

COUNTY COUNCIL

22 July 2015

QUESTIONS FROM AREA ACTION PARTNERSHIPS

Question Received from East Durham Rural Corridor AAP (Durham Ask Initiative)

Given the severe financial challenges that face the Council, East Durham Rural AAP recognises the importance of the Ask initiative if community facilities and services are to be maintained. Indeed, through the work of Future Leisure in Coxhoe (FLiC), we have shown how local organisations can effectively manage critical facilities such as our local leisure centre. As an AAP we are keen to support the Council's Ask initiative and we would like to know what role we could play and what support will be available for local groups.

RESPONSE

Since launching the Durham Ask, the Council, along with our partners has been successful in securing £1.4 million to help support the initiative. This funding has meant we have been able to put in place a support team to work with organisations interested in taking on assets.

Experience from the successful community buildings project has shown it is essential to have hands on support for groups to ensure a facility is successfully transferred.

AAPs have an essential role in promoting the Ask and we are planning to carry out a series of presentations to AAPs in the near future on the Ask. These presentations will feature video clips from some of the groups that have made asset transfer work, including FLiC. Like you, we recognise how successful FLiC has been.

In addition to promotion, AAPs can play a vital role in providing the support team with information on local groups and local needs, as well as providing funding to support transfers.

AAPs have been critical to the success of the community buildings asset transfer process and I am sure they will be equally as important for the Ask.

Question Received from Chester-le-Street AAP (Introduction of 20mph Zones)

The AAP Board and the local community broadly welcome the introduction of the 20mph zones around key schools in our area.

It is appreciated that consultation is currently open until 31st July for people to comment on the proposed introduction of 20mph zones around 6 local schools.

Can the AAP ask how the Council's Highways Team plan to work with the AAP and other local community groups and organisations such as Parish Council's on their implementation and subsequent enforcement? It is recognised locally that the real success of this initiative will be ensuring that people change their driving behaviours and that there is a wider community understanding of why these changes are being brought in.

RESPONSE

A public consultation is underway which includes AAPs, community groups and town and parish councils. All feedback will be fully considered and amendments made to the proposal as appropriate.

The project includes an education and social marketing campaign to support the successful implementation of 20mph part time speed limits around schools.

This will encourage motorists to comply with the 20mph part-time limits and provide children with further road safety education to support walking and cycling.

Question Received from Chester-le-Street AAP (Digital Town Pilots)

Digital Durham represents a major opportunity to embed better broadband connectivity across the County. Can the AAP ask what are the Council plans regarding creating potential Wireless towns?

Chester-Le-Street benefits from many areas of great public open space in which free Wi-Fi could be utilised to better connect our community – Market Place, Riverside Park and the DCCC Cricket Ground for spectators.

The AAP would like to register its willingness to work with the Digital Durham Team to create any Wi-Fi town pilots and we potentially see the opportunities presented by the cricket club as a potential avenue to be considered.

RESPONSE

The Digital Durham Team has always recognised the importance of digital connectivity to the social and economic wellbeing of the county and its residents and this is a key objective in our ICT Service Plan.

We are making excellent progress with the superfast broadband rollout across the County and this has been recognised by the prime minister himself during a debate in the House of Commons.

Our Digital Durham programme has already enabled an additional 65,000 properties across the County to have access to effective broadband. By September 2016, 98% of the County will be covered which will be a fantastic outcome for residents, businesses and schools.

Town centre WiFi connectivity is a separate issue though. Most high street businesses have their own arrangements and a growing number of establishments are opening this up to the public.

We have approached the telecoms market on two separate occasions to provide free WiFi access within Durham City, but on both occasions the market has shown insufficient interest to make this a viable option and therefore our plans did not progress.

We keep trying though and we are working closely with a small team from the Stanley AAP on the 'Smart Stanley' project which aims to open up existing WiFi to all users in the Stanley area as a way of encouraging people to shop in the Stanley area and thereby improving the footfall in the town. Should this prove to be a success - it could be used within Chester le Street and other towns across the county.

So we will be in touch with the Chester le Street AAP to take up your offer should the Stanley project be a success and one that can be replicated in Chester le Street.