

COUNTY COUNCIL – 7 FEBRUARY 2023

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

1. Question from Gregory-George Collins, Heathfield

Background

With effect from 17 October 2022 the former Leisure Centre at Heathfield Community College passed back to the school for curriculum use only following the end of the WDS/ESCC agreement. With effect from Monday 17 October the Leisure Centre became part of the Heathfield Community College campus. The college governors had no objection in principle to facilities at the Leisure Centre being rented out to local sports/leisure clubs in the same way that other facilities at the College are made available. However, the wording of the decision of ESCC stated SPECIFICALLY that the centre was to be closed for all non-College use.

It is understood that the Governors at HCC have challenged this decision, and that, furthermore, they had expressed a hope, before Christmas, that HCC might be able to reach a position to bring facilities at the old Leisure Centre site into line with the arrangements for the rest of the campus, and make these facilities available for community groups and sport teams to hire.

Question

Why, on what basis, was the decision made to specifically close the former Leisure Centre facilities at Heathfield Community College to all non-College use even though other facilities on the campus are available to hire?

Response by the Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change

Dear Mr Collins

Thank you very much for your enquiry regarding Heathfield Leisure Centre.

The County Council had a lease agreement with Wealden District Council for the community operation of the Leisure Centre which expired in October 2022. In summer 2022, there was therefore a full public consultation survey to inform options for the leisure centre site following Wealden's decision not to renew the lease.

An analysis of the public consultation was provided to the Lead Member meeting on 20 September 2022. In that meeting a decision was made to cease offering a full range of community use at the Leisure Centre and the Leisure Centre site was therefore handed back to the college as forming part of their college curriculum facilities.

It is worth noting that Heathfield Leisure Centre is located on a separate site adjacent to the main Heathfield College campus. At the main Heathfield College campus there is currently ad hoc hiring of internal/external sports spaces outside of college hours to community groups. The college continues to use the Leisure Centre

site for its curriculum use. The college, like most schools, operates an extended school curriculum across the whole school campus outside college hours. At a future date, the College may approach the Council if it wished to consider dedicated community use within the Leisure Centre. The Council would take into account all the necessary considerations.

2. Question from Emily O'Brien, Lewes

Background

After my son was run over in 2018, crossing at the bus stop, I presented this council with a petition on the A259 speed limits between Seaford and Newhaven. As well as the multiple accidents and around Bishopstone junction and its endlessly delayed 'improvements', the petition pointed out the high and escalating level of accidents on the 'bends' and the fact that a 60mph speed limit is inappropriate for a road which has bus stops on either side, footpaths crossing over, and multiple bends, and in fact clearly against national guidance on speed limits.

East Sussex chose to ignore the petition. Then last year, as the level of accidents continued to escalate, chose to take the opposite approach – i.e. to introduce reflective bollards on the A259 bends, which have, as would be expected, increased the speed on this road.

Since then there has been a notable increase in serious accidents on the bends, which have included a fatality and which have also caused traffic chaos for miles around, as the road is regularly closed for lengthy stretches.

Question

My question to the lead member is firstly how much money was spent on the bollards, secondly by what amount has the rate of serious road accidents increased since their introduction, and thirdly whether you think their introduction was good value for money?

Response by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

I refer to your written question of 30th January 2023, in which I understand that you would like to know the cost of the reflective verge marker posts that were installed on the A259 between Seaford and Newhaven, by how much the Personal Injury Crash (PIC) rate has increased since their introduction and whether their introduction represented good value for money.

The bend in the road by Foxhole Farm was identified as a priority for a Local Safety Scheme (LSS) in 2020. The cost of the scheme was £9,205 and it was completed in December 2021.

A detailed analysis of the PIC's on this part of the A259 indicated that there had been 11 PIC's during the three-year review period (01/01/2017 and 31/12/2019) on the bends between Stud Farm and Denton roundabout. A full review of the crashes and

their causation factors indicated that it would be appropriate to introduce reflective verge marker posts on the bends in the road to help highlight the alignment of the road to drivers.

Since the scheme was completed the crash data, provided to us by the Police, indicates that there has been one fatal crash on the treated part of the A259 between 01/01/2022 and 30/09/2022. Early indications are that the new measures are effective in addressing the identified crashes. Until we have three years of after data, it is too soon to make a comparable assessment of the resulting difference in crash rates, but we will continue to monitor the site on an annual basis.

