

## COUNCIL – 25TH FEBRUARY 2013

### ITEM 6 QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

#### 6.1 Councillor Smidowicz – European Twinning Visits for 2013

With the award of a €5000 grant, can the Leader inform me what plans do our European Twins have for visiting us this year?

*The Leader, or his nominee, will respond:*

*Charnwood Borough Council, and its partners the Loughborough Twinning Association and Voluntary Action Charnwood, have been successful in obtaining European Union funding of €5000 to promote and facilitate building links between the voluntary and community organisations of Loughborough and its twin towns. The funding will help us run a weekend of events in Loughborough between 5th and 7th April 2013 where representatives from the town and community and voluntary groups will be able to meet and share ideas with their counterparts from Epinal, Gembloux, Schwabish Hall and Zamosc.*

*A full programme of events has been put together for our European counterparts including:*

- meeting members of the Warwick Way Residents Association to be shown the initiatives undertaken in the area to improve the quality of life for residents on the estate;*
- attending an open morning at John Storer House, which will also be open to the public, where local organisations will be able to recruit volunteers; attendees will be able to learn more about the breadth and depth of community and voluntary activity within Loughborough and the Borough of Charnwood and community organisations will be able to learn more about how things operate in the twin towns and to express an interest in further links being developed;*
- an opportunity for a discussion with local groups, local politicians, community and voluntary group leaders about the role of the voluntary and community sectors in the twin towns, the emerging role, the role of the local government, funding and future support; and*
- reopening and dedication of Fearon Fountain, recognising the role of Henry Fearon in bringing clean water to Loughborough and the impact this had on the poor and vulnerable of his day.*

## 6.2 Councillor Parton – Policy Decision Making Information

Would the Leader please clarify as to what extent information gathered by Ward Councillors can currently be used in contributing to and informing policy decision making?

*The Leader, or his nominee, will respond:*

*The Council has a number of processes and mechanisms in place whereby ward councillors have the opportunity to contribute to policy decision making. The scrutiny process allows for opportunities through committees (e.g. Policy Scrutiny group) and specific panels (e.g. CCTV panel, Gipsy and Traveller Panel) for ward councillors to comment on policies and strategies as they are being developed. Some key corporate projects may decide to have Member Reference Groups to support the development of a policy e.g. the LDF.*

*Additionally as part of the development of many strategies and the development of the Corporate Plan there is a period of public consultation, and ward councillors can contribute and put forward information and views gathered from their constituents through these consultation mechanisms.*

## 6.3 Councillor M Hunt – Barriers to Housing and Services

Is the Leader aware that the Wolds (East and West) has the highest level of deprivation in the Borough, as classified by Government figures for Barriers to Housing and Services? What is the Borough Council doing to address this?

*The Leader, or his nominee, will respond:*

*The borough council is aware of data in relation deprivation. There are seven indicators that the Government uses to measure deprivation and 'Barriers to Housing and Services' is one of these indicators. The Council has used all seven indicators of deprivation to identify Priority Neighbourhoods in Charnwood taking account of a broader range of issues, including educational attainment, incomes and levels of unemployment. Priority Neighbourhoods have therefore been identified taking a balanced view against a range of indicators.*

*Data around deprivation, especially in relation to Priority Neighbourhoods has been used to inform the emerging Local Plan Core Strategy, including the overall spatial strategy. The range of social, economic and environmental evidence used to inform the spatial strategy has been referred to in the Objective Assessment and Sustainability Appraisal Report which accompanied the Core Strategy Report to Cabinet on 27th September 2012.*

*The borough is seeking to respond to particular issues identified in our communities using evidence about deprivation alongside other evidence for example on transport and travel patterns and access to services and facilities. For villages in the east and west Wolds, the emerging Local Plan Core Strategy policies seek to avoid significant new development that will be reliant on the car for access to services whilst securing higher levels of affordable housing to meet local needs, and where possible protecting and enhancing local facilities for people that live in the Wolds.*

6.4 Councillor M Hunt - Core Strategy Traffic Assessment Congestion Severity

The Core Strategy Traffic Assessment Congestion Severity Indices at peak hour traffic for the five Core Strategies tested so far are:

**Congestion Severity Index (AM Peak)**

DS1 (West Loughborough/SWL/Shepshed/East Thurmaston)	133
DS2(East Lough/South Lough/ Shepshed/ East Thurmaston)	111
DS3(West Loughborough/Cotes/Shepshed/ East Thurmaston)	127
DS4(West Loughborough/SouthL/ Shepshed/East Thurmaston)	133
PS (West Loughborough/West Shepshed/ East Thurmaston )	160

With the preferred strategy starting from a lower base line than the DS results (ie 58 vs 82). What conclusion do you draw from this?

