

Questions and Answers

Executive
Thursday 23 July 2015

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Executive Meeting

23 July 2015

Questions and Answers



Public Questions as specified in the Council's Procedure Rules of the Constitution

(a) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Transport and Emergency Planning by Mr Tony Vickers:

“Whilst the introduction of an extensive 20mph zone in Newbury is welcome, very few residents are aware of it. Could I please ask that the Council looks to introduce additional reminder painted ‘roundels’ on the appropriate roads to increase road safety?”

The Portfolio Holder for Highways, Transport and Emergency Planning answered:

I question the assertion that very few people are aware of this speed zone. The speed zone was launched on the 25 July 2014 after extensive public consultation as is statutorily required. There have been press announcements and street orders and traffic orders.

Every time a driver leaves a 20mph zone he or she is greeted with a roundel on the ground and speed signs, and the area of Newbury in question has much on-street parking and speed humps so the speed is constrained. The Department of Transport guidance to highways is that zones should be delineated to street signs and roundels only at their edges in the interest of minimising street clutter which is a national problem and lower maintenance costs. West Berkshire Highways does not propose to add any further roundels but will maintain a watching brief and conduct additional speed loggings as necessary.

The Chairman asked: *“Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?”*

Mr Vickers asked the following supplementary question:

“On what basis do you believe that it is not true when I say that very few residents are aware of it? Are we not interested in maximising public safety rather than just doing what we have to when it is quite clear that you can do more roundels, you are just choosing not to?”

The Portfolio Holder for Highways, Transport and Emergency Planning answered:

I repeat we have had only one e-mail on this subject from a person who is resident in that area and that has been quickly turned round and answered so e-mail traffic does not suggest what you are asserting.

(b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Property, Culture, Customer Services, Environmental Health, Trading Standards, Countryside, Cleaner & Greener, Waste by Mrs Martha Vickers:

“You may be aware that the drinking fountain in the Wharf Toilets has recently been removed, this after many years of being unusable. Does the Council have any plans to replace this free water source either in the Toilets or elsewhere in the Town Centre?”

The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care, Housing, on behalf of the Portfolio Holder for Property, Culture, Customer Services, Environmental Health, Trading Standards, Countryside, Cleaner & Greener, Waste answered:

The old water fountain was removed after it became an ongoing target for abuse by some members of the public which rendered the fountain unsafe for public use. There are no current plans to replace it.

The Chairman asked: *“Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?”*

Mrs Vickers asked the following supplementary question:

“I am intrigued to know what sort of abuse there was. Do you think that having free water in Newbury is something that residents should be entitled to? It is a sustainable water source, it reduces plastic bottles and rubbish and also reduces the sale of sugary drinks from our shops which I am sure that other Portfolio Holders will think is a good idea as reduces obesity and bad teeth. So do you think this is a necessary thing and maybe you could tell me what the abuse was or is that not very nice in this company?”

The Portfolio Holder for Property, Culture, Customer Services, Environmental Health, Trading Standards, Countryside, Cleaner & Greener, Waste answered:

I think the abuse is not very appropriate for this company. In response to your question about whether or not we could reprovide the fountain, I recall some years ago Newbury Town Council were thinking of putting up a water fountain and it wasn't followed through because of the high cost. I feel that water is quite freely available to people and people do seem to me to prefer to fritter their money away on expensive bottled water than drink it from a fountain.

- (c) **Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Development, Newbury, Hungerford, Thatcham and Eastern Area Visions by Mr John Gardner (asked at the meeting by Mrs Martha Vickers):**

“Will the WBC publish the traffic studies used for planning the infrastructure supporting the proposed Sandleford Housing Development (2000 houses) in southern Newbury?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Development, Newbury, Hungerford, Thatcham and Eastern Area Visions answered:

The traffic studies used for planning the infrastructure supporting the delivery of Sandleford are published on the Council’s web site. You can find them under Planning and Building Control/Planning Policy/Local Plans Information and Monitoring/Transport Assessments.

The Chairman asked: *“Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?”*

Mrs Vickers asked the following supplementary question:

“Could you tell me when this was done and when the study was done?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Development, Newbury, Hungerford, Thatcham and Eastern Area Visions answered:

It has certainly been on the Council’s website for at least two years.

Members' Questions as specified in the Council's Procedure Rules of the Constitution

(a) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care, Housing by Councillor Alan Macro:

"What is this Council currently doing to bring the affordable homes in the Parkway development into use?"

The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care, Housing answered:

You will be aware of recent press reports in which residents at Parkway have accused Standard Life of misleading them by allowing them to enter into a purchase process without informing them that the process could not currently be completed due to a legal dispute with the Council.

The Council has refused to sign off any of the private leases at Parkway and it has also continued to avoid transferring the freehold of the site to Standard Life as that would no longer require us to sign off the leases.

The Council has activated the Dispute Resolution Procedures under the original Project Agreement and S106 Agreement entered into with Standard Life. Standard Life has not been cooperative within the dispute resolution procedure.

We are aware that Standard Life are actively trying to sell the affordable units to a Registered Provider but delivery of the affordable units remains largely with Standard Life and their chosen Registered Provider.

