

COUNTY COUNCIL

18 APRIL 2018

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

Councillor C Martin

With Chester-le-Track closure at Chester-le-Street Railway Station. What is the Council doing to help minimize any disruption for passengers and ensure no further future reductions in services the station offers occurs?

Response

I would like to thank Cllr Martin for his question.

Whilst many similar sized stations in the UK have been unstaffed since the 1980s, Chester-le-Street has benefited from a local business, Chester-le-Track, who have been leasing and running the station as an independent operation for the past 19 years. Their business has been sustained by earning commission on the sale of tickets, but unfortunately, the increase in online purchases, e-tickets and 'single operator only' promotions has led to a decline in revenue from traditional ticket sales, to the extent that the business is no longer considered viable.

Whilst the loss of any local business is unwelcome, I am pleased to advise that this Council has been leading on discussions with Northern Rail, and as a result, the train operator has agreed to continue to provide a staff presence at the station. The ticket office will be staffed from 0730-1300 Monday – Saturday, and other facilities such as the waiting room and toilets will be open for use 6am to 6pm as previously.

The railway station at Chester-le-Street is an important asset to the town, providing residents and businesses with links to Tyneside, Durham and beyond. The station attracted nearly quarter of a million passenger journeys last year, and I can assure Members that supporting local transport opportunities such as this will continue to be a priority for this council.

Question from Councillor L Brown

Can information be provided regarding the changes to the standard start times for builders and developers? These are usually enforced by conditions put in place at the time a planning application is approved. I should like information regarding the original start times across the County and the newly amended times. I would also appreciate knowing who made this decision and who was consulted to reach it?

Response

Thank you for your question.

Planning officers regularly review their standard suite of recommended planning conditions. Construction times were subject to a recent review where it was felt appropriate to recommend a normal start time of 7.30 a.m. in the working week as opposed to 8 a.m. which was previously the usual standard. This change, which was made following discussion between Planning and Environmental Health Officers, reflects the times often applied elsewhere and fits with standard industry practice.

The recommended normal end time for construction is 6 p.m. during the working week and 2 p.m. on Saturdays for external works and 5 p.m. for internal works e.g. painting, decorating etc. No works are permitted on a Sunday or bank holidays.

Officers consider that the revised start time will ensure that the amenity of any neighbouring residents will be safeguarded at the time of day when they can reasonably be expected to have peace and quiet. However as with all planning conditions, these can be amended at Planning Committee if it is felt that the circumstance of a particular planning application merits this.

As an example, on a recent application in Sacriston, Committee changed the start time in the week, limited working hours at weekend and bank holidays, and limited access arrangements for heavy plant and delivery vehicles. This demonstrates it is possible for local Members to raise their concerns and for Committee to consider them.