

**North Somerset Council
Council Meeting 16 April 2024
Question Time (Agenda Item 12)**

Question 1

**From Councillor Steve Bridger
To Executive Member for Spatial Planning, Placemaking and Economy –
Councillor Mark Canniford**

Developer appointment of management companies

Councillor Bridger asked the following question:

“Colleagues will recognise that it has become very common (even the norm) for a housing developer and the council to agree during the planning process that the green spaces are not to be ‘adopted’ by the council but managed privately.

I am increasingly concerned by how some management companies seem to be treating residents in my ward as a ‘cash cow’ with households facing significant hikes in the estate service charge collected by a particular management company.

I met Sir Liam Fox at the weekend to discuss this as I know he shares these concerns and is acting on behalf of some residents in Portishead.

After seeking advice from the Solicitor, will Mark agree to a meeting to help me understand whether the council – as the Local Planning Authority – can influence (or has any agency) over how developers appoint companies to manage Public Open Space following a planning approval?”

Councillor Canniford thanked Councillor Bridger for his question confirming that the council’s preference was to adopt infrastructure and that this was assessed on a case-by-case basis. He agreed that this was unreasonable and should be reviewed, and to meet to consider suitable solutions. If this was not possible, then council could make representation to government.

Question 2

**From Councillor Patrick Keating
To Executive Member for Highways and Transport - Councillor Hannah Young**

Use of BSIP funding

Councillor Keating asked the following question:

“While we can be rightly proud of the success of North Somerset in gaining record funding for Bus Service Improvement, our residents are concerned that existing and proposed plans for infrastructure works are overengineered for the number of buses circulating on our roads - and the disruption caused outweighs benefits - is there really a need for a huge new gyratory at Churchill?”

Can the Executive Member therefore please commit to:

- Reporting back to this Council before our next meeting in May on what steps she intends to take to ensure funds are spent only on practical, effective, and value for money schemes – that are to the benefit of all North Somerset residents
- Commit to scrapping schemes that do not meet this test
- Reassure us that all members are fully involved in the refresh of the BSIP and to push government to give NSC more flexibility on how to use BSIP funding – so that future schemes have the full support of local communities.

Councillor Young thanked Councillor Keating for his question and replied that much work had been undertaken behind the scenes hearing the concerns of communities regarding the delivery of BSIP. She reminded members of the extensive process of bidding to government for that funding. There were very good reasons for continuing at that time, including massive cuts to bus services. However, there had also been concerns about the nature of the schemes. There was recognised frustration for residents using our roads and the scale and impact of disruption.

There was therefore going to be a review of delivery against our original intentions and, other than the Wood Hill scheme, there would be a pause for the remainder of the infrastructure delivery. This would be reflected on the Forward Plan and members would be engaged in the refresh process.

Question 3

From Councillor Oliver Ellis

To Executive Member for Highways and Transport - Councillor Hannah Young

Safer lanes in Nailsea

Councillor Ellis asked the following question:

“Will the Executive Member for transport agree to a meeting that she agreed to over seven months ago to look at ways to make Nailsea’s lanes safer?”

Councillor Young thanked Councillor Ellis for his question and replied that she would commit to a further meeting. The West End lanes in Nailsea were being considered in the context of the local plan, and she understood that this had already been fed back to Councillor Ellis.

Question 4

From Councillor Ciaran Cronnelly

To the Leader – Councillor Mike Bell

Funding for flooding mitigation at Hutton Moor Lane Park Homes

Councillor Cronnelly asked the following question:

“The recent heavy rain across North Somerset has led to residents living at Hutton Moor Lane Park Homes becoming stranded in their home due to surface level flooding, which at times has been so high it is not passable without a vehicle. I applaud the council who have acted when requested and they have identified issues

with how the gulleys are discharging. To fix the issue will require capital programme investment and I'm concerned that due to the financial pressures placed on the council this won't be prioritised this year. Can you provide reassurance that the council will look into this as a priority and prioritise repairs this financial year?

