

Questions and answer – EMCCA Board – 16 September 2024

Q1 from Anne Robinson

I understand that this year the Mayor is developing the Local Transport Plan (LTP) for EMCCA, which will include the Bus Service Improvement Plans for each constituent authority. When and how will the public be involved in the consultation on the LTP; and will the Mayor adopt the BSIP 2024 as written by Derbyshire County Council, or will there be a consultation on that too?

Mayor Claire's response:

Thank you for your question Anne. A report is being taken to the Transport and Digital Connectivity Committee on 8th October setting out the work that has been done so far on the development of the Local Transport Plan and an indicative timeline for further work. It is being developed in collaboration with the constituent authorities and will take account of existing plans such as the authorities Bus Service Improvement Plans. It is anticipated that there will be public consultation on the emerging Local Transport Plan in spring 2025. It is expected that EMCCA, as the new local transport authority, will develop the next Bus Service Improvement Plan for the region as a whole and will work with Government to agree a plan to deliver ambitious bus service improvements through an enhanced partnership with local operators in the area.

Q2 from Richard Gill

Our region faces several large-scale solar proposals that could cover thousands of acres of countryside, turning productive farmland into huge solar plants. This will fundamentally alter our landscape for a generation.

If ground-mounted solar is necessary, how much of our farmland should communities be expected to sacrifice? What limits, if any, should be set to protect our landscape, food security, and environment?

Countries like the Netherlands generate 80% of their solar power from rooftops. Shouldn't we prioritise a 'rooftops first' strategy to exceed our net-zero targets, decentralise energy, and benefit local communities while protecting valuable farmland?

Mayor Claire's response:

Our region, like much of the UK, is facing the dual challenges of reducing carbon emissions and ensuring food security. Solar energy, both rooftop and ground-mounted, will play a significant role in achieving the UK's net-zero targets. However, we must do this in a way that protects our landscape, food, and environment. The East Midlands' heritage is one of both the production of power and places of beauty, and these should be the bases for our future prosperity as well.

In our commitment to a sustainable future, I fully support the development of clean energy sources, including solar power. Solar energy plays a vital role in reducing our carbon footprint, meeting our energy needs, and the creation of jobs. As we look to the future, it is essential that we continue to encourage innovation in renewable energy while ensuring that our community benefits from the economic and environmental advantages that solar energy offers.

However, I also recognize the importance of protecting our agricultural land, which is crucial for local food production and long-term food security. Agricultural land is a finite and valuable resource that sustains our community's wellbeing, providing not only food but also jobs and economic stability.

Equally, the East Midlands is a beautiful region to live in, and I want to encourage more people to visit and enjoy that beauty for themselves.

The CCA does not have planning powers, but I will advocate for a balanced approach that prioritises both clean energy development and the protection of our natural environments. By exploring opportunities for solar development on the most suitable land and examining opportunities to integrate solar panels into existing infrastructure, we can achieve a solution that serves our energy and economic needs as well as our commitment to food security and a flourishing natural environment.

Q3 from David Ingham

As quite a regular attendee of Council meetings at Derbyshire County Council I am really encouraged that the EMCCA recognises at such an early stage of its formation the importance of accountability, openness and transparency regarding decision making. These are such key matters, which in fact, I frequently raise inter-related questions in respect of at Derbyshire County Council meetings. I consider these areas to be so important both as a former local government officer of 32 years and a non-partisan member of the public.

I note at agenda item 16 the report entitled Transparent Decision-Making. Within this report if my reading is correct it seems to suggest reading between points 2.3 and 2.4 that there is no requirement to publish in full Officer Decision Notices (ODN's) when incurring expenditure over £100k - but up to presumably £499k (i.e under 500k) unless it is a Key Decision.

I welcome the steps already being taken, and I really do appreciate and acknowledge the pro-active measures being taken by the Mayor regarding openness and transparency.

However, although there may not be a current constitutional requirement to publish in full these particular types of Officer Decision Notices, in the interests of only serving to increase transparency, can consideration also be given to publish in full those decisions as well to help better inform the public how money that could be up to £499k (that are not Key Decisions and have to be published even though expenditure could be as low as £40k as in the case of the Derbyshire student bus pilot) is being positively used in the interests of the East Midlands region?

Mayor Claire's response:

Thank you for your question and for recognising the importance of accountability, openness, and transparency that EMCCA places in its decision making. The intent around having a standard report to all Board meeting on transparent decision-making aims to ensure that those Mayoral decisions, Officer decisions and urgent decisions that are taken between Board meetings are brought to the attention of the public and Board members. This is an additional step to drive transparency as when those decisions are taken, they are also published on our website.

