respond to any enquiries to keep the road reasonably safe.

Supplementary:

Expressed belief that the 10mm threshold for carrying out repairs is not being adhered to and that the loose slab in question has been left unattended. The resident circulated physical photographs in person showing perceived defects from multiple locations across the city centre, of which were reviewed following the meeting by the Area Highway Manager.

Response to Supplementary:

County Councillors expressed their sympathy upon hearing about the accident and wished Mr Harding's wife a swift recovery. Cllr Sharp called on Highways' repair team to visit the pavement outside of Sweaty Betty on South Street following a high level of complaints received via email. Cllr Hunt suggested that Mr Harding contact his local County Councillor and ask them to contact the Area Highway Manager to arrange an inspection of the location.

Officer Response:

This issue has been inspected by a Highway Inspector (during monthly walked inspections), a Highway Steward and Highway Manager and was noted to be approximately 8mm. The photograph shows a very long edge with daylight clearly visible beneath which demonstrated that the upstand is not being measured directly at the face. Google Maps indicated this slab was cracked around 2018 and it is appreciated that this issue is only likely to worsen over time and possibly may have worsened since it was last measured, however it has taken over 4 years to get to the current position and has been inspected over 48 times by monthly inspections. It is noted these inspections will not be solely focussing on this location. The Area Manager has also requested the Highway Steward to maintain a watching brief on this particular defect, so if it should worsen it should be identified relatively swiftly.

It should be noted that the 10mm upstand is for Damaged Rocking Modular Paving (CW03) which is appropriate for the issue outside of Hays Travel. It is noted there are other photographs provided, however it is believed these are not appropriately considered under the CWO3 category as they are not rocking. The correct category for these would be Abrupt Level Difference (FW04), which considered an abrupt level difference 20mm to be the point where an issue would become Investigatory Level.

Written Question 3 from Mrs S. Trenchard:

What action will West Sussex County Council/ West Sussex Highways take to prevent further trips, slips and falls suffered by residents on pavements in Chichester city centre and ensure the provision of safe wheelchair access?

I moved to Chichester 18 months ago and in October 2021, I experienced a fall on dodgy paving stones while walking along The Hornet. The empathy I received from local business owners and shopkeepers, upon seeing my injuries, and hearing their eye-witness accounts of similar incidents prompted me to take action. I have created two petitions and both have attracted several hundred signatures, including that of my local County Councillor, Sarah Sharp.

Officer Response to Question 3:

Firstly, may I state at the outset that I am sorry to hear of your fall.

As a Highway Authority, West Sussex County Council has a duty to ensure the highway is maintained to a reasonably safe condition for all users, and as part of this duty all our assets are routinely inspected.

If during these inspections a defect is observed which meets our Highway Inspection investigatory levels, then these would be logged and programmed for repair. The response times assigned are based on risk, which vary between 2 hours to 28 days.

Our current Highway Inspection Manual details the levels we will maintain our highway to. I hope you can appreciate that we are not resourced, and it would not be practical to, maintain the highway at perfectly smooth conditions at all

times as we do have over 4,000 km of roads with associated footways, trees, streetlighting, traffic signs, signals, road markings, drainage etc. to maintain with limited resources, hence we need to set reasonable investigatory levels.

I can confirm that The Hornet, Chichester is subject to monthly walked inspections. If you can provide a more specific location in terms of where your accident took place we would happily visit the site to establish if there are any safety defects that meet out investigatory levels.

I would like to reassure you that we will continue to routinely inspect and respond to any enquiries in order to keep the road reasonably safe.

We are aware of both petitions, to be considered by the County Council in due course.

Supplementary:

Reiterated the question and asked when the city centre/shopping precinct will be prioritised for re-paving.

Response to Supplementary:

County Councillors shared full sympathy with local residents and referred back to the root funding issue, as discussed in response to an earlier question on the same topic. Cllr Oakley highlighted the importance of reporting all incidents and faults at the earliest opportunity. Cllr Joy re-affirmed his claim that this is a wider issue, caused in part by HGVs undoing maintenance work.

