

Questions and Answers

Executive
Thursday 30 May 2019

West Berkshire Council is committed to equality of opportunity. We will treat everyone with respect, regardless of race, disability, gender, age, religion or sexual orientation.

If you require this information in a different format or translation, please contact Moira Fraser on telephone (01635) 519045.



This page is intentionally left blank

Executive Meeting

30 May 2019

Questions and Answers

(Please note that the order in which the questions were taken at the meeting varied from the order set out on the agenda)



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

(a) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning by Mr Thomas Tunney:

“November is now 178 days away (at time of writing) what steps is the council taking to ensure this years rough sleeping winter plan does not have to be re written in December to involve an emergency night shelter?”

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Communications answered:

The Homelessness Strategy Group is in the process of reviewing the winter plan which started on 1 November 2018 and ran until 31 March 2019. As the night shelter was open for longer, the review is planned for the beginning of June following the closure of the night shelter. The night shelter was not included in the original winter plan. The Rough Sleeping Initiative funded projects are assisting to find housing solutions for the remaining rough sleepers. The Housing First proposal is seeking to assist ten people and the "Make it Happen" and "Move On" funds are assisting others to find alternative housing. There are also other projects around the prevention of homelessness agenda. The review will feed into the new winter plan.

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:

“If there are any volunteer organisations such as the night shelter and the soup kitchen involved in the winter plan will there be any public funding available to help them do so and help them with their costs?”

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Communications answered:

The grant funding that we have had from central government has been specific to particular projects. We have not been able to give grant funding to the voluntary sector because the projects were particularly and quite tightly controlled.

However, I don't know at the moment what will be coming out, if anything, from central government with regard to additional funding and what criteria will be attached. But if there is any funding that we can bid for we will look closely at what it can be used for.

(e) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Communications by Mr Peter Norman:

“In light of the recent election results, when will the Council undertake a review of the current Core Strategy to ensure that it is still fit for purpose?”

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Communications answered:

The National Planning Policy Framework (February 2019) requires a review of local plans once every five years, this is what the Council is doing with the Local Plan Review to 2036.

It is anticipated that the Local Plan Review will be submitted for independent examination following consultation in 2020.

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:

“Will that include a review of the strategic housing sites?”

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Communications answered:

We did a call for sites last year, we published part of the plan in February for consultation and the sites will go out for consultation at the end of June or the beginning of July, when everybody will have the opportunity to comment on new sites that are being put forward.

(g) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by Mrs Pamela Sergent:

“Will the council admit that the hedge netting in Theale was not properly installed?”

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

It should be noted that within 48 hours of the netting being installed on the 5th & 6th March, Kier recorded what was termed ‘Stanley knife vandalism’ along whole sections of the netting, including the net ends, and with further damage occurring thereafter. This is photographically recorded by Kier and this interference culminated in whole sections of netting being removed without authorisation. Kier did its best to control the situation in difficult circumstances, however they were not able to guarantee the continued functionality of remaining netting and thus the remainder was taken down. Any installation deficiency reported by the ecologist to a member of the public has to be seen in the context of the first inspection taking place five days after installation and where substantial vandalism had already occurred and where Kier and their subcontractor tree surgeons were satisfied that the installation met the required standards. Over the time period netting was inspected by a qualified ecologist on 11th March, 15th March, 27th March and finally 4th April. On those visits the ecologist advised Kier that no birds were trapped. The Council is aware that a bird was released by a member of the public and we understand that to have been on the 10th March. This incident took place after interference of the netting had already commenced.

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 Sergent asked:

“The ecologist who oversaw the removal of the netting said the correct methods had not been used for securing the ends of the nets. Will the Council now accept that the netting was not properly installed?”

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered

I think I have advised in what I have just given in response that everything was inspected and found acceptable.

I don’t think the position of the Council changes on the basis of your revised statement there.

I am happy to go back to Kier through their contractors and get a fuller response if they are able to give one but my understanding is that the response that we have received is complete.

