

# Questions and Answers

**Executive**  
**Thursday 17 October 2019**

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# **Executive Meeting**

**17 October 2019**

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 Transport and Countryside by Mr Alan Pearce:**

*“Has the A339 road junction for new access into London Road Industrial Estate been constructed with a sustainable drainage system?”*

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

Thank you for your question Mr Pearce, the very brief answer is yes it has.

The A339 junction sustainable drainage system comprises an oil interceptor and oversized concrete pipes that provide temporary storage of run-off from newly paved areas which is then released into a public sewer at a controlled rate mimicking natural run-off characteristics – a central design concept in sustainable drainage systems. These components are well understood and are especially useful in highway improvement projects where site constraints preclude the use of other methods. Oil interceptors are widely used to prevent hazardous chemicals and petroleum products from entering public sewers and watercourses.

The removal of sediment is one of the primary mechanisms in SuDS design as most pollutants are attached to sediment particles and so the removal of sediment results in a significant reduction in pollution. Oversized pipes reduces the flow of water to a level where the sediment particles fall out of suspension. This has the added benefit of reducing sediment entering public sewers that over time can cause blockages and an increased flood risk.

Both the Environment Agency and Thames Water were consulted on this approach through planning approval 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 Pearce did not ask a supplementary question.

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

*“Can the Council please confirm that they will provide written confirmation regarding the availability of a Step 5 ground in Newbury to ensure that NCFG’s application to enter an Under 23 team and an Academy U18 team into the Hellenic Football League (which is Step 5 league) for next season (2020/2021) is successful?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing answered:**

Unfortunately the Council cannot confirm the availability of a fully functional Step 5 football facility in that timescale. We do welcome the news that new U23 and academy U18 teams are being formed in Newbury as we were not aware that the Newbury Community Football Group ran teams directly. We were also not aware that any teams in Newbury are currently playing at that level or approaching that level. However, we would be very willing to meet with club officials to understand the details and what their plans are for a sustainable future at that level and what the Council can do to help.

Longer term, as I have said to you and your colleagues in our meetings outside of the Chamber, the Council will endeavour to improve the current situation for high quality teams and either provide or influence the provision of surfaces and facilities for all relevant levels of play.

**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 the following supplementary question:**

*“You are aware of course that it’s a Catch-22 situation. The Step 5 ground already exists, so it’s not the fact that you need to provide a new one because it already exists. You cannot apply for a league unless you’ve got a Step 5 ground, you know that and most of the people in the Council know that. Conversations have been held with the Berks and Bucks FA and they have said Newbury FC is at the top of their league so they want a ground to play the next step up, so the demand is there it’s always been there. The ground should not have been closed. My question is who in this Council is looking at the question of whether this ground should be opened without further delay. Which one of you Council Members is in charge of this important question?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing answered:**

The question of the ground being reopened is one related to the London Road Industrial Estate project which is a different remit from my own. The ground, as I would have said in answer to a later question, is not in a fit state to be reopened as a level 5. If it was reopened as it stands today it would not qualify as a level 5 ground and would require huge amounts of investment to get it to that level again so we’re not in a position to do that. The London Road Estate is not available to us to develop as a leisure facility.

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

*“Is the Council aware that Newbury Ladies FC is currently in a promotion position in the Southern Region Womens Football League and that if promotion is achieved to the FA Womens National League they would have to play outside Newbury as Faraday Road Community Football Ground has been closed by the Council and no other pitch is available that meets the appropriate ground grading requirements?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing answered:**

We are pleased to hear that the Newbury Ladies Football Club are doing well and hope that they do gain promotion from the Southern Region Premier Division into the FA Women’s National League, which we understand is at a level which would require a ground equivalent to a Category G. This is based on the observations published on the FA’s website.

At this stage we are not able to provide a Category G facility in Newbury but we would be very keen to assist in the process of representation to the governing body of Women’s football for any transitional arrangements that may need negotiation. It would be very helpful to meet with the club officials to understand what their plans are for a sustainable future at this level. It should be noted, as I said in the previous question, that simply reopening the ground would not be a solution because it would not qualify for the Step 5 requirements as it stands at the moment.

