

## **Council – 8 April 2013**

### **Transport and Environment Progress Report of Councillor Ansell, Portfolio Holder**

Services within my portfolio are important to residents, businesses and shoppers, throughout the borough. Transport services are essential to enable efficient travel around the borough in a way that is both safe and convenient. We are responsible for over 500 miles of highway and manage 58 car parks. Environmental services such as refuse collection, recycling and street cleaning are important basic services while pollution control is vital to the quality of life of residents in general and to their health in particular.

Transportation makes a vital contribution to the local economy and serves as an important catalyst to aid its recovery. We are working closely with the Local Enterprise Partnerships, the Integrated Transport Authority and nearby Councils to promote regeneration and economic success.

With the major announcement of the HS2 extensions to the north of the country, we are endeavouring to ensure that the existing local rail network is upgraded and good connections are achieved to ensure benefits are fully realised for Walsall businesses and residents.

Particular mention should be made of the Darlaston Strategic Development Area project where, following government approval, site works commenced in February. Subject to addressing any objections received to the Compulsory Purchase Order, we hope to submit an application for £14.3m government grant in the spring. This project will help stimulate major investment in new employment opportunities benefiting the area and the borough.

The contract for the delivery of the Highways Maintenance Service was extended to April 2015 and we have delivered 66 carriageway maintenance schemes treating a total length of 12 miles and 53 footway schemes involving a length of more than 13 miles. The overall expenditure on highways maintenance was around £6m. The government allocated this Council an additional £352,000 for 2013/14 to assist in addressing issues with highways condition. In deciding where best to spend this, the emphasis will be on areas which encourage job creation.

Consultation has commenced on the proposals for the replacement of York's Bridge at Pelsall.

As with all areas of the country, Walsall's roads continue to be affected by works carried out by the utility companies. Recent examples include the major gas works in the Pelsall area. I can reassure members that my officers carefully coordinate these works to minimise disruption to the travelling public and will be carrying out major resurfacing along Wolverhampton Road near to the Finger Post junction and York's Bridge after the water replacements works are completed in the summer of 2013.

Following a successful funding bid, we have carried out several infrastructure improvements across the borough including traffic signal upgrades in Caldmore with further works planned for the spring.

A major concern in the borough is inappropriate parking on verges and the Council has recognised this by allocating £250,000 to implement schemes over the next year in consultation with Area Partnerships.

During the year, my team helped ensure the success of national events related to the Queen's Jubilee celebrations and the Olympic Torch Relay event in June.

The review of car parking within Walsall town centre has progressed and, working with the private sector, we will be bringing forward options to improve both the quality and location of spaces.

Turning to street lighting, we implemented the first phase of an 'invest to save' project in Bloxwich where new LED lighting has reduced operating costs and carbon emissions. Phase 2, in Leamore, is almost complete. The Council's public lighting contractor, Amey, has also installed floodlighting to illuminate the Ellie Simmons post box free of charge in Aldridge town centre.

We delivered a major junction improvement scheme at the Rosum Junction in Leamore and consulted residents and businesses about the possible closure of the Bloxwich Level Crossing. We have also promoted Walsall's rail ambitions including the Chase Line electrification, Aldridge Station, and reinstatement of the Walsall to Stourbridge freight line.

The performance of the winter service last year again deserves a mention for the way in which the team worked to keep the roads clear and safe for motorists.

My team has implemented a number of road safety improvement and sustainable travel schemes during the year and, working with schools and Walsall College, has again promoted road safety amongst young people. There has also been a successful initiative with the health service to tackle childhood obesity.

It was pleasing to note that there was national recognition for the Council's A\*Stars initiative. This involves working with schools across the borough to address issues around congestion, air pollution, unhealthy living & road safety and involves.

The Council's Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment has been approved by the government and significant progress has been made on the development of the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy.

We have formally declared the former Willenhall Town Gasworks site as contaminated land and made significant progress through the subsequent technical assessment and legal consultation process. The next stage will be the formal determination of liability and continued liaison with those companies and residents involved.

Turning to environmental services, my team has investigated 450 environmental complaints in the past 12 months and continues to regulate over 100 companies through the Environmental Permit regime. The team has also secured significant government grant funding to support the West Midlands Low Emission Towns and Cities Programme.

We have run an effective campaign to reduce the amount of contamination in our recycling collections, reducing contamination from over 17% in autumn 2012 to between 7% and 8% in January 2013. This has helped our efforts to recycle as much household waste as possible whilst maintaining an income from the collection.

We have restructured Street Pride to incorporate Green Spaces, delivering savings in the region of £650,000 per year. This has created a flexible workforce capable of taking the Service forward in a customer focussed way.

We have reviewed our commercial and domestic waste collection activities, changing the way we deliver some services and reduced the number of collection crews, saving around £400,000 per year with no impact to the customer.

The Waste to Energy project with Staffordshire County Council is progressing well and construction of the new plant in South Staffs is virtually complete. Commissioning of the plant is on target and we are scheduled to start delivering waste from our residual waste collections in the autumn of 2013 with the majority of our waste being disposed of via the new plant from the spring of 2014. This will divert waste from landfill, create energy to supply the National Grid whilst reducing our waste disposal costs.

We are renewing our Household Waste Recycling Centre Contract, with a new contract due to commence in April 2014. The two existing Centres will remain and it is intended that the new contract will further minimise the amount of waste sent to landfill and maximise the amount of waste recycled.

A further review of the Street Cleansing service is underway with the feasibility of operating a 7 day a week service currently being considered. These arrangements seek to maximise the use of equipment and deliver further significant financial savings.

Investment in transport and the environment is fundamental to making Walsall a great place to live, work and play. We are committed to improving transport networks and environmental services that support the growth and development of Walsall's economy and protect the environment. This is challenging, in times of unprecedented financial restraint, but the performance of our services shows that we are making real progress towards this goal.

**Councillor T Ansell**

**Portfolio Holder for Transport & Environment  
22 March 2013**