Councillor Bell thanked Councillor Cronnelly for his question and responded that the cause was being investigated by the highways and flood risk teams as it appeared there was no drainage in the vicinity, leaving reliance on soakaways. Feasibility work was looking at the viability of capital works, but the relevant land was owned by a third party. An interim solution was being sought for this year.

More generally, there were real issues in flooding management and mitigation across the network due to the increase in rain over a sustained period and an outdated system that was not able to cope.

Question 5

From Councillor Stuart McQuillan

To Executive Member for Highways and Transport - Councillor Hannah Young

Accountability for bus service reliability

Councillor McQuillan asked the following question:

"I am regularly approached by frustrated parents in Long Ashton who are seeking to get their children to Backwell and Nailsea schools via the X7 and X9 bus routes. I hear stories of cancelled busses, and overcrowded busses – indeed I experienced this myself recently being unable to board a bus that was full. It could be said that full busses are a good thing – but if people do not have good experiences on busses, they will look at other forms of transport such as the private car. I am aware of the work the council is doing to improve the sustainability of bus routes through BSIP, but my feeling is that the council are taking are doing its part by improving infrastructure through BSIP (and all the challenges that come with it) but there is not enough of a response from First Bus as yet. Can you outline what we are doing to hold First Bus to account in general – and what can we do to improve the reliability and capacity of the X7 and X9 routes specifically?"

Councillor Young thanked Councillor McQuillan for his question and underlined that this matter did indeed fall within the scope of BSIP. It was recognised that a lot of money was being spent on subsidising services which was why so much focus was on the infrastructure. She was having frequent and regular meetings with First Bus, with focus on performance and reliability to get services working more effectively.

Question 6

From Councillor Luke Smith

To Executive Member for Culture and Leisure – Councillor Mike Solomon

Award of Salthouse Fields concession

Councillor Smith asked the following question:

“The awarding of the Salthouse Field's new concessions has been delayed. This means that the badly missed mini-train is expected to remain out of use for another season.

Despite the conflicting element being incredibly limited to a clash between a proposed redevelopment of the minigolf and longstanding proposals from Clevedon Skate Project. Residents will find it a bitter pill to swallow that the whole area and planned investments have been affected, with no guarantee that in a year's time a practical solution will be found. To summarise, Is this really the best way forwards?”

Councillor Solomon thanked Councillor Smith for his question and replied that unfortunately it was the only way forwards as the council did not run the concessions. He added that he would love to see someone come forward and run the train and the crazy golf, but that nobody had been forthcoming.

Question 7

From Councillor Ash Cartman

To Executive Member for Highways and Transport - Councillor Hannah Young

Bus lanes and the Bus Service Improvement Programme

Councillor Cartman asked the following question:

“Can the Executive Member clarify there will be no commitment for bus lanes for the next six months and ask the government for more time and flexibility for the funding?”

Councillor Young thanked Councillor Cartman for his question and responded that she had already been working with the Department for Transport to extend the programme. It had been a challenging programme to deliver, and more time was needed between schemes to check and test that they were right. There would be a pause on scheme delivery and the Forward Plan had been updated to reflect more sensible timings.

Question 8

From Councillor Tom Nicholson

To the Leader – Councillor Mike Bell

Banwell bypass

Councillor Nicholson asked the following question:

“Would you mind giving us an update on the Banwell Bypass? It's obviously a matter of great significance so if you don't mind giving us an update, I would be grateful. I would also like to apologise for not giving you a heads up of this question prior to about 15 minutes ago, I do appreciate your willingness to take a question at very short notice.”

Councillor Bell thanked Councillor Nicholson for his question. It had been unfortunate that the original contractor had pulled out, and the impact of that was continuing to be explored. Replacement contractors had already been identified to start the advance

environmental works, and there were continued conversations with Homes England as the funder. He remained confident that construction would start before too long and could guarantee that the bypass would be built, it was just a question of timing.