I am a firm believer that greater transparency ensures that decision-makers are more appropriately and effectively held to account for their actions. When a decision is taken

openly it becomes far easier to track the reasons for those decisions and who it has been made by. Such a step helps foster a culture of responsibility; this is a key objective for EMCCA as we seek to establish a culture of good governance in all that we do.

As a new organisation I recognise that we have some way to go until our processes and practices are fully established and our publication scheme is fully implemented. Getting this right is a priority for our officers. Once we have fully implemented our publication scheme, we will naturally review its effectiveness, supported by committees within our governance framework and also supported through the requirement to publish an Annual Governance Statement.

We are required to publish the full decision notices of all key decisions taken by the organisation, whether they be at Board, by an officer or by myself as Mayor. Our publication scheme also commits us to publish a list of expenditure, whether that be by officers, myself as Mayor or by Members that is outside of the key decision definition. This information meets the Transparency Code for Local Government requirements which require details of each individual item of expenditure that exceeds £500 to be published. The level of information published is in line with the requirements of the Transparency Code.

Additionally, details of all the agenda, paper, reports, and minutes of EMCCA Board and Committees are available on the website.

Q4 from Pauline Inwood

When and how will the public and stakeholders be consulted and involved in producing the Climate Action Plan and the forthcoming Local Area Energy Plan?

Mayor Claire's response:

Commissioning the EMCCA Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP) is an important step towards supporting ambitions for carbon emission reduction across the region. The current work will provide an evidenced tool that can be used to engage stakeholders in designing which technologies should be applied in which areas in order to transition to net zero. The current programme of development of the data for the whole region will take up to 18 months, with stakeholder engagement taking place as the data emerges for areas within the region.

We are at an early stage of development of EMCCA's strategic approach to achieving inclusive growth, which will include action on climate. The published papers for this Board meeting set out how that work will be taken forward.

Q5 from John McHugh

What are the Authority doing to make our roads pot hole free. During the campaign to elect a Mayor much was made by candidates to get something done. Since then we have heard nothing?

Mayor Claire's response:

Thank you for your question, John. As I have set out several times in our communications on social media, I remain determined to improve the state of the roads in our area and make transport across the region more accessible by all forms of transport. As you say, improving the state of roads and reducing potholes has been a clear theme during the election campaign, and I am working with the local Councils to develop ambitious road

repair programmes to invest in. That's why EMCCA is distributing over £41m this financial year to help those councils maintain their roads. Given the backlog of road repairs, local authorities are actively working on developing these programmes to ensure they provide the best value for money and greatest impact.

Q6 from Jim Froggatt to Cllr Ben Bradley

When constituent councils were preparing their previous Local Transport Plans, 15 - 20 years ago, NGO's and user group representatives were involved at an early stage. The draft terms of reference for the Transport Committee, to be considered later today, refer to involving large organisations and transport providers. Can you assure me that other relevant stakeholders will be fully involved in the formulation of the new regional LTP?

Cllr Ben Bradley's response:

I want to start by just touching on the terms of reference for the Transport Committee that you have mentioned, in order to be absolutely clear about the extent and the limitations of that role. If agreed today then I would Chair that committee. This is an unremunerated and non-Executive role. Decisions will be taken collectively by this EMCCA Board. So whilst I hope to be able to support plans and strategies as we go forward, I would not be the decision maker. I would not have executive powers like a Transport Cabinet Member has at a Council. That remains a collective decision.

In terms of the specific question, a report is being taken to the Transport and Digital Connectivity Committee on 8th October setting out the work that has been done so far on the development of the Local Transport Plan and an indicative timeline for further work. It is important for the authority to understand how our stakeholders feel about transport issues in the EMCCA region and to get stakeholder comments and feedback on the emerging work. There will be various opportunities throughout the development of the Local Transport Plan to enable stakeholders to feed into the emerging plan, for them to raise awareness of specific issues and to understand the various actions that can be taken to address them. Due consideration will be given to all feedback and comments received to inform the next stage of the development process. The first step though is being taken today, with our proposal to set up this committee.

Q7 from Richard Allarton

What is the Mayor's stance on the planned mass industrialisation of large parts of the agricultural East Midlands through the proposal of major solar arrays? The Great North Road and One Earth arrays alone will turn over 10,000 acres of BMV land into a solar industrialisation with consequent effects on wildlife, flood risk and locals' well-being which are already issues of significant concern in this region. Whilst no one denies the long existing need for energy security, this can be met through other options (such as rooftop solar) and should not further compromise the equally important food security crisis which currently sees the UK only producing 60% of its current consumption. (This production itself being focused in the East Midlands, Lincolnshire and Yorkshire belt.)