Written Question 4 from Mr R. Gould:

Can you specify any targets for improved performance at WSCC, and who is responsible for achieving them?

Officer Response to Question 4, in consultation with Cllr Oakley:

The aims and priorities of West Sussex County Council are set out in our Council Plan that is published on our website (<https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/about-the-council/policies-and-reports/corporate-policy-and-reports/our-council-plan/>). The Plan includes a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) used to measure the impact of our work.

We report quarterly on progress against the plan and KPIs through a Performance & Resources Report (PRR). The relevant parts of this report are scrutinised in public through the various Council Scrutiny Committees and in full by the Cabinet. The latest quarterly full PRR report for Q3 2021/22 was considered at Cabinet on 15th March and can be found as part of the published meeting papers on the website (<https://westsussex.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s30577/Q3%20PRR%20decision%20report.pdf>).

We also reflect the latest performance updates in our West Sussex Performance Dashboard (<https://performance.westsussex.gov.uk/>).

We also seek to convey the County Council's aims and performance as clearly and transparently as possible through a range of communications work beyond this formal regular reporting, including through press and media work, our social media channels and direct engagement with the public.

The Scheme of Delegation in Part 3 of the Constitution (<https://westsussex.moderngov.co.uk/ecCatDisplayClassic.aspx?sch=doc&cat=13352&path=0>) sets out in Appendix 2 that the Cabinet is responsible for: 'Assurance and performance management of the delivery of the Council Plan and budget (revenue and capital), including assurance that corporate risks are effectively managed.

The responsibility for delivery is then that of directors and assistant directors, as set out in Appendix 3.

Written Question 5 from Mr R. Gould:

The 2020-21 Town Hall Rich List published by the Taxpayers Alliance revealed that 17 WSCC officers were paid salaries exceeding £100k.

Will you take the necessary steps to reduce that number significantly in the current financial year?

Officer Response to Question 5, in consultation with Cllr Hunt (Cabinet Member for Finance and Property):

The County Council is transparent in publishing senior officer salaries and does this annually as part of the accounts. Salaries for senior officers are in line with comparable organisations.

Written Question 6 from Ms S. Weston:

What is the County Council doing to support and encourage Chichester District Council to conclude its Local Plan Review in a timely manner, and in particular to demonstrate a 5-year housing land supply?

Officer Response to Question 6, in consultation with Cllr Oakley as CLF Chairman:

West Sussex County Council officers work closely with all the District and Borough Council Boroughs and South Downs National Park Authority on the preparation of their Local Plans and associated documents.

With specific regard to support provided to Chichester District Council, officers have responded to all statutory and non-statutory consultations by the District Council and have regular officer meetings. On request, officers provide information in a timely fashion to support the technical work involved in preparing a Local Plan; this includes the provision of evidence to inform any revised assessments of housing need. On request, officers also carefully consider the infrastructure requirements on all sites coming forward for development and respond promptly to such requests; this includes assessing the potential impacts of future housing and other development on County Council services such as

highways and transport, education, libraries, fire and rescue, and waste management.

It is important to note that the District Council is responsible for planning for the needs of its area, including objectively assessing housing needs and allocating land to meet those needs. It must also consider the need for supporting facilities and services by engaging with the relevant service providers, including the County Council, through the plan-making process.

The County Council is only a statutory consultee in the plan-making process and it does not have any control over the decisions made by the District Council or over how quickly those decisions are made. The County Council is not aware of any suggestion that its actions, including the provision of information and supporting evidence, have delayed CDC's preparation of its Local Plan.

Similarly, it is the District Council's responsibility to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply and the County Council does not have control over planning decisions relating to housing supply; this includes decisions relating to plan-making and decisions about individual planning applications for new homes.

