

# Questions and Answers

**Executive**  
**Thursday 26 July 2018**

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# **Executive Meeting**

## **26 July 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 Waste by Mrs Deborah Bartley-Brown:**

*“Could the WBC web site, have a tab to report Road Traffic Accidents”*

As Mrs Deborah Bartley-Brown was unable to attend the meeting she has received the following written response from the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Waste:

Unfortunately this is not a service that we are able to provide. The only traffic accident data that the Council uses for assessments is Personal Injury Accident (PIA) data. This data is obtained by Police who attend the traffic accidents and who record the details on what is known as a Stats 19 form. This information is sent to Wokingham Borough Council for collating and recording because they provide this service for us. Details of the accident data that has been recorded is generally available to us quarterly in arrears.

We, along with all other local authorities, do not record or have any use for damage only accident data because it would be an enormous task to process this data. The PIA data is in fact very accurate. If you are referring to this data not including every accident that has occurred then this is true because we will have no record of accidents that do not involve injury.

Planning Applications only include accident information in a minority of cases if this is relevant for the specific application being considered. This information is not provided for every application considered. Generally accident data would only be considered if there was a significant increase in trips and/or a known PIA history in the vicinity of the application site. When it is relevant to provide accident data as part of an application it will be available to view within supporting information documentation on the Councils website.

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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 Highways, Transport, Environment and Countryside by Councillor Alan Macro:**

**Question:**

*"What is the council doing to reduce pollution and emissions from vehicles queuing for the Thatcham level crossing?"*

**The Portfolio Holder for Highways, Transport, Environment and Countryside answered:**

Thank you for your timely question, Councillor Macro.

It's timely because our 2018 Air Quality Report has just been submitted to DEFRA.

It has yet to be published, but I can give you advance notice that it will confirm that levels of Nitrogen Dioxide, which is the pollutant we are most concerned about in West Berkshire, has declined over a period of five years. Air quality in West Berkshire is generally good.

I am sure you will agree this is good news and testament to the hard work, knowledge and commitment of our officers.

We are well aware of how fundamental air quality is for health. We have called on expertise across the Council so Environmental Health, Transport Policy and Highways and through our relationships with partners, our Strategic Public Health Team and Public Health England to develop the wide-ranging and effective Air Quality Strategy with which you are familiar through your membership of Transport Advisory Group.

Some of the elements of this Strategy is specifically relevant to Thatcham. We have our Newbury to Ascot cycle route which goes down the A4, also the planned signal improvement that you have heard about, the SCOOP project on the A4 in Thatcham and others which are more general:

Improving traffic flow onto the A339, deploying the planning process to drive change: the requirement for travel plans, EV charging, cycle lanes, investment in pedestrian cycling infrastructure. Opposing planning applications where they have an impact on our Air Quality Management Zones. So improving public transport – we are working on our rail stations, building a better bus station in Newbury, all of vehicles in our public transport are at least Euro 4 standard, promoting our car club and this is just a taste.

It's important to note that we check that we are going in the right direction by carefully and regularly monitoring air quality across the district. As part of this, each year the monitoring stations are assessed to ensure that they are best located to give us the most valuable data.

In terms of Thatcham level crossing. The nearest monitoring station to the level crossing was nearby 159 Station Road. Three years ago, we reviewed the readings of Nitrogen Dioxide here and as they had been routinely low over a period of years we made the informed evidenced based decision to move that monitoring station.

But this does not mean we are not alert to residents' concerns about delays at the level crossing in Thatcham. We understand how frustrating this can be and we hear the arguments for a bridge. We have committed to evaluating this option as part of the wider Thatcham study required as we work towards a new Local Plan.

So to sum up:

1. We want to assess and respond to traffic issues in Thatcham, including those that arise because of the rail line.
2. Our monitoring does not indicate an air quality issue in Station Road, but be assured if there is evidence then we will monitor again and we'll do that quickly.
3. Air quality is a high priority for this Council and, while fully acknowledging there is more to do, we are pleased that we are seeing an improvement over time.

So I will end by saying that we as individuals have got responsibilities here. But we know that the major threat to air quality in West Berkshire comes from road traffic and I hope people waiting at the level crossing at Thatcham, observe our sign, cut engine, cut pollution.

Now I love my car, but I don't use it all the time and we need to ask ourselves instead of grabbing the car keys whether we can travel on foot, by bike or public transport. I provide as an example, and I did check with him first, our Leader's making a trip from Lambourn via bike and I present you with that inspirational image.

**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:**

*“There has been quite a lot of information in the media recently, basically saying that virtually no level of traffic pollution is safe, particularly for children and there is a strong association with traffic pollution and high incidences of asthma. Can I ask you view that sign and ensure it is far more obvious and just try to persuade people to turn their engines off. According to Friends of the Earth about a third of people either turn their car off, or their cars turn off automatically, but that means two thirds are left still running and engines idling are very inefficient and far more of a pollutant.”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Highways, Transport, Environment and Countryside answered:**

I am very sympathetic to your view and we are doing everything we can, but air quality generally is not a problem in West Berkshire, but it is a good point about turning engines off.

**(b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Communications by Councillor Lee Dillon (asked on his behalf by Councillor Alan Macro):**

**Question:**

*“Why will the Council not enter into a short term lease with the Newbury Community Football Group for use of the Faraday Road site?”*

**The Portfolio Holder Economic Development and Communications answered:**

Thank you Councillor Dillon and Councillor Macro.

As the appeal case regarding the wider London Road Industrial Estate redevelopment has now been heard, the Council wants to have the flexibility to commence redevelopment as quickly as possible.

