

**COUNTY COUNCIL
21 SEPTEMBER 2016**

QUESTIONS FROM AREA ACTION PARTNERSHIPS

QUESTION FROM DURHAM AAP

Whilst a traffic scheme to support the flow through of traffic at peak hour is to be welcomed the recent bridgeworks and roadworks over the course of the year have possibly deterred potential city visitors from venturing in. Could the council have shortened the amount of disruption by having late/night working for the duration of the recent installation of the SCOOT system? Also, if the Council feels there may have been a reduction in visitors, have plans been developed to help attract them back to the city?

RESPONSE

I would like to thank Durham AAP for their question.

As Members will be aware it is the intention of the SCOOT system to provide;

- More predictable journey times which will help residents and visitors alike;
- A better managed City to help deliver future events as well as deal with unforeseen incidents; and
- A better quality environment with improved pedestrian connections and helping to address air quality issues.

However, in order to deliver these improvements, some short term disruption is sadly inevitable. Being at the heart of the City means that the work impacts equally on residents as well as those travelling on our highways. We simply cannot carry out noisy construction work overnight on an ongoing basis next to hotels and residential property. However, when it comes to the most disruptive elements of the works such as the ongoing resurfacing, night time closures have become essential. As Members will be aware the project as a whole has been undertaken when traffic levels are traditionally at their lowest through the summer months.

Throughout the project we have constantly monitored journey times through the City and, whilst commuters may have been delayed or diverted, the journey times for people travelling out of peak, perhaps for shopping or leisure, have remained largely unaffected.

We have striven throughout the project to ensure that work is undertaken in such a manner as to reduce the delays people experience travelling into the City, whilst making sure they are kept up to date with approximately 430,000 hits on our website in connection with the project. Interim figures show no significant reduction on visitor numbers.

It is inevitably true that allowing more traffic lanes to be closed, together with more overnight, working could have delivered the project over a shorter period. However, this would have inevitably resulted in significantly more disruption to commuters and visitors, and more sleepless nights for residents and hotel guests.

As always with projects of this nature it is a matter of balance, however, when you consider that we are nearing completion of two major junction improvements in the City, on time and on budget, then perhaps that balance has been achieved.

QUESTION FROM STANLEY AAP

Regeneration of Stanley is still one of the main priorities for the AAP, can the Council update residents of Stanley about what discussions have taken place regarding the development sites in the town and what support is in place for existing businesses and new start-ups through Business Durham to increase employment in the area?

RESPONSE

Firstly, I'd like to thank Stanley AAP for their question.

The Council are in regular discussions with the owners of all the major development sites in the town and continue to work with them to achieve redevelopment in line with the agreed masterplan for Stanley. Due to today's difficult retail environment progress can be slow, but it is being made.

I'm delighted to state that we've recently agreed the sale of the former bus station site and other land we've purchased to enable a new retail development which we expect to be the subject of public consultation before Christmas.

We are also working with the owners of some of the key buildings in the town centre such as the old Board School and the Elite building site as they move forward.

The Council is investing £400,000 in the current works to Front Street as part of a package of works that with partner contributions will have totalled investment of £1.2million over the last couple of years.

Alongside these public realm improvements we have worked jointly with the private sector to improve retail premises in the town. This has seen an investment of £150,000 to improve 7 key business premises. It means we've helped new and expanding businesses and brought back to life underperforming or vacant premises and it has already created 14 new jobs and safeguarded many more.

Beyond the physical regeneration we're also focussing on how we support businesses to grow and create employment.

We have just launched the Smart Stanley project to help local businesses move online and are also making sure people with business ideas can do some test trading using the regular market.

Business Durham are delivering fortnightly drop in sessions at Tanfield Lea Business Centre and continue to work with Derwentside Enterprise Agency to deliver 1:1 coaching sessions for businesses. We have also recently established an online 'chat now' facility for businesses to contact Business Durham with their support queries to improve prompt access to business support services.