

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

19 March 2024

Agenda Item 5 - Public Participation

Question from Dawn Wilson – Pewsey Community Area Partnership and Pewsey Vale Tourism Partnership

To

Cllr Richard Clewer – Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Military-Civilian Integration, Heritage, Arts, Tourism, Health and Wellbeing

Statement

Background

When this cabinet took the decision not to continue to fund VisitWiltshire last year the situation with the new arrangements for LVEPs was not clearly understood. It is true that there is some future uncertainty with an election looming so why would you throw away an organisation that can deliver so much pound for pound when the replacement is, what exactly? You speak about meeting targets. What are your targets for this coming year in increasing visitor numbers, events attended to attract visitors from abroad, delivering products via your website, targets for social media campaigns.

VisitWiltshire was created by and has been supported by Wiltshire Council over the last 13 years in a public/private partnership, and the partnership has successfully worked to support and grow our tourism Industry, promote local businesses, and create local jobs. Pewsey Vale Tourism Partnership members, partners and a number of market towns across Wiltshire agree with this statement and it is also demonstrated by the industry awards won by VisitWiltshire. Wiltshire therefore already has a highly regarded and highly performing organisation in place that is set up to be a successful LVEP.

This Cabinet decided against critical core funding of £150k over two years as an interim step to secure the LVEP status for Wiltshire. This equates to perhaps one or two officer's salary per year (gross), whereas VisitWiltshire can already provide more and expert staff. It was not made clear in the statements made on February 20th just exactly how support for tourism specifically is to be achieved going forward. Becoming an LVEP is not something Wiltshire Council can achieve alone. It is not fiscally responsible if the replacement for VisitWiltshire does not demonstrate better value for money.

Please note that there are now documented and recorded 30 other counties of the 48 in England, who have already become LVEPs. Are we to be left out?

(In February 2024, 4 new LVEPs were announced these were East Sussex, Brighton and Hove and West Sussex, Lincolnshire and Rutland, Leicester and Leicestershire

and Tees Valley. They joined the programme alongside 26 existing LVEPs which included three North East DDP pilot LVEPs: NewcastleGateshead Initiative, Visit County Durham and Visit Northumberland. The pilot was a valuable opportunity to prove the DDP concept, and the impact that the model can have on growing the visitor economy, strengthening the case for future funding.

<https://www.visitbritain.org/resources-destination-partners/local-visitor-economy-partnership-lvep-programme>)

Summary, Facts and Estimated Losses

Wiltshire Council should be actively supporting a Wiltshire LVEP as an urgent priority and Visit Wiltshire should be leading it. It is more cost effective currently than some ephemeral idea in the future which is not even defined, let alone set up.

There is insufficient time, in our opinion, for Wiltshire Council officers, even if extremely gifted and qualified, to be able to deliver to the current level and standards of VisitWiltshire in twelve months.

Wiltshire will be excluded from VisitEngland/ VisitBritain national and international marketing activity and according to their calculations, lose £5.6million in direct and indirect international visitor spend per annum **from April 2024**.

These losses are significant, and Wiltshire, its towns and all the businesses that are involved in the visitor economy both directly and indirectly will suffer. Pre Covid, the income derived from visitors to Wiltshire was £1.5 billion per annum supporting 29,000 jobs. The marginal revenue required to create a job in the UK tourism industry is estimated to be around £54,000, therefore £50m of revenue equates a potential loss of 930 jobs in the sector.

When the Pewsey Vale Tourism Partnership has spoken to Wiltshire Councillors about this situation, the response has referred to a new walking app – Explore Wiltshire – and they say that there has been significant investment in this app and it will replace VisitWiltshire. Whilst the new walking app is welcome, it does not **in any way** replace the work that VisitWiltshire does.

Question (24-16(Q))

- a) Why exactly are you so against funding Visit Wiltshire for a further 2 years?

Response

Like all local authorities, Wiltshire Council faces consistent pressure on its budgets. Given inflationary and demographic pressures, there has been a level of reduction required to non-statutory services.

As a result, the budget (as approved in Feb 2023 by Full Council) includes no extension to our existing contract with VisitWiltshire as it ends in March 2024.

- b) How will your new tourism plan demonstrate that Wiltshire is a county invested in tourism with a competent, value for money, Destination Management Organisation/Department?

Response

We have spoken to VisitBritain and VisitEngland about our intention to align our Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) considerations with the Government's devolution plans for Wiltshire.

As per Government policy, we are also working to integrate the Local Enterprise Partnership (SWLEP) business support functions into the council, and we would also like to align these functions with both the LVEP and devolution, so that we can provide consistency to both businesses and visitors.

As there are several aspects of the above are yet to be decided, we are continuing our conversations with VisitBritain and VisitEngland as we look to provide the right LVEP solution for Wiltshire.

- c) How **specifically** does Wiltshire Council plan to match or even exceed the following outputs valued by VisitWiltshire's partners in the next two years?