**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 the following supplementary question:**

*“Well I had a supplementary but you’ve effectively answered it by saying that you’re not in a position to reopen Faraday Road. I would just ask a quick question, so effectively, in terms of timescales, if we continue to stay in the position we are currently in and we are offered promotion then are you aware that we have to have all the provisions for next season in place by the end of February?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing answered:**

I am conscious of the timescales and we are working as hard as we can to see what we can do to provide some help. I think realistically for the next season the best that the Council can do is to help to negotiate the right facility in the area. It clearly won’t be Faraday Road.

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**(d) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing by Mr Jason Braidwood:**

*“Can the Council advise what it is doing to address the chronic shortage of children’s football training venues in Newbury?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing answered:**

Thank you for your question, you raise an important point. The Council is aware that more football training venues are needed for children, this has been studied in partnership with Sport England and the Berks/Bucks FA and will be considered in detail through the Playing Pitch Strategy. The Council will be setting out its actions for dealing with the shortage once the Strategy is published and will use all of its available policies and powers to try and improve accessibility to such important local facilities. We do not accept that Faraday Road has made the situation worse as we are not aware that Faraday Road was ever a regular training ground for children’s training.

**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 the following supplementary question:**

*“What advice would you suggest to give to me that I can give to over 300 kids that do not get the chance to use any of these facilities?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing answered:**

I understand what you’re saying, I think that’s exaggerating the situation. I know that you have an academy with a lot of children who are already training. I know that there’s pressure on those training facilities. We know through the Playing Pitch Strategy that there are enough pitches numerically in the area but they’re not necessarily the right configuration or quality or the access may be difficult and what we want to do is to work on those aspects as soon as we can, but our concentration at the moment is to get the Playing Pitch Strategy published and put an action plan against that as fast as we can.

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

*“How can the Council expect us to believe it is serious about it’s Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2017-2020) and specifically the declared Aim and Objective to “Support residents to be more physically active, achieve a healthy weight and eat a healthy diet”, when it unnecessarily closed the Community Football Ground a year ago?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing answered:**

There are several parts to the answer to your question, so hopefully you’ll bear with me.

First, we cannot accept there’s a direct link between the general health and wellbeing of the residents of Newbury and the status of one adult football pitch. That is not to say that we don’t recognise the contribution and the importance of playing football, or any of the many other forms of physical activity which contribute to the overall mix of public health initiatives. As landowner of the Faraday Road Football Ground the Council does not verify the claim of the football group that it was frequently and regularly used by the wider community and it was not called the Community Football Ground.

We view the use beyond that of Newbury Football Club itself as infrequent, for special occasions only and with relatively limited access. We assisted Newbury Football Club with alternative arrangements for which they have told us that they are satisfied.

There are plans to partially reopen the site for true broad community use which will increase the accessibility to the public.

The Council remains clear that it will look for all opportunities to increase the number of pitches across the Newbury area and beyond, remember we are responsible for the whole District not just Newbury. That will include working closely with other organisations who have pitches and looking for new pieces of land that may offer viable long term facilities.

Finally, to answer the import of your question fully, the Council provides and commissions a wide range of public health services which includes leisure facilities, recreational sites and open green spaces and also contracts supporting vulnerable people. We will continue to look for ways to protect and expand the reach of these services whilst being conscious of the constraints of our budgets.

**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 McDougall asked the following supplementary question:**

*“Do you mind if I just clarify a factual correction first? You say that the ground wasn’t used by the wider community, that is just incorrect. My son played there right up until you closed the ground: U6s, U16s, U17s, U18s. If you look at the Asset of Community Value application there are 10 pages of community use going back over 30 years so please don’t try and position this as just a men’s club. As part of the lease with the Council they had to sublet it to the community so that is an incorrect statement that you need to clarify before you say that in public again.*

*In relation to my supplementary question, you have a facility for football, which is the largest participation sport in England; 11 million play, 3.5 million children play on a regular basis. The*



*FA report shows that youth participation in football drops from about 52% ages 13 to 15 to just 26% when you get to 17 to 18 so therefore my question is do you not see that the Council is exacerbating the reduction in participation in sport by the youth of Newbury by taking away the only venue that's suitable for competitive youth football? "*

**The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing answered:**

I understand the point you're trying to make but as I've said the Council is creating a Leisure Strategy. The Strategy is to try and provide playing surfaces, playing facilities for all levels of field sports, football and other, across the District and not solely concentrate our efforts on the one particular venue (the Community Football Group seems to have only one agenda). I would welcome working with the Community Football Group on working out how our Leisure Strategy can satisfy the demands of the real community right across the District.

