

Wiltshire Council

Council

16 June 2020

Item 9 – Covid 19 Update and Financial Position

From Ian James – Bremhill Parish Council

**To Councillor Philip Whitehead – Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member
for Economic Development**

Statement (20-10)

This statement is made in the light of the COVID 19 virus that has overtaken this country so quickly. Wiltshire Council has responded magnificently to the virus, supporting many in the community, and our thanks go to the hard-working support staff of Wiltshire Council.

The virus has made many of our residents realise that it is better to work from home rather than get in their cars and travel to work and back.

50% of the population are now working from home, and many will choose to do this in the future.

Wiltshire is the largest and one of the poorest counties in England, should the Council continue to pursue the HIF bid with Homes England at a cost of well over £5m which the Council can no longer afford when it is now in a deficit of over £50m?

The country is one of the worst hit economically, only yesterday stock markets in the UK and America plunged 4.5%, a second spike is threatening America. We are looking to 15% unemployment, and the economic outlook is bleak with a drop of 25% for this quarter.

In view of the very poor economic outlook, the dire state of the Council's finances where a Section 114 may need to be declared would it not be sensible for the Council to withdraw from the HIF bid to protect what money the Council has left. To be seen spending £5m on consultants to continue this flawed bid will be seen as Emperor Nero fiddling while Wiltshire Council's finances burned.

The main thread throughout the HIF bid was increased traffic congestion, which by all accounts was anecdotal. There will be a change in working practices reducing traffic congestion, reducing the noxious gases in our environment making it safer to walk out on our streets. There will be no requirement for link road.

There is a strong possibility that the Government may not come riding over the hill with the cavalry to save the Council, the Council cannot put together a budget now, it

is up to Council to put pressure on the Cabinet to reverse this folly of a road to nowhere as there is now no requirement for a link road.

Should any road be constructed, the plots will be sold to developers, and they will remain empty for many years as the recession bites. Where will the buyers come from with 15% unemployment? It has taken 10 years to complete building at Birds Marsh, Rawlings Green site was proposed in the last Housing Allocation Plan in 2016 and no construction has started and still this site sees no sign of starting, a bridge over the railway line is a major obstacle. And what is next a bridge over the river Avon? is this included in the £75m?

Land to the East of Chippenham is part of Bremhill Parish and is valued landscape with the rivers Marden and Avon part of a significant ecological site. A Neighbourhood Plan stands in the path of the road, the Planning Inspector Anne Skippers stated that no development should occur to the east of the cycle track. And the proposed road is not part of the current Local Plan. It is being imposed on local people with little support.

This HIF bid is at risk as the Council has stated, should the Council continue in such dire Financial Times? You can look at the facts and draw your own conclusions and challenge the leadership to stop this project now. You may be responsible for a piece of infrastructure which will blight the countryside and never built on for many many years.