(h) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by Mr Thomas Ward:

“Having been informed that a meeting to discuss and prioritise all drainage works across the district would take place at the end of September 2018, when will the investigation required on the drainage layout on Englefield Road resume?”

As Mr Ward was unable to attend the meeting he received the following written response from the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside:

A drainage investigation was carried out in March 2019. As a result of the investigation the drainage system is being upgraded between Play Platt Junction and the new entrance into the school. This is being undertaken as part of the construction of the new school. Officers are now also aware of a specific drainage issue outside Number 62 Englefield Road, which will be included in the on-going school works.

(i) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing by Mr Paul Morgan:

“What is the business case and associated up front and ongoing running costs associated with the latest new suggestion proposed by the Council for the Community Football Ground in Faraday Road?”

The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing answered:

In terms of the business case, the use of the old football ground as a Multi-use Games Area (MUGA) is not an attempt to find a more commercially beneficial use but a way of making this asset available for continued public use until the land is required for possible redevelopment and to make that use available by not again entering into a new lease.

You asked about the upfront costs, the capital costs budgeted for that are £88,000. The final amount is subject to procurement, but it is expected to be close to that number.

The previous lease arrangement earned the Council an income of £4,500 per annum. As and when redevelopment might come forward, the Council needs to retain freedom of action which would not be well served by entering into another agreement similar to the previous lease which expired in June 2018 and which the Council has made clear many times it would not renew.

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 Morgan asked:

“Are you saying that £88,000, which you quoted about six months ago, is the upfront cost for your plans?”

The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing answered:

The final amount is still subject to procurement, but we expect it to be close to that number.

(k) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by Mr Jason Braidwood:

“What quality controls will the Council put in its own Planning Application submission process to avoid a repeat of a recent application that Sport England stated was “extremely poor and lacks detail?””

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

As with all constructive criticism and feedback, Officers will take the comments of Sport England on board and will learn from it. However, it should be noted the application content needed to make a Planning Application a valid one is prescribed by legislation. It is not unusual for further information and clarity to be sought and provided, after first submission and during the application process, and particularly in response to specialist interests identified by consultees.

It is also considered that the time and effort Officers spent preparing plans and documents for what is, and I emphasise is, for temporary use of this land was entirely proportionate.

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 Braidwood asked:

“When do you envisage the next application?”

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

I don't have an answer to that, I am happy to take that up with officers, and try to confirm it later and come back to you in writing.

(I) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing by Mr Jack Harkness:

“What consultation took place and what evidence of need does the Council have to justify their latest plans announced in March 2019 of a MUGA at the community football ground in Faraday Road?”

The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing answered:

As I said in response to the earlier question, the MUGA installation is seen as providing a temporary access to a facility whilst the London Road regeneration process takes place.

The proposal, as was mentioned, does go through planning which does involve a statutory consultation 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 Harkness asked:

“So you are saying that you haven’t done any consultation so far – why not?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Waste answered:

This question has been asked and answered many times before. The Council has, in the light of the London Road Industrial Estate situation, taken the decision that the MUGA is the best way of making that access available to the public.

(m) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing by Mr Lee McDougall:

“In the light of the recent election results and the influx of so many new Councillors does the Council not agree that it is now time to come together and engage with the wider Football Community of Newbury (together with Sport England and the Berks & Bucks FA) to provide a permanent solution for the ongoing issue of the re-instatement or re-provision of the Community Football Ground at Faraday Road - a solution that is genuinely supported and needed by the Community?”

As Mr McDougall was unable to attend the meeting he received the following written response from the Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing:

The Council has been in discussions with Newbury FC, Sport England and the Football Association, through the Berks and Bucks FA, in relation to the Football Ground on Faraday Road and potential re-provision.

As you know, and has been widely publicised over many years, the Council maintains its intention to regenerate the London Road Industrial Estate. This position is understood by Sport England and Berks & Bucks FA and the parties are in dialogue about an alternative long term provision elsewhere in Newbury.