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**(f) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Dr Julie Wintrup:**

*“When and in what detail will the assessment of the effects of a no deal Brexit be shared with local residents and businesses, headlines of which were apparently leaked from a confidential Council briefing?”*

**The Leader of the Council answered:**

The leaked documents did not include an assessment of the effects of a no deal Brexit, but rather an assessment of the potential risks with details of what mitigation was being put in place.

The Council has been working with the Government and a range of partners for some time to manage the risks of a potential no deal exit from the European Union. Local residents and businesses concerned about the impact are being directed to the [www.gov.uk/Brexit](http://www.gov.uk/Brexit) website and to the Berkshire Growth Hub respectively for advice and guidance. The focus of this Council’s activities are about making sure we can continue to provide our statutory services and the briefing for elected Members was to update them on our latest planning.

With regard to the leaked documents from a confidential Council briefing, I would like to invite the Leaders of the Opposition to join me in condemning any Member or officer that breaches their Code of Conduct for Members and the Nolan Principles for Public Life and leaks documents that are very clearly marked as confidential.

**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?”*

**Dr Wintrup commented:**

*“I am very glad to hear that you are committed to the Nolan Principles and you have a robust policy for dealing with Councillors’ breaches, so no I don’t have a supplementary.”*

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**(i) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Education by Ms Caroline French Blake:**

*“Can the Executive describe how and when it will reverse the 97% cuts in Youth Services since 2010, and re-establish or preferably exceed its 2010 funding level to meet the urgent need of young people for support?”*

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

Thank you for your question Ms French Blake. Significant financial constraints over the last ten years have meant that the Council has moved towards a targeted provision of work based on Children’s Social Care Service thresholds rather than the free access, District wide provision that was previously in place. This means that most of the Council’s youth centres have been transferred to community or to parish ownership across the district, with the majority continuing to run youth and community provision by their own communities for their community.

The Waterside Centre in Newbury is one of the last of these buildings. We have built a partnership with Berkshire Youth and we have some very exciting plans to enable an extensive refurbishment of that facility and Berkshire Youth have submitted plans for that.

The Council continues to work with vulnerable young people through Social Work Teams and the Targeted Intervention Service. Where young people have particular needs - for example misusing substances - they work with The Edge (a dedicated service for young people), or if they commit a crime they work with the Youth Offending Team. The Local Authority provides support for young carers and has developed a partnership with YMCA for weekly activities. We have developed similar support services for young people who are Not in Education, Training or Support and also Asylum Seeking children.

It is these vulnerable people who need our support the most and I will ensure that they continue to receive 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?”*

**Ms Caroline French Blake asked the following supplementary question:**

*“I’m sure that’s right that the most vulnerable do need the most support but it’s support across the board that’s important. Aside from support for children in particular need, do you think this support that’s left to local people is sufficient across the board?”*

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

The provision of youth services that were previously provided by West Berkshire, they haven’t disappeared. They continue to be delivered, not perhaps in exactly the same extent or depth or volume but services are being delivered locally to the young people of West Berkshire.

**Ms Caroline French Blake asked the following supplementary question:**

*“But the 97% cut to the budget, is there enough to keep the local communities safe; young people and old people in West Berkshire?”*

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

The money West Berkshire Council is spending is on the most vulnerable young people who need the support the most.

