

Transport, Environment & Climate Change Select Committee – 14 September 2023

Agenda Item 4 – Public Questions

Question One

The current cycle route from Wendover to Aylesbury is dreadful (e.g. a lorry parked across the cycle route opposite Dobbies Garden Centre for the last three weeks and the crossing for cyclists at the busy main road A413 near 270 Wendover Road has been removed leaving it extremely dangerous to get from one cycle lane to the other). Given this situation, how will the new plan improve on this, for example will the cycle routes be checked and maintained, and will some group be responsible for enforcing these routes?

Answer

Thank you for taking the time to let us know about your experience using the cycle route from Wendover to Aylesbury. I would urge you to report vehicles parked dangerously on the highway, or causing an obstruction, to Thames Valley Police who can investigate. I have asked officers to look into your comment regarding the removal of a refuge crossing point on the A413. The refuge was removed earlier this year as part of works that Thames Water were undertaking as part of the SEALR project. The refuge was removed to reduce the impact of these works. Had the refuge remained, the proposed temporary traffic management would have required around 4 weeks of 24/7 temporary two-way traffic signals on A413 Wendover Road which would have caused significant delays. The refuge wasn't replaced as it was expected that the work to deliver the Wendover Road roundabout would have started soon after. A temporary refuge is expected to be installed in the near future.

To answer your question on how the Local Transport Plan 5 will help to improve safety for those cycling in Buckinghamshire, the plan will set out the high-level principles and policies for how the Council intends to invest in and maintain walking and cycling infrastructure, as well as how it will improve road safety and accessibility for all users of the street environment. Greater detail on these elements will be included within the supporting Buckinghamshire Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, which is currently in development and intended to be a subdocument of LTP5. It is important to understand that specific routes/schemes in the LCWIP will require external, third-party funding to be delivered.

Maintenance of cycling infrastructure is included within the Councils rolling maintenance programme. Issues can be reported using FixMyStreet. Regular inspections and repairs to our highways will continue in line with our Policy:

<https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/parking-roads-and-transport/policies/highway-policies/highway-safety-inspection-policy/>

At this time there are no plans to form a separate walking and cycling maintenance team.

Question Two

How will Buckinghamshire Council, as the LNRS responsible authority, encourage more community involvement and support the work of community led voluntary groups at parish level who are already active in promoting biodiversity?

Answer

The LNRS guidance requires us to involve people and groups from across the public, private and voluntary sectors and help them to work together. The strategy will clearly benefit from their understanding of what environmental issues are most important locally and thereby encourage and help enable them to carry out the proposals in the strategy.

The LNRS steering group is developing a robust plan to reach out to and engage as many stakeholders as possible to input into the LNRS including as many community led voluntary groups as possible. In July of this year, an introductory webinar on the LNRS was held for local environmental organisations and community groups. We had 66 attendees for this particular webinar, where we set out how they could to be involved in both the preparation and delivery of the LNRS.

In addition, through the Buckinghamshire Council's Town & Parish liaison and the BMKALC, we have reached out to all Town & Parish Councils to both be a part of the LNRS process, as well as advertise the opportunities for involvement in the LNRS process to all their constituents, including community groups. We have also used many of the Council's other communications channels, as well as the communications networks of our local partner environmental organisations, and the contact lists of the Natural Environment Partnership to advertise these opportunities. We will be hosting a series of stakeholder consultation workshops early next year and it is essential we ensure good representation of community groups at the workshops.

Question Three

I understand from the HS2 community engagement meeting in the Summer that a large number of trees planted by HS2 (to supposedly compensate for ecological damage to much older trees) have died. Can the council insist that they replace the dead trees with new trees and put in place a management system to ensure the trees don't die again, and in future who will be responsible for managing these trees to ensure they thrive?

