

Questions and Answers

Executive
Thursday 19 January 2017

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WestBerkshire
C O U N C I L

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Executive Meeting

19 January 2017

Questions and Answers



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

There were no questions submitted by members of the public.

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

(a) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning & Housing by Councillor Lee Dillon:

Question:

"How much S106 money does the Council have in its accounts for affordable housing?"

The Portfolio Holder for Planning & Housing answered:

The current balance is £2,588,538.71.

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 Dillon asked the following supplementary question:

"I think residents will be surprised to know there is millions of pounds in our accounts for affordable housing and yet we are not building affordable housing. What do the Council plan to do to be able to release that money to enable completion of affordable units?"

The Portfolio Holder for Planning & Housing answered:

We have some projects committed, Councillor Dillon. Section 106 is used to mitigate the harm of a development and only five Section 106 contributions can be pooled for a particular project.

We do have some projects; we have been quite successful with the use of Section 106 money in the past, and we do have some projects all ready allocated for using this funding.

One is Bath Road, Calcot. We have a property there which we are refurbishing for affordable homes. The other of course is the Mabel Luke Charity, in central Newbury where those properties are being demolished and there some new flats being built and Section 106 contribution is being given towards that project. And there are other ones that we look at and we are constantly looking for properties for affordable homes.

But as we are not a developer therefore we do not build our own affordable homes, at the moment.

(b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning & Housing by Councillor Lee Dillon:

Question:

“Does the Executive believe that receiving 13 affordable housing units within the Market Street Development represents value for money for local taxpayers?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning & Housing answered:

The answer to your question is yes.

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 Dillon asked the following supplementary question:

“I think the Council giving away land at the value of £3.9million and receiving for it 13 affordable housing units in the minds of most tax payers wouldn’t represent value for money. I’m sure the answer, I’ll probably receive will say that we will get a bus station we already have, a car park for it, we already have.

At the end of the day, if the Council can only secure 13 affordable houses, on a site that it owns, how can it expect developers to step up and provide affordable housing on other sites?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning & Housing answered:

The developer on this site came forward to us and they indicated that they were unable to satisfy the affordable housing requirement on the grounds of viability. You are aware no doubt Councillor Dillon that we are charged by central government to look at viability proposals from developers, and we went through this with an absolute fine tooth comb. We had to accept that what the developer was offering with regard to affordable housing was the viable amount.

You are right Councillor Dillon; I could mention a new car park and station. The other point I could make is that this whole development is regenerating a part of Newbury that is in desperate need of regeneration. It will create a very nice link from the station through into the town. So there are those other social and economic benefits which we can’t put any monetary value to. But there are social and economic benefits to the Market Street development which will bring a lot of benefit to Newbury because it will improve the environment in this area.

(c) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Highways & Transport by Councillor Billy Drummond:

Question:

“What is the Council doing to support local businesses during the 9 weeks of road works on the A339?”

The Portfolio Holder for Highways & Transport answered:

The A339 project will bring benefit to us all including local businesses and if there is one sector of the community of West Berkshire that understands the importance of investing for the future, looking at the vital assets and balancing short term pain against long term, it is our business communities so thank you for your question.

Our business men and women will know that the A339, our busiest road, is essential to the economic health of our district. They know it has to be looked after and they will have joined the Council, and I'm sure yourself, Councillor Drummond, in welcoming the massive investment in resurfacing, in the maintenance of bridges, under passes, other structures and transport improvements.

I know it has been a long haul, but the very fact that all these separate projects are being combined and coordinated is something to celebrate. This very professional planning has reduced costs and has reduced disruption. As you point out this project has another 9 weeks to run and you ask how we will support local businesses.

We will do it in three ways; we will continue to support them by good planning, by good information and being ready to help in special cases. So by good planning we will continue to do everything we can to keep disruption to a minimum. Yes there will be lane closures but only between 9:30 – 15:30, so that in the peak all lanes will be open. And we will continue to take notice of what is going on in the town. So yesterday, a race day, there were no lane closures and the traffic on a particularly busy day, was running very well. So good planning, good information.

There will continue to be weekly updates on our blog, on our own website, and I know that local businesses will find that helpful: it is up to date, it's accurate and it does give a sense of how huge this project has been. So good planning, good information and also being ready to help in special cases.

So if local businesses are seeking more help with more formal business continuity planning then we can help with advice. And if local businesses feel they have lost trade because of this project they should get in touch again and there might be some temporary help with their business rates.

So three ways good planning, good information and being ready to help. But what is more important is when this huge project is finished we will have an asset to be proud of, we will have a road in excellent condition, that we can maintain more cheaply going forward. As Councillor Cole was indicating we will have homes and jobs linked to this road and supported by this road. So that is what we are doing.

Good news I think.

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 Drummond asked the following supplementary question:

“ Wouldn’t it have been better to wait till after the Boundary Road bridge had been completed at the end of this month?”

The Portfolio Holder for Highways & Transport answered:

There is a lot going on and there has been as much coordination as possible. We wanted to get on with this, there is always something to be done and that idea was investigated. But on balance this was seen as the way to reduce disruption overall.

(d) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Councillor Lee Dillon:

Question:

“Has the Council changed its policy in terms of wanting a joint application for the Sandleford development?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning & Housing answered:

No we haven't.

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 Dillon commented:

I welcome that decision. I think we need a holistic approach to Sandleford site.

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