

# Questions and Answers

**Executive**  
**Monday, 19th February, 2018**

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# **Executive Meeting**

## **19 February 2018**

Questions and Answers



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

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**(a) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Leisure by Mr Thomas Tunney:**

*“Can I ask how the Council deemed the tents at the football club to be empty before issuing letters to the occupants on the 1<sup>st</sup> February informing them that the tents would be cleared away?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Leisure answered:**

The decision to remove redundant tents and associated rubbish has happened after some months of discussion and monitoring of the rough sleeper community at the canal side and at the rear of Newbury Football Club. West Berkshire Council's Countryside Officers have been in discussion over the last four months with colleagues in the Police, Housing, Building Communities Together Team, and most importantly with the Outreach Worker from the Local Two Saints Hostel. The Outreach Worker based there has monitored the site on a regular basis and has spoken to the rough sleeper community there. He is familiar with current and former residents and has confirmed that the redundant tents we intend to remove have been abandoned.

**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 Tunney did not ask a supplementary question.**

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**(c) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture and Environment by Mr Peter Norman:**

*“With the greater understanding of the detrimental effect of road pollution especially on young people, does the Council agree with me that widening roads that brings traffic closer to mothers and young children would be a huge dereliction of duty to their constituents?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport answered:**

All West Berkshire Council's major highway improvement schemes are subject to air quality impact assessments. These assessments are undertaken by air quality professionals and consider the scheme in light of national legislation, policy and guidance.

There are a number of factors considered when assessing the air quality impact of highway schemes. These include traffic flow, traffic speeds, proximity, local meteorological conditions and traffic growth from future developments.

If, following the assessment process, the advice received is that there will be no discernible air quality impact of moving a highway closer to receptors, then the merits of the highway improvement will dictate whether the scheme will proceed.

**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 Norman asked the following supplementary question:**

*“Thank you for that, which is good to hear. My own concern, with the A339, is whether or not those policies were enforced, are mature shrubs and trees being planted to preserve the skate park and children’s playground area there. My real concern and what I want reassurance for is, in looking at the future Sandleford scheme, if road improvement works are needed on the Andover Road to allow access which includes widening the road and therefore bringing the road much closer to school children, then will these pollution assessments have an overriding bearing on the consideration of the junction improvements?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport answered:**

Well they have to fulfil the statutory objectives, they can’t be exceeded so we’d have to take a balanced judgement. That’s the position.

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**(h) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Community Resilience and Partnerships by Ms Julie Wintrup:**

*“Were the savings that the Citizens Advice West Berkshire generate for the Council factored into the Stage 1 Impact Assessment, which concluded there was no need for a Stage 2 Impact Assessment?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Community Resilience and Partnerships answered:**

The savings proposed were part of the Stage 1 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA). The EIA helps us look at what proposals are put forward and whether they would impact disproportionately on residents with one or more of the protected characteristics under the Equalities Act. If any savings proposal is deemed to impact on the public then a Stage 1 EIA is completed to support the public consultation on the Revenue Budget as was the case for CAB. Based on the feedback to the consultation we then looked to see if there was a requirement to undertake an EIA Stage 2. The public consultation closed on the 10<sup>th</sup> January 2018 and the feedback received in relation to the proposal has been considered. As a result of this feedback, the Stage 2 EIA has been completed and is included in the Revenue Budget report for tonight and indeed for full Council.

**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?”*

**Ms Wintrup asked the following supplementary question:**

*“Yes. So the Stage 1 online that says no to the Stage 2 is now superseded?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Community Resilience and Partnerships answered:**

Yes.

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**(j) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Transformation by Mr Tony Vickers (asked on his behalf of Councillor Lee Dillon):**

*“How is it that the Council is not using its ability to borrow from the Public Works Loan Board to help boost supply of affordable housing in West Berkshire when it is borrowing £30m between now and 2021 from PWLB to buy commercial property in places such as Eastbourne?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Transformation answered:**

Thank you for the question. I can confirm that alongside our commercial property investment the Council is actively pursuing options to increase delivery of affordable housing in West Berkshire that may result in the use of our ability to borrow from the PWLB. We are not in a position to give more detail at this time.

**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:**

*“The Government, in the November Budget, announced the ability for Councils to be able to borrow more for affordable housing and those laws still need to be changed to allow that freedom but would you agree with us that the Government should release the ability for Councils to borrow to tackle the needs of its communities rather than just commercial projects?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Transformation answered:**

As I say we are considering all options with how we finance the purchasing of properties and PWLB is one of those options. We will keep on top of it and report back.