*The Leader, or his nominee, will respond:*

*The reason for the variance between the severity index figures for the emerging development strategies modelled in Stage 1 and the single emerging development strategy modelled in Stage 2 can be explained as follows:*

- *Following the completion of the Stage 1 work, MVA undertook some analysis in July 2012 of the Strategic Road Network (SRN) within LLITM. As a result of this work, alterations (network improvements) were made by MVA to the SRN for the 2008 Base Year. These amendments meant that the Base Year results were slightly different to those used for Stage 1 and as a consequence, meant that the 2026 Reference Case needed to be re-run. This in turn has meant that the Stage 2 Reference Case results are different to Stage 1.*

- *The mitigation package has also been refined for Stage 2 and includes numerous public transport and highway schemes which were not modelled in Stage 1. This will also have had an impact on the difference between the Severity Index results for Stages 1 and 2.*
- *The Stage 1 work assessed four possible permutations of a single emerging development strategy and the main purpose was to ensure that all development options were modelled. It was never intended that one of these would be picked as a single emerging development strategy but that the Stage 1 work, along with other evidence, would inform the development of a single emerging development strategy to be tested in Stage 2.*

*In conclusion, the reasons explained above therefore mean that it is not possible to make a comparison between the Stage 1 and Stage 2 transport modelling work.*

#### 6.5 Councillor Sharp – Localisation of Council Tax – Supporting the Vulnerable?

At its meeting of 22nd November 2012, the Cabinet accepted Overview Scrutiny Group recommendations to amend the discounts applied to second and empty home owners so that the burden of meeting the Council Tax benefit cuts could be shared by those more able to afford the increase in payments.

Overview Scrutiny Group outlined the reason for the proposal as to *'maximise Council Tax income in order that increased funds could be added to the discretionary fund...so that more vulnerable people could be supported.'*

In view of this, could the Leader confirm:

1. That the income from second and empty homes was estimated at £687,000 in the Full Council papers of 14th January 2013, an increase of **£257,000** on the figure outlined in the 22nd November 2012 Cabinet papers reflecting the impact of the Overview Scrutiny Group recommendations?
2. That this estimate excludes £20,000 additional funds generated from changes to the second adult rebate?
3. That this estimate excludes £20,000-£40,000 additional income generated from changes to second homes discounts?
4. How much of this additional c£300,000 income has been added to the discretionary funds that stood at £60,000 (Local Council Tax discretionary discount fund) and £132,000 (discretionary housing payments fund) at the time of the 22nd November 2012 meeting?

*The Leader, or his nominee, will respond:*

*The Cabinet Item was clear to state that as this was the first year of this new scheme many of the numbers within the report were based on best information available but in many cases they were necessarily estimates and reliant on a high proportion of households in all categories paying the new debt levied. If these estimates are not realised then the Council would need to find any shortfall from elsewhere within its budgets.*

*At the time the Cabinet item was submitted the actual financial details of the Government settlement for 2013/14 had not been received. The addendum to the Council report of 14<sup>th</sup> January 2013 showed revised numbers reflecting details of the settlement as well as the impact of changes to second and empty homes. Specifically:*

- The revised estimates in the addendum do show an increase in projected revenues from empty properties of £257,000*
- The amount of £20,000 in respect of the second adult rebate is actually included within the savings for the new scheme; this is unchanged from the cabinet report*
- The addendum does exclude potential revenues generated from changes in the second home discount*

*It may also be noted, however, that as a result of the financial settlement, the estimated funding shortfall across all preceptors increased by £144,000, with Charnwood bearing the brunt of this impact.*

*At this stage no specific additional funding has been allocated to the discretionary funds. However, the budget proposals do include an additional £100,000 to address potential impacts arising from the various Welfare Changes expected in 2013/14.*

#### **6.6 Councillor M Smith – Loughborough Pedestrianisation Proposals**

Does the Leader agree that following the report in The Loughborough Echo on information given at Loughborough South West Forum there is great concern over the possible continuation of buses running both ways through the proposed pedestrianisation section in Loughborough?

