

Borough Councillors Report 15th November 2021
Cllr Jill Houlbrook

National Parliament week has recently taken place and I was delighted to be invited into several of our Upton schools and to visit 1St Upton Rainbows to talk about my role as a Councillor. I faced some probing and incisive questioning. I am really impressed by the interest our young people have in what goes on in Upton and in particular I was asked if I knew what is happening with the old youth club building. I had to admit that I am not clear on this.

However I did submit a question to the Cabinet member at Council in October. For clarity and information you can read this and the answers below.

Question

Upton Community is still being blighted by ASB at the eyesore which is the disused youth club building. It is now several months since the bidding process for the site was put on hold. Will the Cabinet member please tell my community and me when we will be informed of the progress being made with the application for SEND funding and when I can expect a reply to my emails asking this same question?

Answer:

A feasibility study has been underway over recent months, the findings of which are expected back by 22 October. The feasibility report will enable the Education service to formulate conclusions on the affordability and practicability of utilising the Youth Club building to support SEN need in the area. Upon receipt of the report it is anticipated that a conclusion on the viability of this can be turned around quickly and shared within the next few weeks. Any proposals to expand numbers at a school may be subject to a period of consultation, clarification regarding this will be provided upon conclusion of the options.

Supplementary Question

At a recent Parish Council meeting the Cabinet Member told us that a bid for SEN funding had been made for £1million to be used for the project. Will the Cabinet member please confirm the bid has been made when it was made and whether it was successful?

Answer

The SEND capital funding is not one that we have been required to bid for. There are no current bidding rounds for capital funding for SEND, however the DfE have allocated capital funding to LA's to support with their SEND priorities and I can confirm that there is Capital funding earmarked within the Education programme for a scheme at Dorin Park School.

The value of funding has not yet been set, this will be confirmed once the feasibility options have been confirmed and a proposal concluded upon.

The total value of funding available for SEND capital across the authority is £1.794m. There are a number of schemes identified as priorities during the SEND High Needs Review which are planned for delivery within this funding stream and so an allocation of £1m for any one scheme is highly unlikely.

Members I am very disappointed by this information as I was and I believe others are under the impression the £1million was to be invested in our community. May I ask that the Parish Council requests clarification?

The plans for planting on Lodge Gardens are still in progress and the £3,500 secure for the work in this financial year.

Residents who live near the Bridleway on Liverpool Road have been plagued by drivers using the verge as a car park while they walk on the PROW and Country Park. I'd like to thank our Streetscene manager for meeting me on site and for devising a planting plan to add colour and interest for

residents and anyone using Liverpool Road. The corner by the poppy will be spruced up and some low growing trees and wildflowers added to the area.

I have noticed that information about my ward budget has been published and some of it does not apply to what I have spent. So here is the most up to date version of what I have been supporting this year.

Because Covid has pushed back some projects we have been allowed to carry over funds from the previous years.

There are some requests for funding which I am waiting to approve
For example litters picking equipment for 1st Upton Scouts and a couple of benches but below is my spend so far.

Members Budget Statement - 2021-22

Councillor:

J Houlbrook

£6,430

Organisation

Contribution Description

Approved Contributions

CW&C - Environment and Communities - Libraries

Summer Reading Challenge

£100.00

CW&C - Highways

Wealstone Lane Roundels

£400.00

Chester Pride

Chester Pride Café and Community Space

£300.00

Upton-by-Chester and District Parish Council

Upton - Community Speed Watch

£199.66

Upton-by-Chester and District Parish Council

Enhancing the local shopping areas – hanging baskets

£200.00

CW&C - Street Care Services

Lodge Gardens Environmental Improvements – Phase 2

£3,500.00

Remaining Budget:

£1,730.

Keeping Upton tidy will be easier now as litter picking kits are now available to borrow, for free, from all libraries in the Borough as

libraries have teamed up with StreetCare colleagues to make litter picking kits available.

The adult and junior kits are made up of a litter picker, hi-vis vest and council litter bags. I am sure the work carried out by the Chester Wombles Group will have influenced this project. Residents may also find all essential books about climate change in a new, dedicated reading list, available via the Libraries' catalogue <https://cheslive.koha-ptfs.co.uk/>.