3. Question from Charlotte Keenan, Newick, East Sussex

Background

On the A272, between North Chailey, Newick and Piltdown, there are signs to motorists that the speed limit is 30, 50 or the national speed limit, there are warning signs that there are junctions, or traffic lights, and 'horses crossing' signs. But there are no signs indicating that motorists should slow down for people who might be crossing the road and no safety islands for pedestrians.

In fact, there is only one crossing for pedestrians (at Newick) in the middle of the whole four-mile stretch, despite there being residences, businesses and bus stops on both sides of what is a busy road, with almost non-stop traffic during the rush hours.

In this area it is mostly children and older people who use busses and who by necessity cross the road, whether the speed limit is 30 or 50. Those who are considered to be the most vulnerable and most at risk from incautious drivers.

I'm Newick resident, and I was disappointed to read that a petition brought by our neighbouring village along the A272, Piltdown, to reduce the speed limit through the village to 30, supported by the local Cllr Roy Galley, was rejected on the grounds that reducing the speed would make it more likely motorists would overtake, thereby making accidents more likely.

This is very fuzzy logic.

Where there is a rule, there is generally a convention. Where there is a convention, there is generally compliance.

Question

Please could I ask the Lead Member for Transport and Environment to reconsider her decision for Piltdown, and take into account that not everyone drives; that we need roads, and road signs that encourage motorists to respect not just horses, but also pedestrians, and that where we have likely vulnerable members of our rural communities crossing the road – to get to bus stops, businesses or their homes -- we have as an agreed rule and sensible convention, regular safety islands and lower speed limits.

Response by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

I refer to your written question of 30/01/2023. I understand that you would like me to reconsider my decision for the Piltdown report that was considered at my meeting on 16 January 2023 and introduce lower speed limits and traffic islands on this part of the A272.

The predominant factors that are considered when determining an appropriate speed limit for a road are the level of frontage development that is visible to drivers, and the average speed of traffic. Reducing the speed limit with traffic signs and road markings alone only reduces the average speed by about 1 or 2mph and only when it is obvious to a driver why the speed limit has been imposed. It is important that drivers are provided with a consistent message, so they understand what is expected of them as they enter different road environments.

The speed limits on this part of the A272 are the most appropriate for the road environments. Drivers may not automatically comply with a speed limit if they cannot see any obvious reason for it. If we were to introduce lower speed limits on the more rural parts of the road, it can lead to a wide discrepancy (or spread) of speeds, as some drivers will try to drive at the posted speed limit and others, not seeing the need for the speed limit, will continue to drive at higher speeds, resulting in inappropriate overtaking and a greater potential for collisions.

In respect to your request for traffic islands to be installed on this part of the A272, East Sussex County Council (ESCC) has a limited amount of funding to develop local transport improvements and we need to ensure that resources are targeted to those schemes of greatest benefit to local communities. To help us prioritise requests, ESCC has developed a process to determine which schemes should be funded through the Integrated Transport Programme. The request for new walk and cycle ways and safe crossing solutions on this part of the A272 was assessed but it did not meet the benchmark score required to enable them to be considered as part of the Capital Programme.

Although new walk and cycle ways with safer crossing solutions are not an identified priority for the County Council, I understand that Fletching Parish Council are going to commission East Sussex Highways to carry out a Feasibility Study to assess potential measures that could be introduced prior to a possible Community Match application.

The use of road signs is controlled by the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions (TSRGD). The guidance limits the types of traffic signs that can be placed on the public highway. It also states that warning signs should only be used to alert drivers to a potential danger that is not readily apparent. To be effective, warning signs should be used sparingly, as if we introduce too many, the effectiveness of the message provided by the signs becomes diluted.

The personal injury crash record on this part of the A272 will continue to be monitored to determine whether it is a priority for a future road safety intervention.

Note: Questions 4 and 5 relate to a similar issue. The answers to these questions are set out after questions 5 below.

