

Transport, Environment & Climate Change Select Committee – 3 November 2022

Agenda Item 4 – Public Questions

Question One

Buckingham Town Council notes that there is no mention of provision of EV charging points for visitors to residential areas. Would it be possible include in the Action Plan the requirement that developers install (commercial) EV charging apparatus in at least two 'visitor' parking spaces on new developments, at the developer's expense (via condition or S106 depending on the size of the development)? All new cars will have to be electric in 7 years, and the Action Plan will be in force for 5 of these. It is unreasonable to expect a resident to pay for the charging of a guest's car or tradesman's vehicle on their domestic connection.

Answer

The installation of EV chargepoints in newly-built residential developments are now required as part of new Building Regulations that came into effect in June 2022 – the 'Approved Document S 'Infrastructure for the charging of electric vehicles'. This document is referred to in the Buckinghamshire Electric Vehicle Action Plan. The regulations state that developers must, as a minimum, install chargepoints equal to either the number of parking spaces associated with that building, or the number of dwellings that the car park serves. There are some exceptions to this rule where electrical connection costs per dwelling are high, in which case cable routes from dwellings to the parking space should be provided as an alternative.

Through the planning process we can ensure that developers meet these minimum standards, but there are no legal requirements to provide additional charging bays for visitors and we would not be able to enforce the provision of these. As such, the EV Action Plan cannot be updated to include this requirement. We will however endeavour to discuss opportunities for additional chargepoints for visitors with developers on a case-by-case basis.

In preparation for the increased need for publicly available charging facilities, we have a programme of installation of chargepoints in public car parks near to existing residential areas. For example, we recently installed eight chargepoints (16 parking bays) at two sites in Buckingham: Western Avenue car park, and Cornwalls Meadow car park. The two Buckingham installations were funded by the Government's On-Street Residential Chargepoint Scheme, which requires sites to be located in residential areas, in areas which lack access to off-street parking (for residents), and to be open to residents 24 hours, 7 days per week. Depending on the size of vehicle, these are therefore also available for use by tradespeople or guests visiting residential areas. We continue to work to secure funding to install new publicly accessible chargepoints in residential areas as these opportunities become available.

(Questions Two and Three relate to Active Travel and so had one single answer)

Question Two

I welcome the update report and the Council's continued commitment to address climate change. My question relates specifically to the work carried out towards Action 42: "Improve infrastructure for active travel (such as walking and cycling) and electric vehicles". The progress reported is to be welcomed but, as far as active travel is concerned, it is exceptionally modest compared with the ambitions referred to in previous strategies. The Aylesbury Garden Town Masterplan, for example, contains the following ambitions:

'In 2033 people choose to walk, cycle, or use public transport for everyday journeys within Aylesbury, because it is easy to navigate and has an integrated and inclusive transport system. Residents benefit from active lifestyles and streets are people-friendly places. By 2050 at least 50% of trips originating in the Garden Town will be made by sustainable modes.

A web of green and blue infrastructure provides the 'garden' in Garden Town. As a result of the Garden Town project, Aylesbury's communities are better connected to the countryside and the Chiltern Hills. The town's waterways have been revealed and naturalised, streets are greener and outdoor spaces are more accessible, biodiverse and active.'

As someone who cycles nearly every day, both within Aylesbury and to nearby destinations such as Wendover and Haddenham, I have to say that, apart from the Haydon Hill extension, there is no evidence that provision for "active travel" is improving. On the contrary, paths are increasingly taken over by vegetation and the surfaces are breaking up, the signage for Aylesbury's Gemstones cycle routes is deteriorating badly, the 20mph scheme in Thame Road, Haddenham – introduced during the short-lived wave of enthusiasm for active travel during the pandemic – has been abandoned, and no progress has been made in creating the Haddenham station to Thame greenway despite years of promises and thousands of pounds wasted on studies by organisations such as Sustrans. Compared to the vast resources poured into projects such as the South-East Aylesbury Link Road, it is clear that active travel remains a very low priority within the Council. What resources does the Council make available to ensuring that "active travel" really does become a strategic priority (in the jargon, bringing about a "step change") and when can a detailed, comprehensive review of all "active travel" requirements, including maintenance, be made available to the Select Committee and to the general public?