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**(b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Leisure by Mr Thomas Tunney:**

*“Has the Council considered that the tents may have belonged to occupants of the night shelter who will need them once the night shelter closes this month?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Leisure answered:**

The information we have on these tents is that they are no longer required and this has been confirmed following discussions with colleagues. Staff have also had discussions with the manager of the West Berkshire Homeless Shelter and she is happy that we are removing these redundant tents, most of which are damaged or vandalised, and these are being removed together with the associated dumped rubbish, in order to improve the environment there for everyone. We are also concerned about the safety of the rough sleeper community after there were attempts at burning redundant tents. The last thing we wanted is for someone to come along and burn a tent with somebody inside 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?”*

**Mr Tunney asked the following supplementary question:**

*“When we get to the end of the night shelter being operational, for those people who don’t have a tent, are you going to provide them?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Leisure answered:**

We don’t provide tents, generally no, but they can come and see our Officers at West Berkshire Council and explain their situation and we will do all we can to help them.

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**(d) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Leisure by Mr Peter Norman:**

*“With Sandlesford currently out of the picture for meeting the Council’s Five year Housing supply target, and with other huge developments now occurring on the A339 most notably a minimum of 400 homes in North Newbury, and 3,500 homes in Manydown, Basingstoke (not to mention the numerous housing projects now given the go ahead in Greenham), is it not time to call time on the Core Strategy approved in 2012 and to take the opportunity to re-visit how we meet Newbury’s housing requirements in light of these developments?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Leisure answered:**

West Berkshire’s housing requirement is identified by a process set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the Core Strategy 2012, together with the Housing Site Allocations (HSA) Development Plan Document (DPD) 2017, and they plan to meet, at least, the District’s identified housing requirement until 2026 in the most sustainable way possible, as evidenced by the supporting sustainable appraisal and other technical documents.

The housing developments at Greenham form part of the HSA DPD and therefore will contribute to meeting the District’s identified housing requirement to 2026. Development at Sandlesford forms part of the Core Strategy and therefore will also contribute to meeting the District’s identified housing requirement to 2026.

The Council has accepted that development at Sandlesford will not contribute to meeting the District’s identified housing need within the next five years and instead development there will occur after this period but within the period to 2026. Development at North Newbury, granted on appeal, will help to meet the shortfall in housing requirement over the next five years created by the delay at Sandlesford.

**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 Norman asked the following supplementary question:**

*“I do, I find that answer somewhat disappointing. Given the fact that if no houses in Sandlesford are anticipated in the next five years, which means a very short contribution period in Sandlesford to be able to contribute to housing supply within the timeframe to 2026, and given the fact that we are now looking at a period of consultation to 2036, it would seem an opportune time to review Sandlesford within that wider context. I’m surprised that the Council is not now looking at that given not just North Newbury but also the huge development which has been proposed just this side of Basingstoke?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Leisure answered:**

With regard to the Basingstoke development, each local planning authority is required to plan for its own housing requirements identified by the process set out in the NPPF. So Basingstoke and Deane are indeed planning for 3,500 homes in Manydown but it's planning for its own housing requirement which is not West Berkshire's housing requirement, although we do have obviously a duty, as local planning authorities, to co-operate with other local authorities and certainly I thought I'd outlined in my answer to you that Sandford is identified as a strategic site and remains a strategic site. We are not anticipating an early delivery but we are anticipating a delivery within the period up to 2036.

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**(i) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Community Resilience and Partnerships by Ms Julie Wintrup:**

**Ms Wintrup noted that her question:** *"What financial assessment was undertaken in order to reach the decision that no Stage 2 assessment was needed?"* had been superseded, as in the response to her previous question she was told that there is going to be a Stage 2 Assessment.

**The Portfolio Holder for Community Resilience and Partnerships answered:**

I've just checked and the Stage 2 is in the papers. It picks up in particular points around the elderly and those that can't access online, but I think beyond the Stage 2 being completed, as I said in my first answer (and the document will be in the report papers for the Council meeting as well as for this meeting), but I'd also like to say we have listened to CAB West Berkshire and also to the various other respondents to the consultation and we will be allocating an extra £40,000, so not making a cut of part of the grant by £80,000 but by £40,000. This is the third year that this additional funding, previously called transition funding, has been given to CAB. We'll be working with them to get them onto a secure footing. In addition, Adult Social Care will continue to give a grant specifically for carers support.

**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?"*

**Ms Wintrup asked the following supplementary question:**

*"So to clarify it's going from £120,000 to £80,000?"*

**The Portfolio Holder for Community Resilience and Partnerships answered:**

Yes and we've been in discussions with them, in addition to offering them support and doing drop-in here to help them reduce costs.