However, your point is noted, and we do intend to engage widely with sports and social clubs and organisations over the next few months, not only with regards to this specific provision, but to enable the Council to generate a long-term sports and leisure strategy for the whole district. We expect that to include a ‘needs assessment’ of quantity and quality of football provision, from which we can work on the provision, from all sources. We hope that we can include your organisation in those discussions.

(n) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning by Ms Alison May:

“Will West Berkshire Council agree to instigate an Ancient Woodland Inventory review, allocating the necessary funding, within West Berkshire Council's current financial year?”

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning answered:

The Woodland Trust was given £200,000 in April 2019 to update the Ancient Woodland Inventory to extend the national data down from 2 hectares to 0.25 of a hectare and improve records that were originally collected in the 1980s.

West Berkshire's Ancient Woodland was last updated in 2017. This identified and mapped 3,611 parts of 25,701 hectares of ancient woodland ranging in size from just 137 square metres to 450.6 hectares.

However, I am happy to report that the Thames Valley Ecological Records Centre, as part of our ongoing Service Level Agreement with them, are in the process of updating these records further to comply with the Natural England 2018 methodology this financial year.

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 May did not ask a supplementary question

(o) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing by Mr John Stewart:

“Regarding the delayed change of use of Newbury’s main football ground at Faraday Road, please can the Council confirm what costs it incurred from the removal of the spectator stand, fencing, gates and floodlighting and whether any other parties benefitted financially from this?”

The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing answered:

Hungerford Town Football Club removed the stand at their own cost. Some fencing was disposed of which was in a state of disrepair and was considered unsafe. The Council has not removed any floodlighting units, and as far as we are aware they are still at the ground.

The only cost incurred by the Council was to make the site safe and secure.

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 Stewart asked:

“When do you envisage the site opening?”

The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing answered:

I can’t answer the question directly in terms of a specific date, we are obviously trying to open it as fast as we can.

We are currently going through a planning process which will be quickly followed by a procurement process.

(p) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance by Dr Julie Wintrup:

“Now that we have a new council, will the Executive reverse the previous council’s decision only to review the unlawful deal with St Modwen’s in the privacy of its Scrutiny committee, and instead agree a full public and independent review?”

As Dr Wintrup was unable to attend the meeting she received the following written response from the Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance:

The Council has fully outlined how and why it will review the matter in question. The Council’s approach was upheld in the High Court and whilst not in the Court of Appeal, the award of £1 against the Council indicates the lack of severity of the issue and in the circumstances I cannot recommend the use of Council Tax Payers money. The referral to Overview and Scrutiny is the appropriate solution and is therefore how the Council will proceed.

(b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by Mr Thomas Tunney:

“What is the purpose served by the compulsory acquisition of the memorial field in Thatcham for flood water retention, when that area has never flooded?”

(c) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by Mr Thomas Tunney:

“Do the new flood defences focus water to the memorial field?”

(d) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by Mr Thomas Tunney:

“What will happen to the dog enclosure in these plans?”

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered all three questions simultaneously as they were very closely linked:

(b) The memorial field was identified, along with a number of other Thatcham open spaces, as a potential flood water storage area as part of the Thatcham Surface Water Management Plan which was produced in 2007 following some major floods in the area.

There is no proposal to compulsorily purchase the land. This particular part of the Surface Water Management Plan is not even at the feasibility stage at this time and there is no funding allocated in the current 5 year Capital Programme.

Any proposal would be aimed at protecting residential properties from flooding but would need to be carefully studied to see if the cost and benefit would attract central government funding. It would also involve careful discussion and consultation with landowners.

The aim would be to have minimal impact on the use of this land, but to make physical changes to the immediate flow routes which would cause the memorial field to flood, during an extreme weather event only, protecting the residential properties to the south that are currently at risk of flooding.

(c) The new defences constructed in Thatcham at Tull Way and Cold Ash, and those currently under construction at Dunston Park and Siege Cross, do not focus water towards the memorial field.