Answer

During construction and for a period after, any new habitat creation will be maintained by HS2 Ltd. This period of initial establishment and maintenance will vary depending on the habitat or feature and the complexity and end objectives for the habitat type. After an initial period of establishment and maintenance, HS2 Ltd will seek to return land which is outside the permanent operational boundary to landowners or other interested parties where agreement can be reached with the landowner that will ensure the continued objectives of the habitat creation will be maintained. Where agreement cannot be reached, the land will be retained and maintained by the nominated undertaker (HS2 Ltd or their successor). Where land is not transferred back to the landowner, a managing agent will be appointed to maintain soft landscape assets including planting.

HS2 Ltd has advised Buckinghamshire Council that should concern arise that mitigation is not being adequately maintained either by the nominated undertaker or a landowner, the

course of action in the first instance is to raise the matter with the nominated undertaker. If the matter remains unresolved, the matter would need to be raised with the Secretary of State.

Where the Council is aware that mitigation measures have or are likely to fail (in part or whole), the Council has and will make formal contact with HS2 Ltd requiring compliance with the approved mitigation scheme.'

Question Four

The 'apex goal' of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy is 'thriving plants and wildlife'. Fundamental to achieving this is connecting existing and newly created habitats to increase diversity and ensure the long-term viability of the flora and fauna they support. Only when these habitats are comprehensively mapped can they be properly analysed to see the gaps in wildlife corridors where particularly on low grade farmland natural regeneration can be encouraged, the most effective way of creating thriving habitats and the cheapest. Therefore 'mapping opportunities' is one of the key elements of the LNRS and Geographical Information Systems is a powerful tool for doing this enabling data from many sources to be gathered and shown on a map in as many layers as required so revealing patterns and 'opportunities'.

At the last meeting of this select committee Buckinghamshire Council confirmed it will be producing a GIS map, but it will only 'show the locations of all the Council Land Tree Planting Programme sites', which represents only 2% of the planting required across the UA area to achieve the statutory target for tree and woodland cover by 2050. Will this map now be expanded to include all other existing and future new tree planting sites together with other natural habitats and be made available to the public so that the council and residents can understand and be involved in the important task of restoring our natural world?

Answer

In terms of mapping the LNRS is required to produce a local habitat map to accompany the written statement of biodiversity priorities. The map is required to show:

- Areas that are of particular importance for biodiversity including national conservation sites, local nature reserves, local wildlife sites and irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland)
- Areas that could become of particular importance. This includes mapping areas that could become particularly important for biodiversity or where the recovery or enhancement of biodiversity could make a particular contribution to other environmental benefits. These spatial areas are the ones where the responsible authority and local partners propose that effort should be concentrated to restore habitat to achieve most for biodiversity and wider environment.

We have previously undertaken a comprehensive and extensive natural capital mapping exercise using a whole variety of locally held and national data sets to show all of the extent and type of current habitats present across Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes. We will be using these data sets as well as others as part of the evidence base for the formal LNRS map. We envisage that the final format of LNRS habitat map will be interactive GIS based to enable users to easily find the information that is most relevant to them.

Question Five

Are Cabinet, Council Officers and Members of the Local Transport Plan Committee aware of the LCWIP proposal as put together by Arup on behalf of Chesham, and, when adopted by Chesham Town Council, will it receive the full backing of Buckinghamshire Council?

Answer

Buckinghamshire Council is aware that Chesham Town Council, working with the consultancy Arup, have developed a draft LCWIP for Chesham. This project is being led by Chesham Town Council, however Buckinghamshire Council officers have engaged and inputted into this work where appropriate and the routes proposed have been considered within the Buckinghamshire-wide LCWIP, currently in development by the Council. I understand that Chesham Town Council are considering next steps for the draft Chesham LCWIP. Once adopted by CTC it is hoped that the Chesham LCWIP will be adopted by the Council and therefore become eligible for Department for Transport grant funding opportunities. However, I must reiterate that the Council will not support proposals that are not compatible with our own policies. It should be noted that adoption by Buckinghamshire Council will require the LCWIP to be subject to a period of public consultation, with potential amendments made in light of feedback received.