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**(e) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Leisure by Mr Peter Norman:**

*"Will the Council take into consideration the Government's announcement that we should be looking at our towns to deliver denser housing and look at existing building stock when determining how to meet future housing needs in the future?"*



**The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Leisure answered:**

The Council takes all Government announcements into consideration and will continue to do so as part of the local plan review process.

**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 Norman asked the following supplementary question:**

*“Given we’ve got a consultation period running to 2036 I hope that the denser housing requirements and help by the Government will be taken up by the Council and in particular looking at some of the housing stock in Newbury which is of fairly poor quality as to how that will be developed in a way which is both compliant with the surrounding areas but increasing the number of houses available without necessarily building on green space?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Leisure answered:**

The Council doesn’t hold any housing stock in West Berkshire of course, so I can’t speak for that, but we have of course recently published online our Brownfield Land Register which shows sites that are available and potentially suitable for residential development across the district. The purpose of the register is to provide up-to-date information on sites that local planning authorities consider to be appropriate for residential development, having regard to the criteria set out in the regulations.

So I would hope that the use of Brownfield sites would help to prevent some house building on Greenfield sites.

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**(f) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Leisure by Mr Peter Norman:**

*“Would the Council support the idea that land value uplift caused by a change of planning use should no longer be to the sole benefit of the landowner, giving them a windfall to which they have contributed nothing?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Leisure answered:**

The landowner is not the sole beneficiary of land value uplift caused by a change of planning use, negotiated developer contributions and development taxes such as the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) are clear evidence of this.

The Council would support any well evidenced ideas which seek to capture additional land use value for the benefit of current and future residents insofar as these would conform with national planning policy.

**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 Norman asked the following supplementary question:**

*“I think my concern, again looking at Sandleford and the huge uplift there and the infrastructure requirements that developers seem to be asking for from the public purse, it just seems wrong and you should as a Council be petitioning Government to allow the greater uplift in the value to be shared with the community?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Leisure answered:**

Well I take your point but I mean developers have to pay infrastructure contributions through CIL. I take your point but that is a national issue and not something that we can resolve this evening but I do take your point Mr Norman, thank you.

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**(g) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Leisure by Mr Peter Norman:**

*“Could the Council advise me of the average price of an affordable two bedroom unit over the last 12 months and how this compared with the average market price for a similar unit?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Leisure answered:**

The Council does not have access to datasets of average price paid for an affordable two bedroom unit without carrying out any further research with Registered Providers or the Land Registry. We don't hold that information.

**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 Norman asked the following supplementary question:**

*“Well I'm a little bit surprised by that because I would have thought, and again I know this is a national question, but the whole issue of affordable housing is to ensure that the housing is affordable. The part of my question which I meant to have asked is how do you compare affordable housing and the average price of affordable housing in this district with the average earnings, especially of public sector workers in the district, to make sure that housing does meet those requirements?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Community Resilience and Partnerships answered:**

The National Housing Federation do publish that called Home Truths for each region in terms of wage levels compared with house prices. In terms of rent for affordable units, that is Government set normally at 60% of the private rental market or 80% of it. National Housing Federation Home Truths is an annual report for each region.

**The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Leisure answered:**

The average registered provider level in March 2017 was £118.31 a week and the Valuation Office have quoted that lower quartile rents vary from £92 a week for a room, £150 a week for a 1 bedroom property and £183 a week for a 2 bedroom property and that has been an increase but those figures are available.

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

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**(a) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Community Resilience and Partnerships by Councillor Lee Dillon:**

*"Why were the most recent air quality figures not published as expected at December's Joint Public Protection Committee?"*

**The Portfolio Holder for Community Resilience and Partnerships answered:**

The agenda item for the Joint Public Protection Committee, due to be considered at the JPPC in December, related to Wokingham Borough Council's Air Quality Action Plan and they had requested it to be deferred until March 2018. This is a shared service across three councils and each one has to have an Air Quality Action Plan and Wokingham's will be considered in March 2018.

**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:**

*"We were informed by Officers that we were expecting our air pollution figures to go to the December JPPC, whether that made the agenda or not is a different item, when will our figures be released please?"*

**The Portfolio Holder for Community Resilience and Partnerships answered:**

I can check. I don't know whether that is on the agenda for March, but we do have a joint group formed within this Council to work on the air quality improvement measurements covering relevant services. I will check when that is due to go to the Joint Committee.

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**(b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture and Environment by Councillor Lee Dillon:**

*"Under what legislation is the Council proposing to introduce charging of green waste collections?"*

**The Portfolio Holder for Culture and Environment answered:**

When the Council consults on changes, normal practice is for the consultation to set out what legislation applies relevant to the changes and when we consulted on charging for green waste, that legislative information was included in the proposal. The detail is that we can charge for this service under the Controlled Waste Regulations 2012.