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**(g) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance by Dr Julie Wintrup**

*“Does the Council know how many families and individuals are living in West Berkshire who are considered to have No Recourse to Public Funds?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Finance answered:**

Thank you Dr Wintrup. I have quite significant experience of asylum seekers in my career having spent some time working in the Asylum Office in North London where there were very large numbers of asylum seekers. I saw this system come in to support these families and I'm very aware of how vulnerable they can be. There are currently only three families receiving this sort of support from the Council. There may be others out there who have not come forward to the Council to ask for 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?”*

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

*“If there may be others out there and you're not sure, are you doing anything to discover them or are they having to come forward to say they have no recourse to public funds because, you will know then, for many people they will be worried about coming forward, so are you doing anything else to discover?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Finance answered:**

It's like all of these things and again as I say I was very sensitised to this having spent time working in that sector. It's generally the case that they fall into one of three groups; either they are earning sufficient money to support themselves or they present themselves with some specific issue or alternatively they come to our attention because some issue has arisen, it may be to do with their children or their families. So we are doing our best and all our services are very alert to these families if they come forward and pay immediate attention if they have needs that need to be satisfied.

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

If these families come to our attention then we're able to address their individual needs and I'll talk a little bit about that in response to your next question.

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**(h) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Education by Dr Julie Wintrup:**

*“What is the Council’s policy on free school meals entitlement of children from families that have No Recourse to Public Funds?”*

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

Central Government policy determines who is entitled to receive free school meals. Children are not entitled if their parents do not meet the specified criteria. These criteria relate to the receipt of defined state benefits. Those who have no recourse to public funds do not normally qualify for free school meals. These people are not residents who are known to Social Services etc, these are people who are perhaps immigrants, who may well have their own resources but their children, under whatever circumstances, would not normally qualify for free school meals.

At present, we have no children in our schools who are in such an unfortunate situation. If they were and if they were in Years 1 or 2 then they would enjoy free school meals under the universal provision. If children were in that situation and older, they would almost certainly, I can’t be absolutely certain depending on the individual circumstances, but they would almost certainly be considered as Children in Need and as such Children and Family Services would then make sure that they received their free school meals.

Just to put this matter into context for us here in West Berkshire, over the last two years we’ve identified eight adults for whom no recourse to public funding was a risk factor and associated with these adults were three children. I’ve been unable to find any record of children being unable to receive free school meals as a result of their parents not having recourse to public funding.

**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?”*

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

*“So if there were people out there, there’s no actual policy making that evident, they wouldn’t necessarily know that was the case because I looked at the policies and I can’t find it on the website or are you saying it’s on a case by case basis?”*

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

It would be on a case by case basis. As explained, the children concerned would almost certainly be considered as Children in Need and as such Children and Family Services would make sure that they received their free school meals.

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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 Transport and Countryside by Councillor Alan Macro:**

*"What is the Executive Member planning to do to make this council more responsive to requests for speed limit changes from councillors and members of the public?"*

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

Thank you for your question Councillor Macro. As you will know, having been involved with the process as I understand for many years, the current way that requests for speed limit changes are dealt with is by means of an annual Speed Limit Review. Requests received throughout the year are considered at the Speed Limit Review meeting by the Speed Limit Task Group.

This approach has long been recognised by Thames Valley Police as being a leading example of good practice and ensures a thorough and consistent decision making process. This helps to ensure that speed limits are consistent across the district, which in turn means that limits are more likely to be respected and obeyed by drivers.

There are currently no plans to revise this process. However, given that this process has been in place for some time I am happy to instruct officers to undertake a review and report this to a future meeting of the Transport Advisory Group for an open discussion.

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

**Councillor Alan Macro asked the following supplementary question:**

*"Thank you for that flexibility. When I was first involved in the Speed Limit Task Group it met twice a year. The issue with only one meeting per year is the time it could take to consider a request that came in shortly after a meeting was held. Could the review consider frequency and the potential for the meeting to go back to at least twice a year?"*

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

As I said I am happy to hold a review and continue this conversation.

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**(b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment by Councillor Carlyne Culver:**

*“Will the council’s draft environment (carbon neutral by 2030) strategy be shared at the conference on Monday 28 October?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Environment answered:**

We have taken the decision not to circulate a formed strategy document to conference attendees for the reason that we want attendees, who are likely to be among the most engaged in the District, to contribute more fully to the Strategy for a much wider public consultation.