Local members' response:

Cllr Oakley stated that it is the County Council's role to provide evidence as a statutory consultee, for the District Council to then make decisions. Cllr Kerry-Bedell suggested that the County Council considers brownfield site development and offer up surplus land without negatively impacting on greenfield sites.

Written Question 7 from Cllr Oakley (Chairman of Chichester County Local Forum):

To the Assistant Director of Highways, Transport and Planning,

As you will probably be aware, there was considerable (in scale and duration) congestion in the subject area on Tuesday 31st May, which is leading to a significant increase in comment on the traffic issues being experienced in this locality. This includes comment on the consequent degree of diversionary movement through the residential Bradshaw Road and Swanfield Drive through route, and the effects now being felt of the closure of the Oving Road/A27 junction to E/W crossing traffic. This latter issue has now also resulted in a considerable increase in am North bound queueing on St James Rd. The general increase in traffic congestion is being cited by Stagecoach as a reason for the deteriorating reliability of the No. 55 bus service (a consequence of which is the now permanent shortening of its route through Tangmere village and an overall reduction in stops along this route).

Could you advise as to what, if any, particular circumstances led to the exceptional congestion on 31st May and any intentions on the part of WSCC and National Highways to mitigate the likelihood of a reoccurrence and more generally improve traffic conditions in the Eastern part of the City and at the Portfield roundabout?

Officer Response to Question 7:

Dear Cllr Oakley,

As you will be aware this area is often a point of congestion on the network and inevitably any small change in the area can have a considerable impact. There were a number of factors that probably exacerbated the congestion issues on 31st May.

It is impossible to state the exact impact of any one of these but...

Portsmouth Water were working on Spitalfields Lane under permit on the day under multi way lights but under manual control at peak times. We were able to expedite the works on Spitalfields Lane so that site was clear by 08.30 on 01.06.22.

These works did cause some queue backs in the area. When there is traffic congestion heading into Chichester from the Portfield Way/Westhampnett Road/Spitalfield Road area, people tend to use Barnfield Drive/Bradshaw Road/Swanfield Drive/Douglas Martin Road as a potential 'short cut' as the route cuts off the two mini roundabouts in Westhampnett Road heading towards Spitalfield Road. Re-joining at the roundabout at Spitalfield Road/Douglas Martin Road is usually sufficient to miss most of the congestion, however, on this occasion anyone using this route, still needed to get through the temporary lights further west at the hospital entrance. Hence the traffic using the 'short cut' backed up along Douglas Martin Road, Swanfield Drive, Bradshaw Road and Barnfield Drive as well as Spitalfield Road, Westhampnett Road and Portsfield Way and A27.

Whilst this seems like a minor change it should also be noted that it was school holidays with a Bank Holiday looming and an influx of people going to the Portfield Retail Park. This was the first time we had experienced a seasonal holiday time since the changes to the Oving Road junction on the A27. As you will be aware the exit from the Retail Park is a real bottle neck (there were considerable delays here at Christmas as well) and the traffic coming off the A27 heading towards Sainsbury's and Westhampnett Rd were not letting people out hence a backlog within the car park.

We have considered the extra pressures on Westhampnett Rd and Bognor Rd (A259) due to the changes with the A27 and are mindful of works taking place around these locations, where possible we will try to push to night works / out of hours but this is limiting due to the residential locations.

Undoubtedly the changes at Oving crossroads are having an impact on vehicle movements. As you are aware this is an initiative that arose through the development in the area. Any significant change like this takes time to settle in terms of traffic movements and it may be premature to judge the result of this specific change.

I have asked National Highways them for information about their monitoring of this change (if any) but have yet to receive an answer.

There are currently no immediate plans to make any changes to the network in this area.

Late Written Question 8 submitted post-deadline, from Ms G. Adams:

I urge you to get on with providing safe cycling on segregated routes both in and through Chichester.

I have been campaigning for this for many years and to date I've heard nothing but talk and excuses. Frankly I'm tired of hearing about what they will do.