If anyone in our community would like to organise a larger litter picking event, please contact yourstreets@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk or email me for help.

May I politely remind everyone that the most effective way to contact me is by email or telephone? Sometimes questions are put in conversations on social media but they are easily missed and that leads to frustration and people thinking they have been ignored.

So here's a reminder

Jill.houlbrook@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

01244 344318

If I'm not free to take your call please do leave me a message including your name and phone number and I will return your call.

I also of course monitor this account!

Thank you.

At the request of residents, I reported the overgrown trees on the grass at Chirk Close/Bolesworth Road. It seems residents will receive no help from the council. I am in the process of contacting BT. This is the response I received from CWaC.

It is the Council's policy is to only undertake work where trees pose a significant health and safety issue; for example if they are dead, dying, diseased, structurally unsound, obstructing the highway or are proven to be damaging property. Tree works are generally not undertaken with issues of BT wires.

As statutory undertakers, BT have a right to prune where required in order to install their equipment satisfactorily, unfortunately with regards to the trees at Chirk Close this isn't the case. If customers do not think the installation of the wires through the canopies is not satisfactory they need to report this problem to BT.

Over the past couple of weeks residents have contacted me to report an increase in the amount of dog faeces on Weston Grove. Our wardens will be keeping a watchful eye on the area. There is no reason for an dog walker/owner not to carry a bag and pick up.

The case officer for nursing home on Wealstone Lane and I the met with residents. The planning application with some changes is being submitted which gives me the opportunity to again 'call in' to committee.

I think we can all appreciate there have been issues with the standard of work happening with the installation of the connective fibre in Upton. I have kept in contact with Julie Derbyshire and she asked me to share this with our community.

'CityFibre can only apologise for the disruption and inconvenience caused, to residents and businesses in Upton. We are totally aware that this is not acceptable and CityFibre and Telent are doing everything possible to ensure that this level of workmanship improves immediately. A full progress plan is underway to ensure that all improvements will be made on all streets and work areas, before any further works commence.

By Christmas we will have connected 1400 homes in Upton, with the area fully connected by February 2022. Please bear with us and keep letting us know of any further issues'

The project to address pavement parking in Upton is still ongoing and recently we have delivered the leaflets to several street. These are a reminder about being community minded. I will bring a sample to the meeting. I have received only one comment and have explained that this is an experiment and the first time this approach has been used in Chester.

Residents on and around Caughall Road have again complained about the level of street lighting. I have raised this with the Highways team and it's been agreed that an assessment will be carried out. In the meantime may I ask home owners to check that trees on their properties are not obscuring the street lights?

The following questions have been put by members of the local Living Streets group:

> (1) How can we as Community Speedwatch and Living Streets groups work best with you as a Ward Councillor on issues of common interest for Upton? What is the best/ most pragmatic way to keep us all informed on the status of different initiatives? Can our two residents' groups potentially work alongside the Council with initiatives such as those below, to amplify them and make them even more effective in Upton?

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> (2) Pavement Parking: since our joint meeting with you and Sarah, we understand that the council have now signed off a letter to go to residents in certain streets. Could it be useful for our groups to be kept informed of the content of the letter and the timing? Can we contribute in any way?

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> (3) Overgrown hedges: we've read on your social media that the Parish Clerk might write letters to the hedge owners, in addition to the CWAC route via the app or website. Might there be a benefit to that more local approach?

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> (4) Chester Zoo safe access and mitigation of impact of traffic on Upton: We are already in touch with Cathy Partington regarding road and pedestrian/cyclist signage to and from the zoo and across the zoo car park. Do you have a regular meeting with the Zoo, and might you be willing to lend support to the proposals? Cathy has been most helpful, and has said that the proposals are being put forward to gain budget allocation, but we wonder if there's anything that could help raise them up the priority list.

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> (5) PROW: we're working effectively with the responsible council officer, and indeed the path from Upton Lane might even be cleared by now!

I would value the opinion of members of the Parish Council on these matters, before I engage with the group as a Borough Councillor.