What we plan to do is circulate to Members of the EAG a lateish version of the Strategy next week.

Conference attendees will be strongly asked at many stages to give feedback on two aspects; both the conference itself, the value and the individual speakers etc, but also their views on what a Strategy and its priorities should be.

The input, related to the Strategy, will be collated by officers and condensed into an updated version of the Strategy by around the middle of November, and that version, including conference attendee feedback and views, will be what goes to public consultation for a six week period, starting the middle of November.

So there won’t be an explicit document, but we particularly value the feedback of people who come to the conference.

**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 Carlyne Culver asked the following supplementary question:**

*“So if we are going to the conference, and then we are going to ask the delegates to provide their views, how are you going to do this? Shouldn’t the draft Strategy be shared with delegates for their views, rather than a blank sheet of paper asking for ideas when a draft Strategy exists?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Environment answered:**

As with the existing process of feedback, and there have been several rounds with Members of all parties, there is a successive process of gathering input, grouping and collating it. Obviously, attendees will be told about this process, and they will then be able to see and additionally comment on the formed document about two weeks later. So firstly, attendees will have two opportunities to contribute and again it will help differentiate the feedback from attendees as well as those wider members of the public who will feedback shortly afterwards.

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**(c) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment by Councillor Carolyne Culver:**

*“How will the council determine the questions asked in its online public consultation about the environment strategy?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Environment answered:**

There will not be explicit questions asked as you phrase it. The document will be published, and we will ask people in freehand format to give views and express comments on specific items of the Strategy.

Relating again to conference attendees feedback, because that will be purely by an online form, this allows us to do a slightly more numerical one to ten opinion weighting, to get numerical input. Feedback from the public consultation will be both online and copies available in libraries, as well as the Council offices. So the usual, fairly broad, attempt to give access to the document, with links and encouragement online, via social media and so forth. So we want the consultation to be as wide and effective, and reach as many people, as possible.

**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 Culver did not ask a supplementary question.

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**(d) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment by Councillor Carlyne Culver:**

*“How will the council ensure that the draft environment strategy and public consultation are widely publicised to stakeholders and the public?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Environment answered:**

I think I have mostly answered this question already, but again we want to publicise this through a number of channels, both online references to physical documents, and online documents, and again we would encourage as many residents of the district to give their input as they feel they are happy to.

**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 Culver asked the following supplementary question:**

*“A resident of mine contacted me this week to say she is going to the conference and made contact with the Council to seek further information but the receptionist she spoke to was not aware of the climate conference. Therefore, what is being done within the Council, in terms of internal communications, to make sure that everyone knows what is happening with the conference, the strategy, the consultation and so on.*

*Will there be a member of staff with specific responsibility for example?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Environment answered:**

Thank you for highlighting that information, I wasn't aware of that. Clearly we need to make people, in particular reception staff, well aware of this.

As you will have seen, and I trust all Councillors will have seen, there has been a lot of online promotional activity around this. I am happy to tell Members that we are nearing the capacity point at the conference. The final batch of 50 or so tickets are going to be released and we expect, together with both Council Members and staff attendees, to have well in excess of 300 people at the conference. But thank you again, we will make sure that a wider range of staff who come into contact with the public are briefed and well aware and can answer queries regarding the conference.

**Councillor Lynne Doherty added:**

I think Councillor Culver that given the number of posters around this building it shows that as many channels of communication as possible are being used. Because there certainly is lots of communication going on but we do need to make sure we cross the t's and dot the i's and thank you for bringing that to our attention.

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

*“How much council resource, in terms of officer hours, has been spent on the Sandleford development applications to date?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning answered:**

Case officer time and supporting management time is not recorded on the basis of time spent on each application so I can't provide information in that particular respect.

**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 the following supplementary question:**

*“If we are not recording the amount of time that is being spent then how do we know the level of financial contribution to seek from builders? How do we know whether or not we are spending too much time or too little time?”*

*Do we know if we have dedicated staff working on the applications?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning answered:**

You are making two references. One is with regard to the planning fees that developers pay for a planning application and the other is whether there is a planning officer dedicated to the Sandleford development, so that is two questions.