The proposed scheme at the memorial fields deals with a completely separate surface water flow. The proposed scheme for the memorial fields will divert flood water from an existing ditch alongside the field, where it will be stored and released in a controlled manner into the existing underground sewer during extreme surface water flood events, with an emphasis on extreme events. As mentioned in my previous answer, this will help protect residential properties that are currently at risk from flooding.

(d) This will be discussed with landowners if, and only if, a viable scheme is developed and taken forward at detailed design.

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.

(f) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning by Mr Peter Norman:

“Will the Council review its current land allocations for new housing to ensure that current proposals best meet the challenges of: climate change, improving air quality and maintaining/improving biodiversity in the area?”

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning answered:

As I’ve already explained in my answer to your previous question, the National Planning Policy Framework of February 2019 requires a review of local plans once every five years, this is what the Council is doing with the Local Plan Review to 2036.

Chapter 14 of that document sets out what local planning authorities must do, in land use planning terms, to plan for climate change, and in order for the independent Planning Inspector to approve the Local Plan and ensure that it meets the NPPF requirements that is what we will do.

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:

“So does that cover existing land allocations such as Sandleford, will that be included in the review?”

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning answered:

We are reviewing the local plan and we will be reviewing everything to do with climate change in that plan.

(j) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing by Mr Paul Morgan:

“What is the current status of the Playing Pitch Strategy and when will it be available for the general public to view?”

The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing answered:

The Playing Pitch Strategy is awaiting final amendments and sign off from the partners involved in the development of the Strategy. Discussions are continuing to finalise this as quickly as possible and it is anticipated that the process for formal adoption of the Strategy will be able to commence by the middle of the summer.

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 Morgan asked:

“So to confirm you will adopt the recommendations in the Strategy?”

The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing answered:

This is a joint document, produced and signed by the Council as well as its partners and I did actually cover this question a few meetings ago, when I said the Council will not adopt a Strategy it is not prepared to sign up to. So, yes, we will sign up to the Strategy when it is agreed.

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

(a) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning by Councillor Steve Masters:

“Given the success of the Night Shelter managed by West Berkshire Homeless will the portfolio holder join me in paying tribute to the voluntary sector (and indeed the landlord) for their work?”

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning answered:

The Council welcomes the excellent work in the voluntary sector and continued partnership working between all organisations to tackle the issue of rough sleeping. The Council and the Homelessness Strategy Group had a winter plan for 2018/19 for rough sleepers in the District which included additional outreach support and an extended winter provision at Two Saints in addition to the SWEP (Statutory Winter Emergency Provision). These initiatives were funded by the Council. The Council and partners made every effort possible (above and beyond) to assist rough sleepers within existing resources. The Council delivers the Housing Service in a proactive way to prevent homelessness and has embraced the new legal obligations under the Homelessness Reduction Act.

The Rough Sleeping Initiative funding allocated by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has provided support for more projects which has provided additional housing options which will provide the tools for all parties to benefit from, such as Housing First. This is a project which provides housing with intensive support to enable people to sustain their tenancies.

The Council has a Homelessness Strategy which is due to be reviewed and has developed a Rough Sleeping Plan which sets out the actions that will be taken to address rough sleeping in West Berkshire.

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 Steve Masters asked the following supplementary question:

“On reflection do you think it was necessary to open the shelter?”

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning answered:

I feel that we had sufficient provision. The shelter is run by a charity and we have no control over what that charity chooses to do or not to do.

Having said that we do have a good working relationship with the West Berkshire Homelessness charity, and I sincerely hope we will continue to do so in the future.

(f) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning by Councillor Adrian Abbs:

“Why and how was the decision made to de-couple the two Sandleford planning applications as revealed by comments recently made by both the CEO of West Berkshire and your Transport Policy Officer as published on the planning portal last month?”

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning answered:

A decision has not been made about whether it is possible to de-couple the Sandleford proposal into two applications. The consideration of that remains a live issue, under consideration.

The Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) seeks to secure a straightforward administrative route to comprehensively secure, into one package, all the elements of development that are essential for a successful development, such as Sandleford.

