

Transport, Environment & Climate Change Select Committee – 10 March

Agenda Item 4 – Public Questions

Question One

What budget within the Transport portfolio has been set aside for traffic speed reduction, a key concern of Buckinghamshire residents? Given that Bucks Council's current position on 20 mph limits will not permit their widespread adoption, what alternative measures are being implemented in order to reduce traffic speeds within built-up areas throughout the county, since speed of traffic is a key barrier to uptake of cycling, particularly amongst more vulnerable and less confident individuals, and therefore a barrier to the reduction of carbon emissions from transport?

Answer

There is no specific budget for speed reduction. If speed is proven to be a contributory factor at locations where there is a cluster of Personal Injury Collisions, then a speed limit may be changed and/or physical speed mitigation measures introduced. Similarly, if a new development changes the environment on a road, the developer will be required to make a financial contribution to enable the Council to assess, consult and introduce an appropriate speed limit change through the making of a Traffic Regulation Order. The Council has delivered, and continues to deliver, a number of developer-funded speed limit changes across the county which support reductions in traffic speeds. Appropriate speed limits on a given road and its context need to include the ability to enforce speeds. Enforcement is undertaken by Thames Valley Police and, in general, the Council is unable to reduce speed limits unless this is supported by TVP.

Furthermore, Community Boards are able to fund and commission investigations and works (compliant with policy) to introduce different speed limits, speed reduction and traffic calming measures in their local area.

More broadly, the report on Forthcoming Transport Schemes included in item 6 on the agenda of this meeting, outlines the wide range of work underway to develop and deliver schemes to improve the road network and encourage sustainable and active transport. As the report notes, the Council is dependent mainly on external funding (primarily grants and developer contributions) and has recently secured over £6.6m of funding to support these activities, giving an indication of their scale.

Local transport contributes 26% of Buckinghamshire's carbon emissions. The Council recognises that a holistic approach must be taken to reduce vehicle dependency, support the uptake of active and sustainable travel modes, and meet our carbon reduction targets. This approach includes the delivery of infrastructure, but also wider interventions that enable active and sustainable travel modes to be attractive and convenient choices.

Question Two

At the June 2021 meeting it was reported as follows: 'Electric vehicle charging (EVC) points would be doubled within the year, there were currently 40 places.'

Please tell me how many charging points have now been installed? Considering the number of electric cars that were sold last year (190k) I do not feel that 40 more is even remotely enough. I live in Winslow where there is still only one charging point. I am worried that electric car owners like myself will be unable to find a vacant charging point. How can we get more charging points locally and will the Council increase considerably its target of another 40?

Answer

There are currently 71 parking bays with access to an electric vehicle charge point in Buckinghamshire Council-owned public car parks. There are also 20 on-street charge points installed on lamp-posts, facilitated by Buckinghamshire Council. This equates to 91 spaces for public electric vehicle charging. These points form part of a wider network of 175 publicly available points in Buckinghamshire, including those at destinations such as supermarkets (data taken from National Charge Point Registry, Jan 2022).

As part of our forthcoming Electric Vehicle Action Plan we are aiming to significantly increase the availability of electric vehicle charging points across Buckinghamshire. There are multiple providers of charging points (the Council being one) and the Action Plan will set out how we want to work with local businesses and partners to maximise the opportunities for installation of new points, to create a wider network.

There are several ways in which the Council can continue to increase the number public charging points, the main limit being availability of funding. In the last 2 years 52 of our EV charging bays have been funded and installed as part of the OZEV On-Street Residential Chargepoint Scheme (ORCS). The scheme is aimed at increasing charge points in residential locations and we intend to submit further bids to this scheme in 2022/23. We are also encouraging Town and Parish Councils to submit applications to ORCS for any car parks that they own and operate, with support from their Community Boards. We have recently signed a contract with BP Pulse to deliver the additional charge points via this scheme and are currently undertaking site assessments of suitable locations.

Destination charging is likely to become more widespread at shops, leisure destinations and workplaces over the next 3 years, as well as at service and petrol stations. We are aware of a new charge point funding scheme under development by OZEV for 2022/23 aimed at providing 'destination' charge points at public facilities and tourist sites. Details of this latter funding scheme are yet to be determined, but will likely offer the Council a further opportunity to considerably increase delivery of publicly accessible charge points within Council owned locations.

Question Three

What do the members of this select committee believe is the correct balance between

- a) cutting the Council's own emissions, and
- b) creating an environment where Bucks residents are both empowered and motivated to cut their own emissions?

Answer

This is an interesting question and perhaps worth starting by being clear that these are not mutually exclusive approaches and that we don't have to pick one over the other. But of course, where resources are finite, we have to decide where we spend on our time and money.

The key context here is that the council is only about 1% of the emissions in Buckinghamshire, and so it's right that we look beyond our own emissions and support others to reduce theirs. If we didn't, we would ignore the other 99%, and getting the council to net-zero alone would have little overall effect on Buckinghamshire wide emissions.

However, we are directly responsible for that 1% and are accountable for reducing it to net-zero. To not act on this 1% because it is small would undermine our messaging to others to reduce emissions and so its comparably small scale doesn't mean we shouldn't act on it.

So, I think this is less about choosing a percentage of time, effort or funding for each part and sticking to that, but finding where we can be most effective in reducing emissions in both of these areas and taking those opportunities where we have them.