Recognition should be given to the contribution the Town Team has made in working with officers widening visitor and shopper amenities in the town centre.

Would he ensure that their contribution is refreshed and in particular they be consulted on this unpopular plan to maintain the two way bus system?

*The Leader, or his nominee, will respond:*

*The approved Loughborough Town Centre Master Plan is committed to the delivery of a “walkable” town centre, easily accessible by public transport, on foot and by bicycle. It is committed also to achieving high quality design in buildings and public spaces.*

*The completion of the Inner Relief Road is supported as a key component of the strategy to divert traffic away from the centre, affording the opportunity to reduce severance, encourage investment, and create a high quality public realm supported by bus hubs. Sketch designs provide for the implementation of the County Council’s original proposal to trial for one year south bound bus services only along the A6 corridor. The Master Plan acknowledges that in the longer term there is the option to completely pedestrianize the area.*

*The Town Team continues to be closely engaged in the monitoring and delivery of the Master Plan. The team works closely with representatives of the County highway authority responsible for the implementation of the Inner Relief Road, bus hubs and related improvements to the public realm to improve pedestrian comfort and safety.*

*The County Council is expected to confirm a variation to the proposed trial to permit both north and south bound bus traffic through the Market Place section of the A6 corridor. If the 12 month trial proceeds on that basis the Town Team, along with all other interested stake holders, will be able to contribute to its evaluation. The highway authority may then take into consideration all representations received in informing its final decision.*

*In the meantime I shall be seeking assurances as to the establishment and enforcement of a code of practice, reinforced by traffic regulation orders as necessary, to ensure safe operating procedures including clear priorities and adherence to “walking pace” speed controls through the pedestrianized area.*

#### **6.7 Councillor Jukes – Food Testing**

**Does Leicestershire have robust food testing facilities? If so, will they be advising people of any local problems?**

*The Leader, or his nominee, will respond:*

*Unfortunately I cannot confirm whether all the food testing facilities are robust across the whole of Leicestershire, as that is a question that would need to be directed to each District Council, Leicestershire County Council and Leicester City Council. However, I can confirm the arrangements that are in place for food sampling undertaken by this Council.*

*The Council does undertake a food sampling programme within the borough. This is specifically to undertake proactive checks of food which is either manufactured or sold within the area. Officers of the Food Safety section of the Council undertake approximately 350 samples each year in order to check for microbiological quality (mainly bacteriological such as E.coli and Salmonella). The type of food that is sampled is directed by the Health Protection Agency (HPA).*

*This microbiological sampling is carried out by the HPA Food, Water and Environmental Microbiology Laboratory, which is based at the Good Hope Hospital in Birmingham. The laboratory is recognised as an 'Official Control Laboratory' by the Food Standards Agency and is accredited to ISO 17025. It is also formally accredited by UKAS (United Kingdom Accreditation Service).*

*Food sampling is carried out by competent staff in line with the FSA's sampling guidelines.*

*The Council also undertake reactive type sampling of food, following the receipt of complaints. This may include microbiological tests and also contamination due to 'foreign bodies'. This type of analysis is undertaken by the 'Public Analyst', which is currently Cardiff Scientific Services, based in Cardiff. This laboratory is also UKAS accredited and also designated as an 'Official Control Laboratory', to ensure that samples are analysed in line with nationally agreed standards and will stand up to legal challenge.*

*The Council are required to use Laboratories that are designated by the FSA for 'Official Food Control'. A full list of these Laboratories are provided by the FSA on their website. All of these controls in place ensure that the Laboratories the Council use are as 'robust' as possible for food sampling undertaken by the Food Safety Service and in line with National Guidelines.*

*Where there are any Food Safety issues identified as part of this sampling process, if they relate to an individual premises, these are dealt with by the Food Safety Team, who ensure that relevant action is taken to resolve the problems. Where there are issues of national significance, which will involve the removal of products from sale, this is co-ordinated by the Food Standards Agency. This will also include, where necessary the publication of information concerning affected food premises.*

*The Council is not responsible for general compositional sampling of food, such as DNA testing, which is the responsibility of Trading Standards.*