It has so far proven difficult for the two owner/developers to reach the necessary agreements between themselves that would allow all the development proposals to be covered by one single application, so they have chosen to submit one application each for the land under their control.

The Council is not allowed to simply refuse to accept two applications for consideration, if that is what the applicants choose to do. That doesn't automatically mean however that two applications can be a successful route to an approved development, but rather than allow the administrative process to stifle the delivery of housing which is much needed, Officers have asked the developers, and continue to consider, how it will be possible to secure one holistic development from two separate planning permissions.

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 Adrian Abbs asked:

“I am a little confused by your response. When you spoke at the beginning, you said that they had not been separated but then towards the end of your explanation they are allowed to. I thought the strategic plan specifically had the two linked together, so have they been separated or not?”

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning answered:

They have not been separated at the moment, as I said initially it is a live issue which is under considerations. Officers are speaking to both developers and it is our intention that we need to deliver Sandleford as a holistic development.

From my point of view it doesn't matter to me if we have one or two planning applications as long as they meet the strict criteria which is laid down in the Sandleford SPD.

(g) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by Councillor Alan Macro:

“What, if anything, is this Council doing to mark Clean Air Day?”

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

I can confirm that the Council is intending to take part in Clean Air Day on 20th June and we are hoping to engage with partners.

We are currently looking into what our participation will be for Clean Air Day. It is likely that we will use social media to highlight campaigns and we are looking at the optimum way of extending that, on a daily or weekly basis, so we need to make sure that we use the optimum means for doing that.

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 day is less than a month away, so I would have hoped that we would have stronger plans for the day by now and you would be able to provide some detail, so does this not show that this Council is not taking the problem of air pollution seriously?”

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

Absolutely not, as you all know from your years in the Council there have been initiatives ongoing for a number of years, and some of those will be discussed later on. As I sit here at the moment there are a number of aspects that are pending finalisation.

We would like to make sure that we are engaged with partners on that, but obviously that takes time to work out what they are doing and work out how we can feed in with them. So no I don't accept that position at all.

(i) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Wellbeing by Councillor David Marsh:

“The Secretary of State for Health has recently called for children to be protected from poisonous exhaust fumes through a ban on all vehicles near schools for 45 minutes in the morning and afternoon when they are arriving and leaving. What plans are there to implement this excellent proposal in West Berkshire?”

The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Wellbeing answered:

We have already studied this and I am happy to report that within the West Berkshire area there are no schools within the hotspot locations or the Air Quality Management Areas within the district. However, air pollution is one of the Public Protection Partnership (PPP) priority areas of work and any actions or new opportunities to reduce exposure to vehicle emissions will be considered as part of the Air Quality Action Plan which is a joint effort between the PPP, the Transport Policy, Highways and Public Health Departments.

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 David Marsh asked:

“Looking at the plans for the current school that is under construction in Theale, for the primary school that’s temporarily suspended that is under construction in Sandleford, and indeed the plans for Sandleford itself which include access via Warren Road to Sandleford - a matter of feet away from Park House School, are you claiming that the Council has taken this seriously and taken it on board?”

Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Wellbeing answered:

I can’t answer the question right now, but I will get that answer to you.

(b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning by Councillor Steve Masters:

“How many people and/or families are on the waiting list for social housing at the moment?”

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning answered:

There are currently 2,071 live applications on the Choice Based Lettings list.

As an elected Member, this information is freely available to all Members and Officers will be pleased to brief you on any housing queries you may have.

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 Masters did not ask a supplementary question.

(h) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by Councillor Alan Macro:

“Why were hedges near the construction site of the new Theale C of E Primary School removed during the bird nesting season?”

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

I believe my response to the public question has detailed the complications that were experienced.

The removal of hedging was legal at Theale was carried out in order to allow the construction programme to proceed as per the contract and doing otherwise would incur substantial extra cost to the Council and delay delivery of the new school.

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:

“Given that the Parish Council agreed to release the land in early February, why couldn't this Council move forward more quickly so that this work could have been done before the bird nesting season started?”