Far from making "the East Midlands the best place to live, to work and to learn" it will bring little employment or growth as multi-nationals seek to exploit our area at the cost of large areas of agricultural tranquillity and reduction of quality of life within the region

Mayor Claire's response:

Our region, like much of the UK, is facing the dual challenges of reducing carbon emissions and ensuring food security. Solar energy, both rooftop and ground-mounted, will play a significant role in achieving the UK's net-zero targets. However, we must do this in a way that protects our landscape, food, and environment. The East Midlands' heritage is one of both the production of power and places of beauty, and these should be the bases for our future prosperity as well.

In our commitment to a sustainable future, I fully support the development of clean energy sources, including solar power. Solar energy plays a vital role in reducing our carbon footprint, meeting our energy needs, and the creation of jobs. As we look to the future, it is essential that we continue to encourage innovation in renewable energy while ensuring that our community benefits from the economic and environmental advantages that solar energy offers.

However, I also recognize the importance of protecting our agricultural land, which is crucial for local food production and long-term food security. Agricultural land is a finite and valuable resource that sustains our community's wellbeing, providing not only food but also jobs and economic stability.

Equally, the East Midlands is a beautiful region to live in, and I want to encourage more people to visit and enjoy that beauty for themselves.

The CCA does not have planning powers, but I will advocate for a balanced approach that prioritises both clean energy development and the protection of our natural environments. By exploring opportunities for solar development on the most suitable land and examining opportunities to integrate solar panels into existing infrastructure, we can achieve a solution that serves our energy and economic needs as well as our commitment to food security and a flourishing natural environment.

Q8 from Paul Mitchell

I continue to be concerned with the large scale industrialisation of the green space in our area through the installation and proposed installation of large scale solar arrays. What is the Mayor's position on this and the removal of over 10,000 acres of agricultural land and countryside from our area? Our landscape will move from beautiful countryside to large areas of "greyness."

Mayor Claire's response:

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Q9 from Clare Maltby

Transport is the biggest source of greenhouse gas emissions, and sustainable transport is so important in tackling climate change and in promoting good health. What does the breakdown in transport investment look like for different modes in the EMCCA area: a) car / road transport, b) walking, wheeling and cycling, c) bus and tram, d) rail?

Mayor Claire's response:

Work is underway on developing the transport investment programme for next year when I would expect a significant uplift in capital funding from the government. I am not currently therefore in a position to set out what the breakdown of investment looks like but I am expecting this to become clearer in the coming weeks once the government has issued its budget position for 2025/26.

Q10 from Bettina Lange

When and how will the public and stakeholders have opportunities for input into and comment on the area-wide spatial strategy the EMCCA is developing?

Mayor Claire's response

We are at an early stage of development of EMCCA's strategic approach to achieving inclusive growth, which will be supported by a spatial development plan. The published papers for this Board meeting set out how that work will be taken forward.

Q11 from David Clasby

What role do you see active and sustainable travel playing in delivering on the government's agenda of economic growth, carbon reduction and health improvements?

Mayor Claire's response

Thank you for your question David. Active and sustainable travel plays a key part in delivering on the government's agenda of economic growth, carbon reduction and health improvements. That's why I've made the appointment of an Active Travel Ambassador a key early priority and met with cyclist Chris Boardman a few weeks ago to hear his thoughts as the former Greater Manchester travel commissioner. EMCCA's inclusive growth objectives include:

- Build new and coherent transport links for better and more sustainable access to our economic hubs such as our cities, market towns and major employers.
- Create modern & robust infrastructure that releases the private sector to deliver new homes & businesses
- Improve healthy life expectancy & reduce inequalities, especially in communities & groups who are most disadvantaged
- Create a net-zero economy with a resilient energy supply

The development of a regional transport strategy is essential in supporting these objectives and helping to deliver the outcomes. Active and sustainable transport is a key part of this by increasing modal choice, better connected communities, strengthening public transport, an integrated transport network, the decarbonisation of transport and embracing innovation. The Local Transport Plan will be required to demonstrate how it supports central government's ambitions and how the policies influence the transport investment programme.

Q12 from Nigel Lee to Cllr Ben Bradley

How will he approach the different challenges of improving bus services in rural areas of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire while building on the success of Nottingham City's municipal bus company?

Cllr Ben Bradley's response

In both Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire there have been some recent examples of improvements to rural bus services, through innovation and improving connectivity to leisure and tourism, through the Bus Service Improvement Plans. In a Nottinghamshire context I can speak to our roll out of On Demand bus services, for example. Building on those successes will be of benefit to people living in rural areas. The key issue is developing services which meet passengers needs and aspirations and it will replicating that good passenger experience that is important, rather than any particular model of ownership or of franchising. Subject to approval of the terms of reference of the Transport Committee today, part of the work of building a strategy to improve public transport will be significant engagement with stakeholders, include both private and public providers, and examination of which solutions might be most appropriate in different diverse areas of the region.

