

Questions and Answers

Executive

Thursday 13 February 2020

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13 February 2020

Questions and Answers



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 Ian Morrin:

“Please could the Portfolio Holder for Planning provide evidence about the experience and capability that West Berkshire Council plan to bring to bear to deliver the Grazeley project including the promised infrastructure and positive environmental benefit?”

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning answered:

Since the option of strategic development at Grazeley appeared in the West Berkshire Spatial Planning Framework in 2016, West Berkshire District Council, together with Wokingham and Reading Borough Councils, has supported the idea of a new garden settlement at Grazeley.

The Grazeley project is a joint effort involving Reading Borough Council, Wokingham Borough Council and ourselves at West Berkshire District Council. The proposal that has been submitted to the Government's Garden Communities fund for approximately 15,000 dwellings of which 10,000 would be within Wokingham and 5,000 in West Berkshire. It is also subject to securing £252,000,000 of forward funding from the Government Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) and we are still awaiting a decision on that.

The Council is very successful in terms of delivering development with our current housing delivery standing at 107% of the Government's housing target and this delivery is associated with the appropriate level of infrastructure. We have long held the belief that the developer should provide the requisite infrastructure and not rely on the existing residents of West Berkshire to provide that.

We have also improved the junction of the A339 and secured funding for the upgrade of the railway station in Newbury including the new lifts.

The Council has also delivered the West Berkshire Living Landscape in partnership with the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust which is 27Km². We have introduced the Car Club for Newbury (which is the first in the country for a town of its size) and where the Council cannot deliver the required infrastructure by itself it has lobbied other bodies to ensure it gets delivered and this includes the Electrification of the main line in to Newbury.

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 Morrin asked the following supplementary question:

“Thank you, but this very comprehensive answer does not really quite answer the question which I asked. I think I can also point to a list of infrastructure projects which have not worked, so the London Road Industrial Estate, was an infrastructure project but is a big development project, Sandford has not been deployed yet, difficulties in getting that over the line. It is a complex site – 15,000 homes, two big land owners, multiple different agents for those land owners, putting forward different plans and the significant issues with it. I would really like to understand how you have priced in the infrastructure because £252,000,000 given that junction

11 is going to need a re-fit and there is no highways money because that has been spent on the current refit of it, they are not going to do it again, all that money is going elsewhere, a new station that is in the plan, a couple of schools, the roads, I am pretty certain that that will top out at £252,000,000 so that is therefore then going to have to come out of the developer's funds. So just how much do you think this is going to cost to deliver from an infrastructure bill? We have not even got in to issues like flood prevention?"

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning answered:

Thank you - to address your first point about London Road Industrial Estate we are carrying out a master planning exercise at the moment, and with regard to Sandleford I still have the confidence that will be delivered according to our local plan. With regard to the Grazeley development, the HIF bid is for the basic infrastructure, it does not include things like schools which would come out of the development, it is for the basic infrastructure to enable that development to continue, to commence and it has been thoroughly costed. Wokingham Borough Council are leading on this and they have a big project team in Wokingham and we have regular monthly meetings with them. So I am confident that it has been covered off.

(b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning by Mr Alan Pearce:

"In light of the recent recommendation by planning officers to refuse the application to develop the old Newbury Weekly News site with 81 apartments, primarily due to the risk of flood, does the Council honestly believe that building flats on the adjoining football ground will ever be a practical or sensible option?"

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning answered:

The regeneration of the London Road Industrial Estate has been a long term ambition of the Council and is referred to in the adopted Core Strategy. However, no master plan of how the regeneration will be achieved has been produced and considered by the local planning authority. It is therefore not correct to say that flats will be built at the football ground.

Indeed, the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) which was published on line on the Council web site at the end of January states that the London Road Industrial Estate is "potentially developable in part" for residential, employment and retail. The reference on the website is NEW1.