I gave up my car more than 2 years ago in favour of active travel. It is almost impossible to cross Chichester as it's gridlocked by traffic most days. There has been no provision to allow cycling safely on direct routes. Local Travel Network style routes could be implemented quickly if there was a will to do this but seemingly there is none.

Just one example would be to make Oving road and Bognor Road one-way streets. This would allow space for segregated cycling/bus route, a footpath and parking for residents. It's simply not good enough to say there isn't room in these old cities when London has perfect examples of how to manage in the same streets that have been there for centuries.

Preferably make a low emission zone of the entire city. Charge all but the residents to drive in. Invest in better affordable bus service.

Personally, I'm glad fuel has gone up and hope it makes people leave their cars at home. However you must provide safe affordable alternatives NOW. Take advantage of the fuel crisis to demonstrate that there can be a brighter future. Thousands of increasingly unhealthy children are driven to schools every day. Start there. Before children become like their parents and depend on a car.

In summary, DO SOMETHING, and stop pontificating.

Local members' response:

Cllr Oakley referred to the proactive work delivered by the long-term [West Sussex Walking and Cycling Strategy \(2016-2026\)](#), as accessible via the County Council's website. Cllr O'Kelly claimed that the introduction of a community highways scheme would encourage rural residents to cycle into the city. She stated that the small-scale of the city, coupled with ring road access, makes it a challenge to develop safe cycling infrastructure. County Councillors agreed that it would require considerable collaboration with partners and other tiers of local authority.

Late Written Question 9 submitted post-deadline, from Mr O. English:

I have been working in the community to encourage local shops and businesses to "switch off their Lights" to save energy and encourage dark skies. So far, I have been conducting an effective campaign. So far, I have had support from several District and Town councillors. Initially I concentrated this in Chichester, which is well served by extensive street lighting. Speaking to independent shops, but after reaching out to others, several chains have joined my campaign.

So this has already extended far beyond Chichester and over 500 shops have now gone dark. Chichester's own astronaut Tim Peake commented in response to me: "Great idea, hopefully it will catch on. The lights of cities at night was very dominant from the station".

We fully support the high street and are currently working on a window decal for businesses who go dark could display if they wished to.

Ideally, I would like to see this expanded across the County, both The Harbour Conservancy and South Downs National Park have a dark skies policy and it would be very helpful if WSCC could also provide their positive support and actively look at what WSCC does within its many buildings, offices and libraries.

So, can I ask this Council to add their support to #SwitchOffTheLights and ask all councillors to promote the campaign? With The Climate and energy crisis in mind, but also to actively combat Light Pollution?

Local member response:

Cllr Hunt spoke positively of the campaign's values and welcomed further information before formally pledging his support. He confirmed that County Hall operates a movement-sensitive, delayed lighting system and has done for a number of years in the Council's effort to conserve energy usage. Cllr Hunt also highlighted that street lighting has generally transitioned to LED lighting to improve efficiency and reduce costs. It was acknowledged that Chichester Library's internal lights remain switched on during dark hours as a safety measure.

Officer Response to Question 9, subsequently provided following the meeting:

Dear Mr English,

I'm pleased to say your question was heard at last week's Chichester County Local Forum and your local campaign was well-received in general by County Councillors, including [Cllr Jeremy Hunt](#) – your local member.

Cllr Hunt said that he would welcome a direct approach from you containing more information about this initiative.

Late Written Question 10 submitted post-deadline, from Mr B. Sharp:

According to reliable sources, the District Council is keen on closing Chichester bus station and replacing it with just a line of bus stops – probably on the Avenue de Chartres.

However, the District Council's own Vision document (Chichester Tomorrow) calls not for outright closure but "Re-location or re-organisation" of the bus station "as a key transport hub" (p.30)

More generally, the government document "Bus back better" says:

Railway stations should be hubs for connecting services with high quality stops close to station entrances. Schemes that move buses further away from stations should not be allowed.