The first one with regard to planning fees, I would wish Councillor Abbs that planning fees covered the cost of the service. Planning fees are set by Central Government and in no way do they cover the cost of the planning service. We would dearly love to be able to set up our own planning fees so that the planning service pays for itself. As it is, every resident of West Berkshire, you and me included, subsidise our planning service, and my view is that the people who submit a planning application should cover the cost, but that doesn't happen. So that is a separate issue.

With regard to the Sandleford application, we do have an officer solely dedicated to working with both developers on this application.

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**(f) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance by Councillor Adrian Abbs:**

*“Due to a lack of response from officers, can the Executive confirm how much of the £750k invest to save money has been spent to date?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Finance answered:**

This £750k is part of a much broader programme of spend to save. It has worked across the Council for a number of years now and significant progress has been made across the organisation, including improvements to processes, and making a lot of difference to costs overall.

But this is a particular sum of money in the capital fund. It is complex, all of these things relating to solar panel installations can have issues around planning, there a large number of suppliers and different technologies.

We have spent about £60k of that budget so far, we intend to spend about another £540k this year, and the balance of that will be carried forward to 20/21 at the moment, unless we come across further projects.

This project, during the course of this year, will, I am pleased to say in environmental terms, deliver almost half a million kwh of power. It achieves a 5% return on investment and it is very encouraging to see that result and we will certainly be looking very closely at these sort of schemes in the future.

**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 the following supplementary question:**

*“Could you explain why you have not been able to spend a relatively small amount of money across the vast landscape of West Berkshire? I don’t see any urgency.”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Finance answered:**

We are custodians of £750k of tax payers’ money. This is complex, 12 suppliers applied and the procurement process was complex. Unlike the private sector where you can pick a single supplier without any particular problem, we have to go through a very complex procurement process in the Council. In this case it involved 12 suppliers and we went through a complicated process of assessment, including viability. A number of these schemes have fallen over because suppliers have gone bust during the course of installation.

Residents, as I would expect if it was happening to me, if there are solar installations nearby, have very clear views on whether they value those installations or not, so we had to go through again a very thorough and meticulous planning process.

**(g) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment by Councillor Adrian Abbs:**

*“Given the slow progress in getting the new Environment Strategy completed, does the Executive agree that the EAG needs to meet more frequently?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Environment answered:**

Thank you for your question. Firstly I do refute the implication in your question that this has been slow. We have not been slow. This is a complex and difficult Strategy and as you well know, it needs to tie together with not just the direct officers involved in solar (reference your previous conversation), but also all areas of the Council. So our intent and need is to have the profile of this Strategy at a place where, for example, Adult Social Care, Children’s Social Care and Health and Wellbeing all have the environment and progress towards carbon neutrality as part of their brief.

These sort of things can’t be rushed. A rushed document, as you are suggesting, would be substandard. It would be easy to produce something within three months. Many other councils have spent well over six months and still are not at that stage, so we are by no means an outlier. We are doing the job very thoroughly. As I was saying in my answer to Councillor Culver, we intend to make sure that this is not only a finely crafted document from officers, but also has substantial input and incorporates ideas and thoughts from the entire community.

You then suggest that more frequent EAG meetings may help accelerate this. Absolutely, the EAG is part of the review and input process as we have already discussed and again will discuss once more next week. However, it really is part of a wider process, this thing cannot just be the Members of the EAG driving the Strategy, it is much bigger. Having more frequent meetings than we are, aside from during the summer break we are aiming for a monthly meeting frequency, that would not improve the ability of officers to do the work asked of them in a meeting, and then come back to the next meeting more often.

So we are working, we are on course for taking this to full Council and ideally seeking approval in the very early part of next year. This will be slightly over six months in total, which is, I believe, the right middle course for producing a thorough and well thought out Strategy, which as we all know needs to be relevant and last with us for a long time. It is going to be refreshed, but this is something which needs to guide us over the next ten years.

We are working hard, a lot of energy is being put into this and we welcome feedback from all quarters.