Every planning application has to be treated on its merits and take into account the most up to date information and planning policies at both the national and local level when it is being determined. Of the two planning applications for the redevelopment of the Newspaper House site which went before the Western Area Planning Committee on Wednesday 5th February, the application to which you refer was withdrawn. The second application was, however, refused on the grounds that there are suitable and available alternative sites at a lower risk of flooding.

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 asked the following supplementary question:

"I am concerned about the drainage, the sustainable drainage in relation to the development, would you ever consider keeping the football ground in the future."

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning answered:

I have mentioned we are doing a master plan for the site, and I am not in a position at the moment to say or predict what the outcome of the master planning will be.

(c) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning by Mr Lee McDougall:

"Can the Council please detail what funds are currently held in "Developer contributions towards local infrastructure, services and amenities" account (contributions secured through the Community Infrastructure Levy ("CIL") and through S106 obligations?"

As Mr McDougall was not at the meeting he received the following written response.

"The West Berkshire Community Infrastructure Levy Charging Schedule was adopted in March 2014. It became effective on 1 April 2015.

In accordance with the CIL Regulations 2010, the Council publishes an Annual CIL Monitoring Report on its website

The total CIL income collected since 2015 when the regulations came into effect to date is £12.6m.

15% of all CIL receipts are passed to the town or parish council in which a development is located. And in the case of a town or parish council having an adopted Neighbourhood Development Plan that increases to 25% of all CIL receipts.

The CIL Regulations also require local councils (parish and town councils) to publish an annual report on their website of the CIL receipts they have received and spent each financial year, by 31 December of every year.

With regard to s106 the Council held £10.6 million as of January 2020.

The Council Budget book for 2019/2020 which is available on line shows the anticipated expenditure for both CIL and s106 up to 2022.

Additionally, on 1st September last year, new CIL Regulations came into effect which means that data on CIL and s106 receipts, and the projects this income funds have to be published in an annual report called an Infrastructure Funding Statement. The first Infrastructure Funding Statement is required to be published by 31 December 2020 to cover the financial period 2019/20."

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

“Please detail what requirements brief has been given to Avison Young to provide consultancy and a report on all options regarding the location / re-provision of the Football Ground at Faraday Road.”

The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing answered:

Firstly, I should advise that the question is probably not worded quite I think as you intended. Avison Young have no football brief at all, however, we have appointed Standard Surfacing Ltd who are experts in the field of sports surfaces to carry out a feasibility study on alternative sites as potential replacements for the Faraday Road ground. Invitations were sent to five specialist consultants, Standard were selected because of their extensive and relevant experience having carried out in excess of 50 such assignments. The brief was to evaluate the pros and cons of developing a Step 6 community ground with floodlights, car parking and facilities to comply with all the requirements of the appropriate FA football league. So this will include access, public and player safety, business case, development plan (which will be carbon neutral), constraints and mitigation measures, costs and timescales.

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:

“Just picking up from the response from Hilary Cole there, just to be 100% clear, so what you are saying I think Councillor Jones is that part of Standard, part of their brief would be to look at retaining the football ground at its current location. Is that correct?”

The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing answered:

No, I said it is to look at alternative sites as potential replacement for the Faraday Road.

“Let me be 100% clear here, are you saying that Councillor policy is not to allow the Football ground to stay where its current location is, is that what you are telling me?”

That is the current assumption.

“That’s your policy is it? Ok.”

That’s the brief I’m working to.

“I just want to be 100% clear, that’s fine, I just want to be 100% clear. That’s your policy yes? Thank you very much.”

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

“Please advise on the anticipated cost and completion timescales for the brief given to Avison Young.”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance/Public Health and Community Wellbeing answered:

Well the cost of the work will be up to £18,000 and we are in a hurry so the target for completion has been set for 31st March.