The Chairman asked: *"Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?"*

Councillor Alan Macro asked the following supplementary question:

"It is perhaps pleasing that the dispute resolution procedure has actually started. Could you tell me when that was please?"

The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance, Insurance, Health & Safety, Human Resources, Pensions, ICT & Corporate Support answered:

From memory, I believe the Council started the dispute resolution procedure in January or February 2015.

(b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Development, Newbury, Hungerford, Thatcham and Eastern Area Visions by Councillor Alan Macro:

“Could the Executive Member for Planning please give an update on the implications of the Firlands planning appeal?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Development, Newbury, Hungerford, Thatcham and Eastern Area Visions answered:

The Council is extremely disappointed that the Planning Inspectorate decided to grant planning permission for 90 dwellings on Firlands Farm rather than let the democratic process run its course via the Housing Site Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD). This DPD is well advanced and includes a transparent process of site selection and also gives the opportunity for members of the public to be consulted on the sites. It should be noted that Firlands Farm was not included within the sites considered for the DPD.

It is of great concern to this Council that the Planning Inspector has also decided to pre-empt the outcomes of the Berkshire-wide Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA), which is in the process of being concluded and which will provide an assessment of future needs for the housing for the District. The SHMA is being carried out in partnership with the other Berkshire authorities and the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) in line with the timetable set by the West Berkshire Core Strategy Planning Inspector.

In the light of the decision the Council is still considering its options.

The Chairman asked: *“Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?”*

Councillor Alan Macro asked the following supplementary question:

“Could you assure me that the Council will vigorously oppose any future similar planning applications on sites which are either not within settlement boundaries or have not been identified in the DPD”.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Development, Newbury, Hungerford, Thatcham and Eastern Area Visions answered:

As I've said and as I briefed you personally the other day, the Council is still considering its options on how to react to this. It's a very complicated situation, we have taken, as you know, legal advice, and we're still taking legal advice. Once we have decided what option to take, it will be made public and I'll ensure I'll be briefing you on that before making any public announcement.

(c) Question submitted to the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance, Insurance, Health & Safety, Human Resources, Pensions, ICT & Corporate Support by Councillor Lee Dillon:

“Now that we have a contract in place for Phase 2 of Superfast Broadband, what plans do the Council have to encourage take up among residents?”

The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance, Insurance, Health & Safety, Human Resources, Pensions, ICT & Corporate Support answered:

Firstly to clarify, Phase 2 is actually for ultra fast broadband within West Berkshire and will be rolled out to 11,748 premises.

Whenever broadband upgrades are delivered to an area across Berkshire our Project Administrator communicates the facts to the following people;

- Ward Members
- Parish Councils
- Those that have registered an interest on our Superfastberkshire.org.uk website
- All those that have made an enquiry to the Council about when their service will be upgraded.

We also regularly update the information and maps on Superfastberkshire.org.uk. We issue press releases to maintain awareness of the project and, as an example, we will shortly be announcing that in West Berkshire under Phase 1 we have exceeded 10,000 premises broadband upgrades.

The Chairman asked: *“Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?”*

Councillor Lee Dillon asked the following supplementary question:

“Out of interest, how many people have registered on Superfastberkshire.org.uk”?

The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance, Insurance, Health & Safety, Human Resources, Pensions, ICT & Corporate Support answered:

I'll have to provide you with a written answer to that question.

(d) Question submitted to the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance, Insurance, Health & Safety, Human Resources, Pensions, ICT & Corporate Support by Councillor Lee Dillon:

“How will IT work with service providers to maximise the benefits of having nearly 100% Superfast Broadband coverage?”

The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance, Insurance, Health & Safety, Human Resources, Pensions, ICT & Corporate Support answered:

As you quite correctly say, Superfast Broadband has so far increased from 65% coverage under the commercial roll out, it will be 83% Superfast Broadband by year end and by the end of 2017 we anticipate it being 99% and more of Superfast Broadband.

West Berkshire Council’s ICT department has already taken advantage of fibre to the cabinet upgrades to reduce the Council’s network circuit costs by switching some leased lines to cheaper FTTC alternatives. That will continue under Phase 2.

We have also alerted schools, libraries and other managers of public buildings of the potential cost saving opportunities presented by broadband upgrades. We will continue to do that throughout Phase 2.

The Chairman asked: *“Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?”*

Councillor Lee Dillon asked the following supplementary question:

“This is a policy that the Council should be congratulated on doing and achieving in my view. I think that the role of digital inclusion within society, changes to welfare reform (being having to be done on line), also pushing Council services and transactions into an online format helps to save the Council money as well. I don’t have a supplementary question”.

The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance, Insurance, Health & Safety, Human Resources, Pensions, ICT & Corporate Support answered:

First of all I will pass on your thanks to the Superfast Berkshire Team who have worked diligently across Berkshire bring Superfast Broadband to the area and the team really has worked very, very hard, and I totally agree with you, Broadband brings real benefits both in terms of rural business and in the rural quality of life. The Superfast Berkshire Team should be congratulated and I will ask the Chief Executive to pass on these congratulations.