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

I would suggest to you that the delays that were caused by the ongoing conversation between the Council and Theale Parish would have probably been fundamental to some of the longer dates being in the calendar than were expected. I don't believe I've got anything more that I can give you as a detailed response to that and I am happy to take advice from our legal colleagues.

(c) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning by Councillor Steve Masters:

“How many social housing units have been brought into the local housing stock since May 2015?”

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning answered:

Between 2015 and 2019, 600 affordable homes have been built in West Berkshire. There are permissions for 800 more. Some of these are social rent, affordable rent and shared ownership.

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 Steve Masters asked:

“What proportion of what you classify as affordable are actually true social rent?”

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning answered:

Total figures are not available for 2018/19 yet, because there can be individual house purchases we are not aware of until year end. However, between 2014 and 2018, there were a total of 615 completions. The breakdown by tenure was 109 Affordable Rent, 296 Social Rent and 210 Shared Ownership completions.

(d) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning by Councillor Steve Masters:

“Does the Housing portfolio holder note any connection between the levels of homelessness and the lack of adequate social housing stock?”

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning answered:

The Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) 2014, which is currently being updated, estimated that there is an estimated net need for affordable housing in West Berkshire of 189 affordable homes per annum. The delivery of 600 over the past 6 years is 125 per annum on average. If all of the permissions were built out, the identified need would be exceeded. Therefore, identified housing need is being delivered. The new SHMA will be available in June 2019 and there will be an opportunity to identify if these needs have changed over 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 Steve Masters asked:

“If there is a waiting list of over 2,000 (as it stands at present), would that not indicate under supply and over demand?”

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning answered:

I think you are confusing two things. One is the number of people that are on the housing register (Choice Based Lettings Register) and the other is the social housing stock. We are not social housing stock holders, the vast majority of social housing stock in West Berkshire is held by Sovereign.

What I have given you is the number of completions that we have had as a district of social housing. In addition, there are 800 permissions extant, but we can't force the developers to build these houses. They will do so in their own time.

(e) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning by Councillor Steve Masters:

“Given we have invested £60million in commercial property with the option to extend to £100 million how many social housing units would this level of speculative, casino style investment yield if we were to build on existing council land?”

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning answered:

At its meeting on 3rd July 2018 the Council resolved to approve an additional £50m to the Property Investment Strategy as an addendum to the Council’s Investment and Borrowing Strategy 2018/19 for the purposes of acquiring additional property assets. This was in addition to the £50m approved by Council in May 2017, offering a total capital budget of £100m. All acquisitions are strictly in accordance with a formal Property Investment Strategy (with any proposed acquisition sitting outside the Strategy requiring an Executive decision) with the intention of creating a balanced property portfolio to derive long term revenue income for the Council.

Separate from the investment in commercial property, West Berkshire Council’s Executive approved the establishment of a Joint Venture (JV) between West Berkshire Council and Sovereign Housing Association with the intention of bringing forward land for the development of affordable housing. Legal due diligence is under way to form this JV and the Council is assessing a number of its own sites for disposal to the JV to offer developable opportunity for affordable housing in West Berkshire in addition to that relied upon through the normal housing development market.

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 Steve Masters asked:

“Did the Council consider building their own social housing, given that the Government has spoken about the need to invest more in social and therefore affordable housing stock at local authority level, and instead investing capital on social housing properties with the rents moving forward - whether that would have a greater return than the 2% that we are experiencing with this investment plan?”

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning answered:

The property investment is agreed by Council and that is for a specific income generation. We are looking at the JV with Sovereign Housing and this is just one stream of work that we are doing on looking at providing housing within West Berkshire.

The amount of land that we have is limited, but we are certainly exploring very opportunity, in as much as whether or not we could at some stage purchase land and develop it out there are lots of options, the JV being one of them. But we are at an early stage and therefore we are taking things slowly, so that we are doing things properly rather than a quick fix way.

This page is intentionally left blank