

COUNTY COUNCIL

1 APRIL 2015

QUESTION FROM MR K ROBSON, VICE-CHAIR OF GREATER AYCLIFFE RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

Publicity and consultation

After it came to the notice of the public, the plans to reduce lighting on the A167 caused alarm, how many members of the public were consulted from the 500000 residents of County Durham.

Health and safety

Is the Council happy that Health and Safety considerations have been applied and are relevant to the decision taken to remove some lights on the A167 define safe and rural?

Alternative possibilities

Have other alternatives been considered such as switching off alternative lights - modern, more efficient lamps and posts?

Response

Thank you for your question Mr Robson.

The Council's Street Lighting Energy Reduction Project involves the removal of street lights which are not required by British Standards and only where we believe it is safe to do so.

The Street Lighting Policy was approved by the Council's Cabinet on 20 November 2013 following extensive public consultation which included the opportunity for all residents in County Durham to contribute their views. The public consultation included all Area Action Partnerships, Town Councils and Parish Councils and various public meetings were held Countywide. The majority of responses were supportive of the Policy.

The project will achieve significant savings in energy and maintenance costs that will help to keep council tax levels down and help meet the unprecedented cuts in central government funding of over 40% that we have faced since 2011.

The project originally planned 7,000 street light removals but based on public feedback and a more detailed analysis - less than 4,000 street lights will be removed and we are very confident that public safety will be maintained in these areas.

The Council has also looked at alternative options and we are retrofitting existing street lights with more energy efficient LED bulbs wherever possible.

We have decided that switching off alternative street lights is not a safe enough practice as it would involve driving repeatedly from light to dark which reduces visibility for motorists.

With regard to Health and Safety, I would give Mr Robson my assurance that the Council has commissioned independent road safety auditors to carry out robust and detailed road safety risk assessments at each site where street lighting has been proposed for removal. This advice is shared with local Members and Town and Parish Councils for their comments to ensure that it reflects all relevant local factors.

If the risk assessment identifies any significant road safety issues that cannot be mitigated then the Council does not proceed with the removal.

I hope this answers Mr Robson's questions and gives him the assurance that he is looking for.

QUESTION FROM MR S ASHFIELD

I would like to ask the council about Freeman's Quay Pool Review Consultation.

First of all as a member of the public whose children can swim - one of them being over eight, they will sometimes go swimming on their own, where upon I might sit in the spectator's area and watch.

The Pool has undertaken a review of its current timetable but placed the advert and the questionnaire, behind the pool barriers, therefore excluding myself and other members of the public in this situation of the option of taking part in this consultation.

Would the council look into whether this resulted in key stakeholders being left out of the consultation process?

Response

I would like to thank Mr Ashfield for his question. I would like to assure him that we do value feedback from our customers.

The consultation was targeted towards swimmers, therefore information was placed in the entrance to the swimming changing rooms at Freemans Quay Leisure Centre. Information about the pending consultation was also sent to the swimming club in November 2014 and was acknowledged by the club in January 2015.

Subsequently, during the consultation, the club requested that the consultation period to be extended until 5th April 2015. They also requested that we meet with them post consultation. Both of these requests have been agreed and we will be meeting with the club regarding this matter later this month. Details of the consultation have also been available on the council website.

To date there have been 150 responses to the review which has been carried out under guidance from the Amateur Swimming Association.

I therefore do not accept that this consultation is not valid although. I would like to assure Mr Ashfield that we will be discussing this with the club whilst we would welcome any comments that he may have before 5th April 2015.