Answer

Thank you to both Mr Bloxham and Mr Thawley for these questions which allow me to outline the work we are doing to ensure a 'step change' in provision for active travel: walking, cycling and wheeling.

Under Action 42 of the Climate Change and Air Quality Strategy, the 2021-22 annual review is included on today's agenda, a range of active travel infrastructure improvements were outlined and these have all now been delivered. These included delivery of the Haydon Hill link in Aylesbury (so that users can walk and cycle from Aylesbury Vale Parkway station into town), as well as route improvements in Wendover and making two of the 'Emergency

Active Travel Fund schemes' referred to in the question, in Southcourt Aylesbury and Marlow, permanent.

This year (2022), the Council has delivered further active travel infrastructure, including the recently opened Berryfields-Buckingham Park Greenway in Aylesbury. We are also currently upgrading the Emerald Way (renamed the Platinum Way in celebration of our late Queen's Jubilee) between Aylesbury town centre and Haydon Hill, which includes improvements to surfacing and signage. The Council is also working with partners to create new and improved routes, for example Sustrans are currently delivering the Misbourne Greenway (Wendover Dean – Great Missenden) which is due to open in 2023.

We are heavily reliant upon external funding to deliver both new schemes as well as improve and maintain our existing routes. We are proactive in seeking funding through means such as Government grants (we have secured over £2.3m through the Active Travel Fund) and from development sites through both good design within the site and securing developer contributions for wider local improvements. We also work to secure improvements from major infrastructure projects, such as East West Rail and HS2.

The Council's priorities for new cycling and walking infrastructure are set out in our Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) – we have these in place in Aylesbury and Buckingham and are currently consulting on our LCWIP for High Wycombe. The Aylesbury LCWIP includes the flagship Gardenway orbital park/active travel ring around Aylesbury, which underpins the Garden Town ambitions for active travel.

To bring about that step change across the whole county, the Council has just begun work on a Council-wide LCWIP. This will involve considerable work with the 16 Community Boards to identify local priorities, aspirations and 'missing links' and will set out our proposals for the future network of active travel corridors across Buckinghamshire. It will set out infrastructure design guidance and build upon the long held aspiration for a 'Buckinghamshire Greenway', a north-south corridor across our region.

Using funding from government grants specifically for this purpose, we have recently recruited a specialist in travel planning and behaviour change promotion and will now be able to deliver targeted promotional campaigns along our new and improved active travel routes. This will include engaging with local schools, businesses and communities and raising awareness of the benefits to health, pollution and climate change amongst residents and visitors of making the choice to travel actively.

Monitoring the usage of our new and improved infrastructure is extremely important – it helps us make the case for further investment from Government and so secure future funding. We already have a network of approximately 30 cycle counters across Buckinghamshire and we are now installing walking and cycling counters on new routes as standard. We will be publicly reporting on usage using this data via a new KPI under my portfolio.

The Emergency Active Travel Fund scheme in Haddenham was introduced on a temporary, trial basis to encourage more active travel during the pandemic. Following feedback from

local residents and through liaison with the working group, which included Buckinghamshire Council Members and Haddenham Parish Council, the decision was taken to decommission the scheme. It was removed in March 2022. The learnings and data from the scheme have been shared with Haddenham Parish Council to help inform their locally-led Streetscape project.

Buckinghamshire Council continues to work closely with Oxfordshire County Council on the aspiration for an active travel link connecting Haddenham and Thame. Schemes of this nature and scale are complex and can require significant background feasibility work to be undertaken.

I report on progress on active travel matters at Cabinet and Full Council. I can look to bring an item on active travel schemes that are under development as well as an update on our LCWIPs to TECC in 2023.

Please do continue to report maintenance issues on footpaths and cycleways routes via FixMyStreet.

Other active travel schemes in development:

Funding source	Scheme	Status
<i>DfT / S106</i>	<i>Waddesdon Greenway Extension to Westcott village and Venture Park</i>	<i>In development/consultation</i>
<i>Internal</i>	<i>Buckinghamshire Greenway (north-south spine)</i>	<i>In development/consultation</i>
<i>Internal</i>	<i>Denham A412 Corridor (linking Denham Green to Maple Cross and Rickmansworth)</i>	<i>In development/consultation</i>
<i>Sustrans</i>	<i>Misbourne Greenway</i>	<i>In delivery</i>
<i>Great Western Railway</i>	<p><i>Bourne End Station improvements</i></p> <p><i>Funding secured from GWR to undertake feasibility work at Bourne End station covering:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• Station access improvements;</i> <i>• Relocation of the bus stop;</i> <p><i>Path improvements and new road crossing.</i></p>	<i>In development/consultation</i>

Question Three

It is great to see the introduction of new walking and cycling infrastructure around the county as part of your efforts to tackle climate change, but will this be backed up with a well-funded, consistent and high-profile campaign to promote the benefits of active travel, along with monitoring to assess the increase in uptake?