This is why no long lease with any organisation is being provided for the site. As for the group that you referred to in your question, it is a kind offer regarding them taking the lease and managing the site. However, we believe the Council is still best place to manage the site, given it already manages multiple similar sites and also carries public service obligations so is best place to make it available to as many groups as possible. We also want to be in the position where we can make sure that we can commence the redevelopment as quickly as possible when the time comes.

However, I still want to be very clear, the group itself and the organisations it represents are of course more than welcome to utilise the site and that is exactly the purpose of what we are doing here, we want to make that site available for as long as possible, right up until the point of redevelopment, because I completely understand that no one wants to see that site, not being available to the public, ahead of the wider redevelopment.

So we intend to make it available for as long as possible, right up until the point when we are starting to invest in the site.

**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:**

*“There is currently a football ground there and a stadium, my understanding of the Council’s plans is for a MUGA which I presume means that the current facilities will be demolished. Whereas the group’s proposal is to keep it as a football ground?”*

**The Portfolio Holder Economic Development and Communications answered:**

So in response to that, let me just be clear, there is a football club which had the previous lease and there is a group of separate representative communities, and it is important that we are distinct in regards to those two and then with regard to the Council.

The Council at the moment is conducting an assessment of the site, as it has to do if it takes on any entity that it then wants to make available to the public, so considerations with health and safety and relevant insurance and making it generally safe for the public to use. That is now

what is going on, the results of that assessment, I believe we are committed to making that available in September and I don't see any problem with that timeframe. That will set out what makes sense for the site to be made available for the purposes that we have talked about here.

We will have to wait on what the result is of that study, I am not going to be drawn on what that will result into. It will literally be however the Council making it safe and available to as many groups as possible.



**(c) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Waste by Councillor Alan Macro:**

**Question:**

*“What plans does the council have to accept more types of materials in kerbside recycling boxes?”*

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

Thank you Councillor Macro for your question. It is actually similar to two public questions which have been asked recently:

On 1 March 2018 (whilst you were on your extended holiday) there was a question from Mr Simon Bowes who asked:

*“Why can’t we recycle plastic food tubs, flora tubs etc? In West Berkshire we can only recycle plastic bottles which is a fraction of household plastics?”*

We provided a reply that included generic information about how we manage the materials we collect for recycling.

A question on 14 June 2018, from Mr Stephen Masters, of the Green Party, asking: *“Has the Council explored the possibility and viability of extending the range of plastics that it recycles in line with neighbouring authorities such as Reading and Oxfordshire?”* was rejected on the basis that it was a duplication from March, and as you know, the same question cannot be asked within a 6-month period.

So the answer I am going to giving you this evening is more or less the same as the one given to Mr Bowes. Which is the type of recyclable materials that any local authority can collect is determined by the demand from the reprocessing industry. We will not collect materials for recycling unless we can guarantee it will be recycled. We would encourage everyone to recycle more of the materials that we currently collect, as there is much more waste that could be diverted into the existing kerbside recycling services with better participation by residents.

However, your question does gives me the opportunity to explain what happens to our waste: 84% of our waste is diverted from landfill, 52% is recycled, reused and composted, with 32% of the remaining recoverable waste, going to Energy from Waste Plants and this means that only 16% of our residual waste goes to landfill.

**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:**

*“Why can we not recycle things like margarine tubs, plastic food trays, soup cartons and foil trays as Reading, Wokingham and Bracknell have had that ability since February?”*

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

Yes I understand that, and I’ve just explained that we only collect recycled materials that we can guarantee will be recycled. You state that Reading collects all this, but it is interesting to

know that Reading have a landfill rate of 24.5% compared to our 16% so obviously their collection of all the other materials that we don't, doesn't help to reduce their landfill.

**(d) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Young People by Councillor Mollie Lock:**

**Question:**

*“What plans does the Council have for school provision in the Theale area if the new primary school is not delivered for September 2019?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Young People answered:**

Thank you Councillor Lock for your question, before I answer it just for a point of clarity, can I highlight you have asked about delivery of September 2019, the new primary school for 2019 is already not viable; and the current deadline was to enable a new primary school for September 2020. Just as a point of clarity.

Having heard nothing from Theale Parish Council since our letter dated 26 June I can understand your interest in school provision in the Theale area. With the deadline of 31 July fast approaching it is looking increasingly likely that a new school at North Street Playing Fields in Theale will not happen due to timescales and the reluctance of Theale Parish Council to relinquish the lease they hold on the proposed school site.

As you would expect from any efficient Council, preliminary discussions around ‘Plan B’ for school provision in the area have already started. From September 2019 the admission numbers for Theale Primary school have been reduced to thirty and we have been exploring the provision of additional places at neighbouring schools.

If the School Project is halted on the 31 July, then when schools return in September we will start firming up one or more of the alternatives as a more substantive arrangement. We will make these arrangements known as soon as possible to enable parents to understand what options are open to them.

**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 Mollie Lock asked:**

*“As a point of clarity I put this question before the consultation was closed. I would just point out that in Wokingham, where there is a lot of development going on, the schools in Grazeley and Lambs Lane were enlarged to take extra pupils before the houses were built, and I just wonder if we are looking at which schools we hopefully have that can take the extra pupils that we are anticipating in Theale?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Young People answered:**

As I have previously stated, yes we have started conversations with surrounding schools. We won't further those conversations until September when the schools return to actually define which schools that will include.

**(e) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Waste by Councillor Alan Macro:**

**Question:**

*“Can the Portfolio Holder for Waste provide an update on when residents will have to start paying for their green waste collections?”*

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

Thank you Councillor Macro. There will be a media launch next week and the new green waste collection service will start at the beginning of September. A letter will be sent to all households explaining how they can subscribe to the service.

**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:**

*“Will that affect the likely income? You have previously said you were expecting around £150,000. Will that still be the case?”*

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

Yes.