Outcomes to include:

- Travel Trade Group – access to the international Travel Trade events where places to visit and things to do, as well as accommodation and packages are presented to group travel buyers.
- Partner Training – regular training sessions for Partners of VisitWiltshire providing easy and affordable access to quality training courses.
- Attending Industry Meetings – to make sure that the Wiltshire voice is heard and to understand issues and changes in the industry.
- Managing the Brown Signs process (in conjunction with Wiltshire Council) – to ensure people can find the place they are visiting, the Brown Signs are essential, particularly in rural areas.
- Promoting Wiltshire via an excellent website, as well as on social media – Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram.
- Providing national and international reach – as a town or small business, it is impossible to get the reach that VisitWiltshire commands. That is why it is important for local DMOs to be VisitWiltshire partners so that we have access to the national and international markets. For example, in 2023:
 - 1.1million unique visitors to the website
 - Brand reach in excess of 30 million
 - 1.6million reach on social media
- Monthly newsletters – to the public and to the Partners.
- Production of printed and digital publications – for example, Visitor Guide, Visitor Map, Towns & Villages.

- Strategic reports – for example the Accommodation Futures report.
- Familiarisation Passport – to educate hospitality businesses on places to visit in the county.
- Other things – such as an image library for partners to use and general advice as well as competitions.
- Work with partners like GWR and the Landscape Trusts on advertisements to attract new visitors

Response

While we recognise the activities set out below, our considerations around the effectiveness of this support identified that in 2019, VisitBritain identified a spend of £92M in Wiltshire by international visitors, compared to £135M in Gloucestershire. Wiltshire sees the lowest numbers across all categories in the Southwest.

Through our Wiltshire Towns program, we are investing £1,000,000 a year into supporting and promoting our towns with over half of this funding being designed to support and enhance the tourism offer that our towns provide. This comprises a number of activities set out below. These have been informed by the Institute of Place Management to target Wiltshire's challenges in reaching visitors, and are designed to increase our reach and visitor attractiveness including:

- **Explore Wiltshire, an app demonstrating Wiltshire's unique character and heritage (due to expand beyond its existing 10 towns shortly)**
- **Generating Activity Grants, funding to town councils to put on events, football driving activities and to develop strategic initiatives such as new tourism products.**
- **Events. Wiltshire, an app and web platform advertising the county's offer in events and attractions**
- **The Wiltshire Marque, a programme to support the counties food and artisan producers to showcase their offer and enhance Wiltshire's experience economy**

This program of activities, designed to enable our parishes, towns and city to shape their own unique selling point and offer is already starting to show results with the latest spend data for Salisbury for example showing a much stronger performance than South West and National data last year

d) We would ask that Wiltshire Council reviews its decision to remove funding from VisitWiltshire. Please act before it is too late.

Response

This saving was approved by Full Council in February 2023 and again in February 2024. Cabinet are unable to amend the decision.

In addition, the entrustment agreement was engaged under a regulatory framework termed State Aid which has been replaced by a new UK Subsidy Control regime. Now the entrustment agreement is coming to an end, any replacement funding would need to go via the new UK Subsidy Control regime and therefore may be subject to competitive tender. We cannot simply extend the agreement.

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Agenda Item 7 – Air Quality Action Plan

Questions from Jeremy Wire

To

Cllr Dominic Muns, Cabinet Member for Waste and Environment

Statement (24-17(Q))

In analysing the one way system (Option A) under the Bradford on Avon Traffic Study modelling, AtkinsRealis concluded that there would be 'significant increases in congestion due to significant increase in vehicle flows on Mount Pleasant, New Road and Springfield (as a result of one-way system)'. Furthermore, it can be seen that the town aside from the monitoring area will suffer, particularly from option A (the one way system), which, the conclusion continues: 'Compared to the Do Nothing scenario, results in a greater increase in Nitrogen Oxides and Particulate Matter emission than Options B and C'.

(5.3 Objective 3: Improve air quality in the town) states: 'The increases are most significant for Option A, which results in a 15% increase in NO₂ emissions in the AM-peak and 27% increase in the PM-peak, in addition to a 13% increase in Particular Matter emissions in the AM-peak and a 15% increase in the PM-peak' and 'For example, Option A results in increased congestion on New Road and Mount Pleasant for eastbound traffic, and on Frome Road for northbound traffic, leading to an increase in emissions at these locations'.

It cannot be justified that a measure (A9) in an AQAP has been recommended when it has already been modelled as creating more pollution elsewhere than the alternatives. Option C is the scheme recommended by the consultants and, for the sake of the best outcome for air quality overall, should be the scheme recommended here.

Question

Will the Cabinet recognise that Option C is the scheme recommended by the consultants and, for the sake of the best outcome for air quality overall, should be the scheme recommended here?

Response

The consultants have not recommended any solution but have presented an assessment of the modelling against the objectives. The next step is for Bradford on Avon Town Council to consult with residents on their preferred solution. Following that Wiltshire Council will consider options and costs.

The Public Protection team has not yet analysed the AtkinsRealis report so is unable to comment on Option C at this current time. It is understood that the consultants used the VISSIM model for assessing air quality impacts, and it is noted that this model only considers tail pipe emission data which is not directly comparable with the dispersion modelling (such as ADMS) which provides a more accurate estimation of air quality impacts on residential receptors.