Answer

See answer to Q2.

Question Four

Just this summer, a school in Wendover, which was the subject of a Feasibility Study into decarbonisation and electrification of heat, which was being done in partnership with Buckinghamshire Council, had its gas boilers replaced with gas boilers. How can Councillors and management in the Council help Property and Estates teams to change policy and practice more quickly so that this doesn't happen again as it is in direct contradiction to stated Council policy on climate change?

Answer

Thank you for this question – this is a good example of the complexity and challenges we face in decarbonising not just the Council's buildings, but as a country why this is difficult.

I would like to first clarify that this is not in contradiction with policy – we have not said we will never install a gas boiler again. We have to also remember that we have obligations to schools and keeping their buildings operational is important – so where a heating system is close to failing, we must act to replace this and do so within the fixed budgets we have.

In this specific case, the initial feasibility study was being completed around April /May this year – by this time the original boilers had been experiencing issues for many months and work to procure the replacements well underway. The feasibility study is an initial look at what's possible, not a detailed design or costed model for replacement – so it was simply not practical to delay the replacement of the boilers whilst that work progressed. To do so would risk leaving the school without a working heating system come the winter.

As is implicit in the question, retrofitting a building with low carbon technology is not simple and needs carefully looking at through a study – we do not switch a boiler for a heat pump and hope it works. Technical feasibility work is essential to understand how a low carbon system would work, and what changes to the building would be required. This is not just the heat source, but the pipe work, the controls, the thermal efficiency of the building and, for electric powered heating like a heat pump, the capacity of the incoming electrical connection. If not done carefully, a poorly designed system can lead to the building being underheated as well as costing a lot more to run.

So, whilst it's really good this feasibility study has been undertaken, we were not able to leave the school with its failing system whilst this the feasibility and potential future costing and design work was completed for a currently unfunded replacement proposal.

I would like to highlight though that as part of this recent works, parts of the pipe work also needed replacing and this has been done with a larger diameter pipe as would be required for a typical heat pump heating system. So, this infrastructure has been future proofed so that a low carbon system can be retrofitted in the future.

I'd like to draw attention to work the property and schools' teams have undertaken together on the new Kingsbrook Secondary School which includes many excellent low carbon features:

- The heating and hot water systems are powered by high efficiency air-source heat pumps.
- Over 200 square meters of solar PV has been included, which will generate approx. 28,600 kwh/yr.
- The building carbon emissions rate is 44 % below required Building Regulations levels and achieves Energy Performance Certificate rating of 'A'.
- And the operational energy will be below 60 kwh/sqm/year, this is considerably lower than a typical low energy new school building that would typically be in the region of 80 kwh/sqm/year.
- The design of the building has also reduced embodied carbon emissions by use of timber framed structural insulated panels that are used for all areas of external wall build-up

Reducing our carbon emissions is absolutely something which teams across the Council are active on – however the reality is that we have finite budgets and many other obligations to deliver on. So, we are delighted to support this feasibility study but in this case it was necessary to replace the system in good time and ensure the school can continue operating before the feasibility study or any subsequent design stages could be undertaken or completed.

Additional post-meeting information

This answer shows that the actions taken in this case are not in contradiction to the actions in the Climate Change and Air Quality Strategy or any of our policies and so the question basis that we must change practice to stop this happening again is unfounded. Should the same circumstances arise it would be appropriate for the same course of action to be progressed, as set out, to ensure that the school remains operational, and pupils' education continues. The specific circumstances were explained to ensure Members and residents listening did not misunderstand the circumstances of the case raised in the public question. Through the Kingsbrook Secondary School example, we show that the Property and Schools teams are already taking major steps to address climate change and so we feel policy and practice across these teams is already in a strong position and as more opportunities to improve performance arise they will be taken.