Q13 from Peter Geldart

The Mayor will know of the proposal for a solar park which in total will take 7,200 acres of Nottinghamshire out of food production, affect both the environment and the attraction of much of Newark and Sherwood district and cause untold disruption to the existing infrastructure, particularly of a large number of small rural roads. If allowed, this development will change not only the character of Newark and Sherwood, but life for many of its rural residents. When added to other proposed developments, the incremental changes brought about would be devastating. Does the Mayor have a view of this proposal and what would she propose to say in comment to Government?

Mayor Claire's response

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Q14 from Duncan Inwood to Cllr Ben Bradley

What provision or assistance can the Authority make for ensuring that new housing developments, especially on greenfield sites, are served by public transport and Active Travel infrastructure rather than the current practice of reliance on private car travel, thereby reducing the need for new road schemes and meeting other objectives relating to carbon emissions and population fitness and well being.

Cllr Ben Bradley's response

To be provided.

Q15 from Janet Carr

I write regarding the actual and potential proliferation of solar developments in the East Midlands, and particularly in Nottinghamshire where there are plans for many thousands of acres to be built. These Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, if given permission, will change the landscape and countryside for at least 40 years (some are seeking permission for 60 years).

The Great North Road Solar Park, planned by Elements Green, will cover 7126 acres north west of Newark (4000 acres of which will be covered by 1,500,000 solar panels),

and would be not only the largest in this country, but in the whole of Western Europe. All the proposed area is good quality agricultural land, currently producing food for our country (As we are only about 60% self-sufficient for food production nationally, any land taken out of cultivation would reduce this worrying figure still further).

Aside from the arguments you will have heard about food security, environmental and visual impact, traffic disruption, flooding and house price reduction in connection with this scheme, are you aware that farming tenants (my family are in this position), will be deprived of their land, through no fault of their own, in order that landowners can take advantage of the huge annual index-linked payments that are being offered for the lifetime of the scheme by developers? (tenants do not benefit)

Ultimately, if these schemes go ahead, the cumulative impact on parts of the East Midlands landscape will remain for one or more generations, with consequent effects likely on tourism, agriculture, food production and local residents' mental health. What is your position on this situation, and can residents rely on you to stand up for our countryside and prevent the industrialization of large swathes of very rural Nottinghamshire?

Mayor Claire's response

Our region, like much of the UK, is facing the dual challenges of reducing carbon emissions and ensuring food security. Solar energy, both rooftop and ground-mounted, will play a significant role in achieving the UK's net-zero targets. However, we must do this in a way that protects our landscape, food, and environment. The East Midlands' heritage is one of both the production of power and places of beauty, and these should be the bases for our future prosperity as well. **In striking this balance, decisions must also take into account the impact on local families' livelihoods.**

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Q16 from James Thatcher

Active Travel England recently released local authority Capability Ratings. While Nottingham City maintained its high score of 3, Derby and Derbyshire are still on Level 1

and Nottinghamshire was the only authority in the country to drop a level, from Level 2 to Level 1. What are your plans for raising the ambition and delivery of walking, wheeling and cycling across the whole EMCCA area?

Mayor Claire's response

Thank you for your question, James.

Active and sustainable travel improvements are a key part of the new Local Transport Plan, and I recently met with Chris Boardman, National Active Travel Commissioner to discuss the ambition of bringing the whole EMCCA region up to the same rating that Nottingham has achieved. I'm pleased to say that, working in partnership with Sustrans and Active Travel England, we'll be appointing an Active Travel Ambassador to assist in identifying the quick win solutions to improve walking, wheeling and cycling provision across the region and ensuring that such schemes have the funding to be delivered to a high standard.

Q17 from Lee Holden

Nottinghamshire (in particular Nottingham City) is now poorly maintained and unkempt. Heavily littered roadsides, piles of detritus, debris, rotting leaves, grass cuttings and muck along many pavements, roadsides and in particular around traffic islands, splitters, junctions and slip roads. Weeds are out of control and seem to be everywhere, with the un-swept roads encouraging more and more weeds. I am fully aware of the reasons. What can the combined authority do to support the county, boroughs and in particular Nottingham city in moving back to proactive, and efficient routine cleaning and maintenance regimes, that offers better value for money in the longer term.

Mayor Claire's response:

The issues that you have raised in your questions are primarily ones that relate to the powers of our constituent councils in their role as local highway authorities. EMCCA is committed to making available funding from Govt to support the work of the highway authorities. However, it is ultimately their decision as to how the funding is allocated.