

Statement from Chris Caswill
Agenda Item 13 Future Chippenham Update

To Councillor Philip Whitehead Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Development

Statement

Like many others, I will not be attending the Cabinet meeting due to the coronavirus situation and government advice. I would still wish to make the following statement in relation to Item 13 on the agenda:

There are several reasons why this Item should not be decided on the 24th and postponed to a future date.

1. Cabinet should take proper account of the current coronavirus crisis, which is not even on the published agenda. The Cabinet is the Council's main executive body and the inclusion of a massive investment of time and resources for roadbuilding and no discussion of the virus crisis or the allocation of resources for it is itself a disturbing statement of the Cabinet's priorities.
2. The Cabinet – and Council - should be devoting any available financial resources, manpower and management effort to Children's and Social Services, to supporting elderly and vulnerable people to survive the virus, and also to going beyond central government efforts to help local businesses to survive.
3. It follows that Wiltshire Council should not be prioritising roadbuilding by approving over £5m from its own budget, nor the huge time and resources to progress the Future Chippenham project.
4. The timing of bringing the detailed plans for this controversial and expensive project into the public arena is wrong, not least at a time when public attention will be fully focused on the COVID crisis, and what individuals and businesses can do to survive it. The project has already been rushed through with almost no proper public consultation. They were not consulted prior to the HIF bid submission, nor are we subsequently allowed to see the details of the HIF bid.
5. The proposal to give massive delegated powers to unelected officials and their unspecified nominees is fundamentally undemocratic, irresponsible and frankly dangerous, and should be completely rethought.
6. In today's circumstances, and with the government ban on non-essential public gatherings it will not be possible to hold an effective public consultation in April – or for the foreseeable future - without putting public health at risk.
7. Specifically, the intention to commit large public resources to a roadbuilding project which is not supported by the current Local Plan and deliberately in advance of the current revision of that Plan is cynical and undemocratic. A

significant project of this kind must be evaluated as part of the local planning for Chippenham, Calne and the neighbouring villages.

For all these reasons, this item should be postponed until it has been suitably revised, includes within the Local Plan process, the proposed human and financial resources have been allocated to address the virus crisis and its effects, and circumstances allow for proper public engagement.