Question 9

From Councillor Thomas Daw

To Executive Member for Highways and Transport - Councillor Hannah Young

Wrington school bus service

Councillor Daw asked the following question:

“Wrington had the 127 bus which travelled between Wrington and the school. This has now been cut which I only found out about from North Somerset website. There are also issues for parents about the cost as it costs about twice as much to use the Bakers Dolphin alternative. Why wasn't I consulted about it, and can we extend the hours that the 125 bus runs so that it starts earlier for commuters?”

Councillor Young thanked Councillor Daw for his question and agreed that there had been some glitches in informing councillors of changes to bus services. Attempts to improve the service were being made through enhanced partnership with the service providers and the West of England Combined Authority. Changes could only be made in April and September each year, and these required a ten-week consultation in advance. It was really important to be talking to our communities at the time that they can influence change, and people were strongly encouraged people to speak with her and the officer team. The service had to be considered as a whole and there would always be specific winners and losers. Whilst arrangements were made so that young people would not be stranded, it wasn't always possible to guarantee that would be the cheapest option.

Question 10

From Councillor Mike Solomon

To Executive Member for Highways and Transport - Councillor Hannah Young

Management of detour road signs

Councillor Solomon asked the following question:

“I am seeing more and more detour signs having to go up and they just seem a bit random and unclear. Can we look at the management of these road signs that aren't necessarily all ours?”

Councillor Young thanked Councillor Solomon for his question and said that an upcoming scrutiny session had already been arranged to consider network management. It was clearly an issue for our communities. Whilst many of the signs were not those of North Somerset, it posed a large workload for a small network management team.

Question 11

From Councillor Stuart Davies

To Executive Member for Highways and Transport - Councillor Hannah Young

Highways Improvement request forms

Councillor Davies asked the following question:

“I submitted three highways improvement request forms last year and haven’t heard anything in response. This was having a negative impact on the community so please can we have feedback on these requests?”

Councillor Young thanked Councillor Davies for his question and undertook to pick up on these requests if there had been no feedback at all. There was a process for assessment which prioritised school safety. The challenge of staffing and recruitment in this area was posing a problem across all councils.

Question 12

From Councillor Peter Bryant

To the Leader – Councillor Mike Bell

Decision to resurface Beach Road, Weston-super-Mare

Councillor Bryant asked the following question:

“Thank you for the current resurfacing of Beach Road, but why has this decision been made as the road is currently in the top 5% of roads within the district?”

Councillor Bell thanked Councillor Bryant for his question and confirmed that the reason for the repair was because the road was beginning to deteriorate. It was cheaper and less disruptive to intervene early where possible to prevent more serious deterioration. Beach Road was a very important A road leading into and out of Weston-super-Mare and so fitted within a different area of prioritisation. Councillor Bell was satisfied that resurfacing was a sensible, value for money decision and the sooner we could do the same for other roads, the better.

Question 13

From Councillor Stuart McQuillan

To Executive Member for Highways and Transport - Councillor Hannah Young

Openness in sharing meeting information

Councillor McQuillan asked the following question:

“Could the meetings that you are having with the bus operator be shared to some extent as it would help with the public perception is that the council isn’t doing something when it actually is?”

Councillor Young thanked Councillor McQuillan for his question and said she was happy to provide an update at the end of each meeting.

Question 14

From Councillor Bridget Petty

To Executive Member for Highways and Transport - Councillor Hannah Young

Change to bus service work in Backwell

Councillor Petty asked the following question:

“In the past week, Taylor Wimpey have issued documents saying that the BSIP work will not continue in Backwell. The residents have become very concerned that the communications they are getting are not from the council. Will you give commitment to making a public statement on this issue? I appreciate our commitment to be open, but I think we could trust in our residents more. Would you consider a standing item on BSIP given the significance and interest? Can you confirm that the Forward Plan entry for May relating to the Backwell works will be removed?”

Councillor Young thanked Councillor Petty for her question and completely appreciated the comments made. She was keen to get a communication out imminently to ward and parish council members and was not aware of the Taylor Wimpey statement so would review the wider comms. The Backwell decision would not be made in May and would be likely to be moved to the tail end of the calendar year. The Forward Plan would be updated to reflect this.