

County Council

27 March 2024

Questions and Responses

Question from Mr Graham Thomas (not in attendance)

HS2 Devolved £73m

I would like to ask if NW County Durham, Consett and Stanley in particular, will benefit from this money. We miss out quite significantly - the majority of monies goes to go to Durham City and South of the county, it appears.

The roads around here are potholed and poor, and the bus services to and from Durham and Newcastle end way too early.

We need more EV chargers too.

Response:

Following the recent news on the £73m Local Transport Fund allocation, Durham County Council are currently undergoing a prioritisation exercise, related to the allocation of this funding for capital activities. It is intended this prioritisation will be complete by the Summer, reflecting expenditure requirements in 25/26 and 26/27. The prioritisation exercise will consider a number of key factors, including deliverability and value for money.

Highway maintenance investment reflects condition prioritisation, informed by condition surveys and asset planning. The Local Transport Funding is not available for maintenance purposes. The planned maintenance investment in North Durham and North West Durham Constituencies in 24/25 financial year is approximately £3.2m.

£4.135m was awarded to Durham County Council from the LEVI Grant for the installation of circa 250 chargers, with a geographical balance and spread across the County. A further LEVI bid for £3m is currently being prepared for submission in July 2024, which would see a circa of 200 chargers installed on Housing Association land, again reflecting a geographical balance across the County.

Installations have started on a successful ORCs (on street residential charging scheme) in the Derwent valley area for 8 charge points, and a Regional Levelling Up Fund bid with 16 locations identified, both of which were granted in 2023, these include rapid and fast EV charge points. Parking standards adopted by the Council also require the installation of charging equipment, as a requirement of planning applications.

Question from Diane Inglis, The Faithful Durhams

Our question today is brought about because we were promised something different to what is actually happening at the Museum site. It was going to be about the DLI and not Art Galleries and the desecration of ashes. We were promised on separate occasions by the Joint Administration on during site visits that topsoil would be lifted prior to work beginning. Our recent reply from the Chief Executive of Council states that "no ashes were in the area currently worked on" – we dispute this and have submitted an FOI request asking the Council to provide a copy of the report for the evidence of this. Whilst we await this response can we formally request that work stops on the grounds immediately until a respectful solution can be found for the mess that has been created?

Response:

Before I respond to your question, I must make a clarification as you misquote the letter to you from the Chief Executive. What it said was:

Before the tree removal works began, our contractors were made aware that ashes may have been scattered across the grassed area in front of the pond and the sloped area leading down to it. The tree felling area has been taped off and any trees felled are done so away from where ashes may have been scattered.

In 2022, the Cabinet of Durham County Council agreed to bring the DLI Museum and Art Gallery back into use as a vibrant community asset and world class visitor attraction refurbished and expanded to include dedicated space for the display of key objects from the DLI Collection, as well as spaces to house world class temporary exhibitions to attract residents and visitors. These plans have not changed.

We have carried out essential works to remove some existing trees and shrubs in order to prepare the site ahead of construction commencing. Where possible and suitable we have retained the felled trees and chippings on site to reuse within the grounds as potential natural footways and external furniture.

The removal of the trees was included in the relevant planning application approved on 16th February 2023 and which was subject to public consultation.

We know the grounds have a strong historical and personal significance to many people. The council has no record of any permissions granted for the scattering of ashes on the site. However, throughout the project we have worked closely with key stakeholders, including the official DLI veteran association and affiliates, to understand the wishes of the veteran community. We are aware that ashes may have been scattered across the grassed area in front of the pond and the sloped area leading down to it. As a result, we have taken significant steps to treat these areas with sensitivity and respect. We have been clear throughout that our intention is to carefully remove the topsoil from these areas before construction works commence, and to preserve and carefully re-lay the soil in a new reflective garden area.

Question from Mr Stephen Ashfield

As Chair of Shincliffe Parish Council and a concerned resident, I seek clarity on a critical issue affecting our community's safety, specifically regarding the Council's implementation of the Department for Transport's Circular 01/2006 guidelines for setting local speed limits.

Can the council provide an update on whether the assessment for village status under the Department for Transport's Circular 01/2006 has been carried out for areas like Shincliffe, and if so, what measures are being taken to ensure the implementation of the recommended 30mph speed limits in accordance with this directive?

Thank you for addressing this matter of public safety and community.

Response:

The assessment for village status, under the Department for Transport's Circular 01/2013, has been carried out and reviewed, on a number of occasions, most recently 2019, for the area of Shincliffe adjacent to A177. On each occasion the reasonable minimum criteria for the definition of what constitutes a village, for the purpose of applying a village speed limit of 30 mph, has not been met and since 2019, there has been no fundamental development within the vicinity that would warrant a status change. Therefore, in accordance with the directive, no measures are being taken to implement a 30mph limit.

Question from Mr Matthew Tough

My question relates to HMOs in East Durham. Does the Council consider that they are keeping in line with their duty under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 by allowing HMOs when they are aware that the houses will have visitors who will stay the night as in every other type of accommodation, making them immediately overcrowded and therefore allowing widespread Criminal Offences to occur for every HMO in East Durham given that the Council have no powers to prevent visitors from doing this?

Response:

The Council is responsible for the regulation of housing conditions in houses in multiple occupation (HMOs).

In line with relevant housing legislation we have adopted standards for all houses in multiple occupation which stipulate minimum space requirements for rooms which are intended to be used as sleeping accommodation to prevent overcrowding.

The council will take appropriate action in relation to any HMO which fails to meet these minimum standards or comply with occupancy requirements. Notwithstanding the above, any HMO or private tenant or house owner has a right to have visitors in their home. As such the Council is not at liberty to impose restrictions on visiting guests and it is not reasonable to expect the Council to know where and when visiting guests are staying overnight. The occupancy number of an HMO is based on those who will live in the property and does not include guests of the resident.

The Council has a duty under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to consider the impact of all their functions and decisions on crime and disorder in their local area. In this regard, the Council undertakes its statutory duties and uses its available powers to improve housing conditions and prevent crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour.

Should there be any concerns about any individual HMO within County Durham particularly in relation to housing condition, overcrowding or anti social behaviour then these should be reported to the Council so that the matter can be investigated, and appropriate action taken, as necessary.