4. The same or similar questions were asked by:

Nick Tigg, Lewes, East Sussex
Ralph Hobbs, Hastings, East Sussex
Charlie Whale, Brighton
Nicola Gover, Hastings, East Sussex
Jason Evans, Brighton
Nicola Harries, Brighton
Charmian Kenner, St Leonards-On-Sea, East Sussex
Adrienne Hunter, St Leonards-On-Sea, East Sussex
Nicky Blackwell, Lewes, East Sussex
Chris Saunders, St Leonards-On-Sea, East Sussex
Clare Shaw, Lewes, East Sussex
Mike Morrison, Brighton
John Hopkinson, Eastbourne, East Sussex
Carolyn Beckingham, Lewes, East Sussex
Kate Christie, Forest Row, East Sussex
Michael Coyne, Crowborough, East Sussex
Adam Rose, Eastbourne, East Sussex
Penny Steel, Brighton
Sue Fasquelle, Lewes, East Sussex
Susan Murray, Lewes, East Sussex
Jan Woodling, Newhaven, East Sussex
Christopher Garland, Lewes, East Sussex
Jan Tramunto, St Leonards-On-Sea, East Sussex
Richard Boyle, Eastbourne, East Sussex
Malcolm Telfer, Brighton
Jane Wilde, Brighton
Sonya Baksi, Lewes, East Sussex
Amanda McIntyre, Robertsbridge, East Sussex
Andy Ward, Brighton
Sarah Hazlehurst, Brighton
Annette Unsworth, Brighton
Les Gunbie, Brighton
Ron Kemeny, Forest Row, East Sussex
Carla Gerlack, Eastbourne, East Sussex
Iain Sheard, Battle, East Sussex
Hugh Dunkerley, Brighton
Paula Williams, Etchingam, East Sussex
Brian Parkinson, Hove
Claire Duc, Lewes, East Sussex
Sylvia Matthews, Brighton
Ayesha Mayhew, Brighton
Claire Bessel, Brighton
Daisy MacDonald, Hastings, East Sussex
Lyle B. Zimmerman, Hastings, East Sussex

Caroline Gorton, Brighton
Dave Allen, Brighton
Gary French, St Leonards-On-Sea, East Sussex
Mike Cope, Bexhill, East Sussex
Jane Plunkett, Eastbourne, East Sussex
Jane Clare, Crowborough, East Sussex
Max Hewitt, St Leonards-On-Sea, Sussex
Saskia Müller, Eastbourne, East Sussex
Danny McEvoy, Newhaven, East Sussex
Brigitta Zuglói, Eastbourne, East Sussex
Ian O'Halloran, Hailsham, East Sussex
Sallie Sullivan, Lewes, East Sussex
Jane Carpenter, Lewes, East Sussex
Lesley Healey, Lewes, East Sussex
Anne Fletcher, Seaford, East Sussex
Deidre Shalloe, St Leonards-On-Sea, East Sussex
Ann Kramer, Hastings, East Sussex
Paul Bazely, Brighton
Fiona MacGregor, St Leonards-On-Sea, East Sussex
Joanne Rigby, Seaford, East Sussex
Alison Cooper, St Leonards-On-Sea, East Sussex
Sarah Kirk-Browne, Brighton
Csaba Jordan, Eastbourne, East Sussex
Lorraine Langham, Bexhill, East Sussex
Yasmin Hassan, Brighton
Jessica Loudon, Hove
Sarah Hutchings, Lewes, East Sussex
Clare Halstead, Brighton
Anne Massey, Hove
Anthony Bradnum, St Leonards-On-Sea, East Sussex
Eveline Tijs, Hastings, East Sussex
Guy Edwards, Hove
Viv Mudie, Brighton
Dolmen Domikles, Lewes, East Sussex
Erica Smith, St Leonards-On-Sea, East Sussex
Amanda Jobson, St Leonards-On-Sea, East Sussex
Alison R Noyes, Hastings, East Sussex
Parascevou Sier, Eastbourne, East Sussex
Duncan Armstrong, Lewes, East Sussex
Carol Turner, Eastbourne, East Sussex
Emily Price, Hastings, East Sussex
Grace Lally, St Leonards-On-Sea, East Sussex
John Enefer, Hastings, East Sussex
Jennifer Howells, Wealden, East Sussex
Gabriel Carlyle, St Leonards-On-Sea, East Sussex
Hilary Turner, Hastings, East Sussex
Leon Panitzke, Cooden, East Sussex

Background

In 2021 the International Energy Agency clearly stated that if the world is going to limit global warming to 1.5°C ‘there can be no new investments in oil, gas and coal, from now – from this year’ (‘No new oil, gas or coal development if world is to reach net zero by 2050, says world energy body’, Guardian, 18 May 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/nonewoilcoalgas>).