**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:**

*“The legislation that you quoted stipulates what can be charged for and green waste is there, I think it is number three in that particular piece of legislation, but there is also a second piece of legislation that says that the fees have to be justifiable. Now in the consultation that went out to members of the public I didn’t see any information in there that stipulated why it was £50 and not £49 or £48 or £30?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Culture and Environment answered:**

We said it was around £50.

**Councillor Lee Dillon asked the following question:**

*“But the legislation requires you to be able to justify the need for a cost so are you confident that you are able to justify why it is set at a level of £50?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Culture and Environment answered:**

We’ll be bringing papers to Full Council on 1 March and will set out what we are actually going to propose as a charge.

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**(c) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport by Councillor Lee Dillon:**

*“What economic impact assessment did the Council carry out on the impact to local business of on street car parking before proposing to introduce on street car parking for Thatcham Town Centre?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport answered:**

Thank you for your question, Councillor Dillon. I know this is a real live issue for Thatcham and so I am glad to have the opportunity to describe how we assess this schemes.

The assessment is in two parts. In the first part, we develop a scheme which we think will benefit our residents and of course this stage gains from the expert input of our excellent team in Highways and Countryside, and you know the team, you know they do a great job. In the second, we test our proposed scheme against local views and knowledge before reaching a judgment about whether to proceed or not and that decision hasn’t been made yet, it will be made soon.

So in the first part we are saying can we answer ‘yes’ to the fundamental question - might this scheme bring benefits? I want to speak quite generally because this could refer to many schemes. What might these benefits be? Well I can think of three:

- Perhaps the most obvious is it raises income. The most obvious, but I don’t think it’s the most important, but we’ll start with that. So a good parking scheme does have the potential to raise income and we invest that income as you know in traffic services in West Berkshire and is really important for us. It is a fact of life that it costs money to provide, to maintain and to enforce parking and someone has to pay. The whole cost could, I suppose, fall collectively on the council tax payers of West Berkshire, but that

would include people who have no car, who don't drive, who choose to cycle, to walk or use public transport. So doesn't seem entirely fair. The alternative is we ask motorists, who directly benefit from the service we provide, to make a reasonable contribution. That seems fair to me. That would be something a good parking scheme would allow to happen.

- The second benefit would be - a good parking scheme can allow traffic to move freely, without hindrance and safely around the district. I almost didn't make this meeting today as there was someone double parked when I tried to leave Northumberland this morning – so a real live issue for me. A good parking scheme means people can move.
- A third benefit, and this is the one that was highlighted in the consultation that went to Thatcham, is a good parking scheme means parking spaces in town centres and village centres aren't tied up all day. It's keeping the centres open for business, for leisure, for having your hair done, for watching the school play. It means town and village centres are not ossified by people who turn up early in the morning, leave their car all day, perhaps go somewhere else, and then come back at night. So it's keeping towns alive and that is what we want for Thatcham Town Centre.

So that is the starting point for our assessment. In the second part we go out to consultation and that is where the meat is going on the bones and there is plenty of meat going on the bones with this consultation. It finished on 8 February, I haven't seen all the responses and the work is being done on the analysis and in working through the comments. There are many good points and we'll give them due weight. There has been very effective lobbying from Ward Members, Councillor Jaques and Councillor Collis have made their points with energy and the Town Council of course have made a submission to the consultation. All of this will be taken into account.

There is a further factor, in that the Kingsland Centre has just been bought and I think this gives us a great opportunity for this Council to work with the new owners to see new life brought in to Thatcham Town Centre and again that is something we will take into account.

So that is our assessment– we scope the potential benefits here, we are testing them against consultation responses and we are thinking about the wider environment. We have an assessment that is thorough, it is contextualised and it is realistic. The analysis of the consultation is taking place now and I'm not going to jump the gun, the decision will be made when the response has been properly analysed, but there is a good assessment and I feel that whatever comes out of it will be for the best for Thatcham.

**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:**

*“That was a thorough answer, I don't think it answered the question which was what economic impact did the Council carry out? This scheme is budgeted, if it goes ahead, to generate around £11,000 of income for West Berkshire Council, yet has the potential to hurt local businesses in the town centre. In terms of what makes a good scheme in your answer, in the first one you said was raising income and not about traffic management and the principles of a parking scheme should be around traffic management rather than raising income as the primary driver. So my supplementary is did the Council carry out any economic impact on businesses from potential lost trade?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport answered:**

I purposely said in my answer that income was not the most important and I was explicit about that. We spoke to the businesses, we leafleted businesses and sought their views and those points coming forward, we will take them into account.

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