Question Six

I'm really impressed with initiatives like the [PickMeUp - High Wycombe] (<https://www.carouselbuses.co.uk/pickmeupwycombe>) service around the Bucks area and I'm curious if there are any plans to add more of these services? Considering my own experience, living on a road with an adequate bus service, while the value is unquestionable, it's important to address the fiscal and environmental costs of running a somewhat underutilised service (1 - 6 people per hour on each of the 3-4 hours it runs each day.) Looking into options like car-sharing infrastructure similar to [Zipcar] (<https://www.zipcar.co.uk/>), [Car2Go] (<https://www.share-now.com/>), or [Enterprise CarShare] (<https://www.enterprise-carshare.com/uk/en/home.html>) can potentially mitigate the environmental costs of extensive personal car ownership costs while still providing essential transport solutions.

Answer

Thank you for these suggestions and I can say car clubs and car sharing are certainly something we wish to see more of in Buckinghamshire. They have a potential role to play in reducing the number of individual journeys thereby reducing congestion, and depending upon the type of car can contribute to the decarbonisation of transport. E-Car clubs let people 'try an electric vehicle before they buy' and have been popular in a number of villages in Bucks.

I'm happy to report that the PickMeUp service in High Wycombe is being received very well locally and we have therefore expanded the zone to include Flackwell Heath from August. Again, it is hoped we can introduce more of these types of service in the future.

Question Seven

I have read the report on the Local Transport Plan 5 and in section 4.3 you report on the engagement with young people. In light of the disappointing level of engagement with this age group so far, please can you tell me what plans you have to further engage this very important demographic? Perhaps I could suggest that engaging with schools directly might

be a good option, there are many areas of the national curriculum that this is linked to and engagement with, at least, all secondary schools in Buckinghamshire would represent a serious attempt to find out the views of young people in the county.

Answer

We recognise that the level of engagement from young people is lower than we would have liked. This demographic can be challenging to reach and engage with on survey style/consultation matters. However, their views are very important to the Council so we tried a novel approach for the recent LTP5 and Local Plan consultation and engaged with the Council's new Youth participation coordinator and enlisted the help of the Youth Voice forum, with a survey specifically tailored for young people. Albeit a small sample size, this provided insights into what is important to the younger generation. As we move forward in the development of this strategy, we would like to invite more feedback from this age group and we plan to engage with young people through a variety of means, including school newsletters and by working with our universities.

Question Eight

Unless we start to accept that nature can, and must be, everywhere by managing our whole environment in a more sustainable way, we will continue down the path and thinking that a few really well managed sites is a success. Tree planting with the right trees in the right place is only a small part of the solution and should not be heralded as a huge environmental gain that it often is. Regenerative farming for example, can produce biodiversity benefits far in excess of any tree planting schemes. How does the County plan to put biodiversity back on the map in every 'hook and cranny'?

Answer

The Government is putting in place a package of measures to encourage and support people to carry out the priorities and measures in each local nature recovery strategy. The measures include:

- An incentive in how the new requirement for biodiversity net gain is calculated - to recognise the added impact of taking action where the local nature recovery strategy proposes.
- Integration of local nature recovery strategies into the planning system, so that areas of greatest potential for nature recovery can be better reflected in planning decisions.
- A variety of funding for specific activities and measures that local nature recovery strategies will be expected to propose locations for i.e. various funding streams in relation to woodland creation and tree planting, protected species, natural flood management, landscape scale restoration.
- A new duty on all public authorities to have regard to relevant local nature recovery strategies.

The government is providing funding for a wide range of nature recovery activities to incentivise landowners and managers to make changes to how they use and manage their land for greater environmental benefit. For example, taking action for endangered species. In addition, the Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes will pay farmers and land managers for undertaking environmentally beneficial activities on their land as well as the opportunities for land managers to work together on larger landscape scale nature recovery projects.

Finally, the LNRS is not just focused on farms and conservation sites, but is 1) engaging a range of stakeholder, including businesses, developers, landowners, Town & Parish Councils, residents, etc. in identifying opportunities for biodiversity improvement at various scales and; 2) will also be focused on opportunities for improving biodiversity in urban areas. Collectively these measures and opportunities will help generate momentum and encourage and enable those who helped shape the strategy to take action to support its delivery.