Yet, in 2023 oil and gas companies are on a massive expansion course. Indeed, a recent analysis of the 685 upstream companies on the GOGEL (a database of 901 oil and gas companies, collectively responsible for 95% of global oil and gas production) found that 96% have expansion plans (‘NGOs Release the 2022 Global Oil & Gas Exit List: An Industry Willing to Sacrifice a Livable Planet’, Urgewald, 10 November 2022, <https://tinyurl.com/gogel2022>).

Moreover, European and North American companies like Shell and Exxon are leading the way eg. Shell spent almost \$7bn during 2020 – 22 exploring for new oil and gas.

Question

Given these stark realities, does the East Sussex Pension Committee accept that asset owners seeking 1.5°C-aligned portfolios cannot credibly own financial interests in companies that continue to invest in new oil and gas projects?

5. Question from Brian Parkinson, Hove

I have divested from oil and gas companies. The family foundation has also managed to do this as well. I do understand that this is problematic and presents challenges but I believe that East Sussex can also manage to do this, not only that but it is essential that it does so.

Really we all know that such investment has to stop, so drop the excuse, when will you get on with it and what is the time scale, (one year should be long enough)?

Response by the Chair of the Pension Committee

The East Sussex Pension Fund (the Fund) is administering a statutory defined benefit pension scheme where the pension an individual receives is defined in statute and not linked to investment performance. The Scheme’s obligations and investment requirements are more complex and differ markedly from an endowment fund. To pay statutory defined pensions as they fall due, and which are affordable to contributors, the Fund has to invest in a diversified investment portfolio which will act in different ways in different economic environments thereby mitigating the risk of failing to have sufficient income to pay the pension of beneficiaries. This means the Fund has investments in equities, bonds, property, infrastructure (such as ports, communication networks, renewable energy), private equity, other forms of debt, commodities and other suitable assets. Some of these asset types

require investment for many years (in some cases more than 15 years) and cannot be exited before they reach maturity, or only at significant cost.

Investment decisions must be directed towards achieving a wide variety of suitable investments that are best for the financial position of the Fund. The Fund has a duty to consider a wide range of factors that are financially material to the performance of the investments, including social, environmental and corporate governance factors. As such, the Fund's Investment Strategy Statement explains that the Fund believes climate change poses material risks; and its position on climate change and the energy transition is set out in its Statement of Responsible Investment Principles. The Fund recognises that a prolonged energy transition is under way and acknowledges that a number of energy incumbents through their size, capacity to mobilise capital and engineering expertise offer the potential to play a substantial role in that transition. The Fund also recognises that there are a range of possible transition scenarios, evolving physical climate-related risks, potential opportunities and a requirement for a just transition.

The Fund does not hold any investments in fossil fuel companies through its index or active equity manager allocations, reflecting a number of decisions by the Committee through its Responsible Investment strategy. In addition, the Fund has made significant reductions in the carbon emissions of the companies held in the investment portfolio, with a 55% reduction in scope 1 and 2 emissions from 2020 to 2022. The Fund has also focused on investing in climate solutions and green investments and as such has 10% of investments whose core products and services address some of the world's major social and environmental challenges, 20% in investments aiming for Paris alignment, investment in infrastructure which includes renewable energy projects and clean technology private equity investments. Following this drive for positive holdings from climate opportunities, the value of green investments in liquid holdings of the Fund have doubled in the past 2 years.

The Pension Committee, at the Committee Chair's initiative, has commissioned a project to assess the fiduciary and legal consequences of fossil fuel divestment for the Fund; examine how such a move aligns with relevant guidance and advice; explore how practical an act it would be within the context of the ACCESS* Pool, where government is directing LGPS investment to be made through the LGPS Pools; and review evidence on the efficacy of such an approach in promoting the energy transition. The outcomes of this project and research will help the Committee assess its approach to climate change and its investment decision making.

** ACCESS (A Collaboration of Central, Eastern and Southern Shires) is made up of 11 LGPS Administering Authorities, set up following statutory guidance published in 2016. The ACCESS members are committed to working together to optimise benefits and efficiencies on behalf of their individual and collective stakeholders, operating with a clear set of objectives and principles that drives the decision-making process to enable LGPS funds to execute their locally decided investment strategies.*

