

**Wiltshire Council**

**Cabinet**

**24 March 2020**

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**Question from Helen Stuckey about Agenda Item 13 Future Chippenham Update**

**To Councillor Philip Whitehead Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Development**

Given the primary focus on everyone is now responding to the Coronavirus escalation, surely Wiltshire Council should neither be approving over £5m from its budget, nor the time and resources to progress the Future Chippenham project. There are 3 key reasons for voting against this project at this stage

**Question 1**

The council should be devoting all its financial resources, manpower and management effort to supporting elderly and vulnerable people to survive the virus, to assisting local businesses to survive and to provide essential services such as rubbish collection and policing.

**Response**

The Council is prioritising its response to the Corona virus outbreak ahead of every other matter and will do so for as long as is necessary. Approval to the Future Chippenham budget at Cabinet means that it can proceed when appropriate and when ranked against other Council priorities including care for the vulnerable keeping our environment clean and safe.

**Question 2**

This project has already been rushed through to reach the current stage - the public have not been consulted prior to the HIF bid submission, nor subsequently allowed to see the details of the HIF bid. Yet again, the council are seeking to cut corners with "a fast paced, compressed programme of work, with some work being done at risk and components being undertaken in parallel with others..... to achieve the timeline required and take advantage of the HIF Grant award." This is a controversial project that should not be unduly rushed through.

## **Response**

The Council is responding to a timetable set by Homes England and MHCLG in order to maximise the benefit to the County that the HIF award can bring over many years. That timetable was set long before the Corona virus outbreak impacted the Council and its services, as well as its parallel impact on Homes England and central government. Given this situation we are engaging in a dialogue with Homes England as to realistic timescales for contracting and for delivery.

Equally the Council is conducting a lot of work at this stage to ensure depth and thoroughness of early site investigation, knowing that this programme has to pass through planning on its own merits, and will be subject to all the usual disciplines and controls of the planning regime.

## **Question 3**

How will the public consultation "planned for late April 2020 be possible with the Government ban on all non-essential gatherings. Yet again it appears that the council is trying to railroad this through without adequate public consideration!

## **Response**

First of all the answer to Question 2 above also refers.

The Council across its full range of services is significantly affected by the Corona virus outbreak and its response to the needs flowing from that will take precedence.

Equally the Council will not compromise its intention to consult with the public about many aspects of the Future Chippenham programme and that will take place as soon as it is safe and practical to do so.

The first such engagement will be to seek review and comment on route options for the road to be funded by the HIF award which we had hoped to commence in late April. As you indicate it will not be possible to hold public events at this point in time. As an alternative we are looking at technological methods to begin the consultation process, to be followed up with appropriate events when it is safe to do so.

As you will know a great many factors must be accounted for in determining the route of a new road from archaeology, ground conditions, engineering options suitability for its intended purpose, among many others. Included in these factors are the views of the public and the Council will only determine a preferred route when the public's views have been received. Once every factor has been considered and a preferred route is available that too will be offered for consultation before being finalised and becoming part of the subsequent planning application.