Additionally:

More bus routes should serve railway stations, as is standard in most European countries, and integrate with cycling and walking routes and networks. (p.32)

The question which arises from this is:

Does the Council have the resources, and the will, to challenge the District Council's thinking before, to use a slightly odd metaphor, proposals for the bus station go off the rails?

Local member response:

Cllr Sharp confirmed she had requested to see the District Council's draft plans and spoke in favour of the key transport hub featuring an information centre for passenger advice. County Councillors acknowledged that this matter is part of the District Council's Southern Gateway regeneration project.

Officer Response to Question 10, subsequently provided following the meeting:

We are aware that Chichester District Council is working with Stagecoach and the County Council to explore future bus infrastructure options for the city. The County Council is entering into an Enhanced Partnership with the local bus companies including Stagecoach with a view to help deliver better bus services for our residents and aiding recovery from the pandemic. We note your views on the bus station that will be shared with the partners who are striving to deliver better services and infrastructure for the future. We will be setting up mechanisms for interested groups and individuals to make the Partnership aware of their views. We have already launched [#WestSussBus - finding out your views on the buses | Your Voice West Sussex](#) as an open-ended way of residents and businesses to tell us accordingly.

Late Written Question 11 submitted post-deadline, from Mr P. Maber:

My request is for WSCC Cllrs to reconsider the Policy to support major new roads - apparently now supported at any cost to our environment, society and public purse.

Please at least add in criteria to the WSCC Roads Policy that include for a true appraisal of the necessary interconnectivity and health of our Wildlife and human population.

Now is the time get our act together as National Highways prepare to sign a £420 M initial contract for Chichester A27 "improvements" in January 2024. We cannot go on building bigger to induce ever more traffic - never solving the problem within a finite World.

Local members' response:

County Councillors confirmed that the County Council's Communities, Highways and Environment Scrutiny Committee received a report and presentation on the County Council's draft proposed response to National Highway's (NH) consultation on the A27 Arundel Bypass at its meeting held on 24 February 2022. The meeting papers contained WSCC officers' detailed comments on NH's Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR). These and the minutes of the meeting are available [online](#). Cabinet approved WSCC's consultation response at its meeting on 15 March 2022 – the meeting papers and minutes are available [here](#).

Verbal Question 12, raised by Ms L. Harris:

Shopmobility (run by Community First) is only available in Chichester from East Pallant Car Park every Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday, and the first Saturday of each month between April-October from 9am-3pm.

This means that as things currently stand, if someone who needs Shopmobility wants to go into the city centre on (for example) in December for Christmas shopping, or even in the evening for an early dinner they will not have the benefit of this service!

This is not good enough and Chichester is turning into one of the areas that are extremely inaccessible for disabled people.

I firmly believe (and know that there are others who agree with me) that Shopmobility should be available at least 6 days per week and covering early evening (up to around 6.30pm).

Location ideas include: east pallant car park (current location), Northgate carpark and Chichester station (open 24/7).

If Festival of Speed, Revival and Glorious Goodwood are taking place, Shopmobility is NOT available in Chichester at all as all scooters are used for the above events.

Given the above, what are Chichester Council willing to do to improve this?

Local members' response:

Members sympathised with the limited service and referred the questioner to contact Chichester District Council as the service commissioner and funder of existing arrangements.

Officer Response to Question 12, subsequently provided following the meeting:

Shopmobility is a Chichester District Council-funded service - not West Sussex County Council. Looking at the website, this may fall within the Parking Services Team's responsibility - if not they should be able to re-direct your enquiry.

Here are their contact details:

Email: parkingservices@chichester.gov.uk

Telephone: [01243 534500](tel:01243 534500)

Also, there is a contact mobile phone number listed on the [Community First \(Chichester Shopmobility\) website](#) – they may also be able to answer some of your questions.

The meeting ended at 11.20am.