**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 Abbs asked the following supplementary question:**

*“I fully agree that we need a good document. However, it is the starting point you are beginning from which is the problem. Having only just decided that you need a Strategy, once it was forced upon you, you are having to create one locally, whereas several other areas already have completed strategies that could have been adopted or at least given a starting point. Do you not agree, given circumstances, that you are struggling to get something going from scratch as opposed to having something that was already started that would have helped you formulate the Strategy faster?”*

## **The Portfolio Holder for Environment answered:**

Firstly no, once again you are quite wrong in asserting that we have only just woken up to the environment. This last Council, over the last four years, did many many good things and we are in a good shape environmentally because of that.

So once again we are not starting from zero, we have been re-reviewing the Environment Strategy from 2014. So absolutely we have had work in place, we have had activities and we need to build on those and accelerate them absolutely in the light of the resolution of 2<sup>nd</sup> July Council - the climate emergency.

But we have ample material to integrate. Part of the challenge of course is not simply cutting and pasting another Strategy which might work well in other areas, but looking for and finding the very specific things which are right for our residents and our district.

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

*“What is this Council planning to do to ameliorate the extra traffic congestion and resulting pollution likely to be caused on the roads leading to the Thatcham level crossing by the extra passenger train services to be introduced in December?”*

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

The new timetable due to come into operation in December will see an increase in the number of passenger trains operating on the Berkshire and Hampshire line. These include additional trains between Reading and Newbury, as well as an increase in longer distance passenger services between London and the West of England (i.e. Devon and Cornwall). In addition there are freight services using the route, which tend to use paths as and when required and therefore have no fixed pattern.

An analysis of the passenger services passing through Thatcham shows that there is likely to be an increase in the downtime for the crossing barriers and officers will monitor the situation with regards to the traffic congestion on approaches to the station and level crossing and comparisons can be made to the current situation. This can be reported again through the Transport Advisory Group.

Air quality and the harmful effects of traffic pollution is something that we take very seriously and we are reviewing the size and message on the advisory signs to encourage drivers to turn off their engines when queuing at the level crossing to make them more prominent.

The reason that the rail timetable can be changed to provide these additional trains is the introduction of electric trains which offer faster acceleration and are cleaner than their diesel counterparts. Taking an overview, the increase in downtime of the barriers and associated possible increase in traffic pollution will partially be off-set by the greener rail travel that is on offer.

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

**Councillor Alan Macro asked the following supplementary question:**

*“Off-peak is currently about six trains per hour going through that crossing and that is likely to increase to eight trains per hour. The average time for the crossing to be closed is five minutes per train, so currently off-peak we are talking about 30 minutes per hour that the crossing is closed and that is likely to increase to 40 minutes off-peak which is going to result in a lot of extra congestion and idling unless the signs can be much more prominent.*

*Will you consider applying the law to stop people leaving their engines idling while they are waiting at the crossing?”*

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

We will take your points into consideration. As I said, this is something that we will need to be monitoring and in all truth we are not going to be able to do that until the new timetable is in, and we can actually see its effect.

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

*“What negotiations have taken place between this Council and the railway companies to request that the extra passenger train services to be introduced in December should call additionally at Thatcham and Theale?”*

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

As part of the development of the new timetable, Great Western Railway (GWR) has been liaising with stakeholders across the GWR network. Through this process, we have seen improvements to services from Hungerford and Kintbury stations through the retention of direct services to/from Reading and London, plus the provision of an extra call at Newbury Racecourse Station.

Whilst welcoming the additional train services between Newbury, Reading and London; we have raised the issue of providing additional calls at Theale and Thatcham on these services with GWR through our regular liaison meetings. Due to the lead-in times for the new timetable, it is not possible to seek any improvements when the new timetable comes into operation in December. However, depending on the wider impact of the services at Reading and London Paddington outlined, it may be possible for some additional calls to be made at Theale and Thatcham for future revisions of the timetable and that is certainly something that we will be keen to take forward. The next review is anticipated to be in May 2020.

We recognise the importance of these additional calls at both Thatcham and Theale Stations, and we will therefore be seeking further dialogue with the Train Planning Team at GWR to see if these can be levered in to the timetable as part of its next revision.

**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 Macro welcomed the points made in the response and did not ask a supplementary question.

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