Further work will be done in this area once the consultant's report has been fully assessed.

Agenda Item 7 – Air Quality Action Plan

Questions from Margaret Willmot

To

Cllr Dominic Muns, Cabinet Member for Waste and Environment

Statement (24-18(Q))

Many points which I submitted in response to the consultation on the Air Quality consultation in August 2023 have neither been incorporated into the Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) to be adopted, nor referred to in the Public Consultation feedback report which is presented at Item 7 Appendix 2. This includes quite straightforward suggestions – e.g. that Reference 30 should refer to the full July 2018 version of the Salisbury Transport Strategy rather than the earlier 16-page summary document which is sadly lacking in detail.

Historically the Salisbury Transport Strategy was put forward as being a model on how to solve the City's traffic problems without building new roads, which makes it particularly disheartening that the report still expresses the Council's support for the principle of a bypass for Salisbury (see Salisbury measure A5, AQAP p.47).

Question

- a) Does Wiltshire Council support the principles of modal shift and the sustainable transport measures which are put forward in the Salisbury Transport Strategy and referenced in the adopted Wiltshire Core Strategy?

Response

Changes were made to the AQAP following the consultation process, but it was not possible to incorporate all the suggested amendments. However, the AQAP will be a living document and subject to change throughout its life. Wiltshire Council strongly supports modal shift and recognises its contribution to reducing traffic related air pollution.

- b) Why does the AQAP include reference to support for a Salisbury bypass but not to progress on the 45 schemes identified in the Salisbury Transport Strategy which were put forward as an alternative to building a bypass and which have the potential to lead to modal shift and improved air quality?

Response

The AQAP acknowledges the benefits of a bypass but recognises that delivery of such a scheme does not sit within the Council's remit, but has to be part of the wider Department of Transport strategic plan for the road network to the south coast. The AQAP feeds into Local Transport Plan 4 which will reference other schemes (such as the Salisbury Transport Strategy) and supports active travel, modal shift, addressing air quality, sustainability and maintaining a thriving economy.

Agenda Item 5 – Public Participation

Questions from Dr Jimmy Walker

To

Cllr Tamara Reay, Cabinet Member for Transport and Assets

Statement (24-19(Q))

I note from the Active Travel England website that “Active Travel England has been tasked with delivering the government’s objective of ensuring 50% of trips in England’s towns and cities are walked, wheeled or cycled by 2030. To meet this target, we will work alongside local authorities to ensure people have the high-quality infrastructure needed to make active travel part of their everyday lives. Achieving this objective in just a few years will be challenging, so we will focus our resources on councils that have the 3 core ingredients to succeed: strong leadership, ambition and a track record of delivery.”

We are very concerned that the Wiltshire's Active Travel Capability (ATCA) Score is 1!

A rating of 1: **Rating 1 is defined as** “Some local leadership with basic plans and isolated interventions that do not yet obviously form a plan for a network”

At the recent COGS Active Travel Conference one of the priorities was for Wiltshire Council provide support and funding for active travel.

The current score of 1 is insufficient to provide leadership ambition and does not reflect a track record of delivery.

Questions

- a) What were the most recent ATCA local leadership, plans, and delivery record scores?

Response

We do not yet know the outcome of the most recent Active Travel Capability Assessment which was submitted in December 2023.

- b) You are obviously a leader with ambition – how are you going to actually going to demonstrably increase the active travel score to leverage funding to support active travel and mobility equity in Wiltshire.

Response

The council is committed to promoting active travel and is working with Active Travel England to deliver schemes and improve our capability assessment score. We are currently preparing Wiltshire's fourth Local Transport Plan (LTP4) and an Active Travel Strategy will be a key element of LTP4 that will demonstrate the council's ambitions and its important role going forward.

- c) When will the LCWIP for Salisbury be provided back to the community groups who have not seen the latest drafts.

Response

The draft Salisbury LCWIP is currently being updated following the responses received from the public consultation and it is intended that a Cabinet Member report will be published in May.

- d) When will Wiltshire Council start to implement active travel strategies in Salisbury city centre to manage the excessive traffic flow and gridlock that is currently blighting the city centre.

Response

The Council is already implementing active travel schemes in the city. The Salisbury River Park scheme has significant pedestrian and cyclist provision, including a new pedestrian bridge and improvements to the coach park. The Fisherton Gateway scheme is providing an enhanced pedestrian route from the city centre to the railway station, where the forecourt is being improved. Further schemes are in the process of being developed.

- e) What strategies are WC implementing to manage gridlock one Fisherton St and the Riverpark project are completed.

Response

It is appreciated that there has been disruption in the city because of the current works, and because of recent urgent unplanned public utilities work. The River Park and Fisherton Gateway schemes are both major investments to improve provision in the city for pedestrians and cyclists, and to improve the environment for visitors, businesses, and residents. The River Park and Fisherton Gateway schemes are approaching completion and the temporary traffic management measures will be removed. The works to improve the station forecourt will be continuing but should not adversely affect traffic flows and movement within the city.