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 Paul Morgan asked the following supplementary question:

“How long do you think would be reasonable to wait for the Standard company or whoever is doing it to actually come up with an alternative venue? Would it be 6 months, 12 months, a year, 18 months? So how long do you think it would be reasonable to wait until they come up with an alternative location? That’s my question.”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance/Public Health and Community Wellbeing answered:

There are a number of stages that we have to go through for any infrastructure development project, this initial contract takes us to the end of March where we want to understand what the options are and we will then work with the users, and the surrounding residents of those locations to work out how to do the project? I can’t at this stage, anticipate how long that will take. We are in a hurry, we want to do it as fast as we possibly can.

(f) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance by Mr John Stewart:

“Please detail the total Council expenditure in the last 10 years on maintaining and keeping the Faraday Road Football Ground in a “good and decent state” as per its legal obligations under Section 10 of Open Spaces Act.”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance answered:

The former football ground on the London Road Industrial Estate is not public open space in terms of the 1906 Act. All tenants of the former football ground have occupied the site on a full repair and maintenance lease so where the Council had no responsibility for maintaining the pitch, buildings and associated infrastructure. That said, in order to reasonably maintain grass quality until new access arrangements are in place, the Council has spent to date £1,500 on grass cutting and fence repairs.

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 the following supplementary question:

“So you’re saying it is not open space, and we have no responsibility as landlords with the tenants with the lease to maintain the site at all and are you saying by the fact that it’s got dilapidated that that’s acceptable?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance answered:

I am saying that it is not open public space as defined in the Open Spaces Acts 1906 as specified by your question.

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

“Please advise why the Faraday Road Football Ground cannot be re-opened for organised community 11-aside football through the provision of temporary toilets and changing rooms, which will be less than the original budget allocation for the MUGA proposal.”

The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing answered:

In view of the many representations made to the Council by Newbury Community Football Group with regard to using Faraday in the current interim period before the London Road regeneration programme begins, the Council is keen that the ground is opened for community use as soon as is practical. However there has been a debate on the best way to do this, the best use, costs and so on. Feedback from the Community group (and that is all the feedback we have received), suggests that the MUGA is not the best consideration because of rising costs. Consequently, the Council's Executive decided instead to simply prepare the surface for good quality play and make it available for casual community use.

Further inspection has shown that the ground, specifically the buildings, to be unsafe for public access at the moment, and this needs to be addressed by measures to ensure public safety before any use is allowed. Our countryside team is working on that right now, and looking for the most comprehensive and also affordable way of doing this. So we have acceded to the request to make a flexible pitch available, for full size or youth/mini pitches, it could be flexible configured, together with a short fence around the pitch itself.

I am aware, that only casual use does not meet the demand of the Community Football Group for a fully competitive facility, but it does allow the community to access and use the ground. We are wary of encouraging each area to establish Faraday as a regular home ground because it would be unfair shortly down the line, to disrupt a club's location again. Also, we cannot, and a team could not, fulfil the requirements of a higher league so the increased investment in the facilities, booking system and changing etc would be wasted.

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 the following supplementary question:

“So you could easily allow an ad-hoc review of the system and you could improve its fence and keep it secure. So are you saying that we could only have a small fence around it and everybody could access it all the time? Is that what you are implying?”

The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing answered:

We need to do three elements of fencing - we need to make sure the buildings are off limits, we need to make sure the outer ground perimeter fence is repaired as it is not secure at the moment and we need to separate the players from the people who are standing around the pitch so those are the measures that we need to address?

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

“Could the Council please provide the detail behind their latest announcement to put fencing around the abandoned grass area at the Faraday Football ground instead of the unpopular “expensive” MUGA.”

The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing answered:

I think that my last answer to Mr Stewart largely answers the question, but to repeat, the Council need to repair the outer boundary fence which is not secure at the moment. We need to provide fencing or some other measure to protect the public from the dangerous building and we want to provide a short fence around the pitch to separate play from any spectators.

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 Paul Morgan asked the following supplementary question:

“I’ve noticed that when we went to have a look at the site survey for the planning application we put in, the metal barrier and little fence has been removed from the ground. My question is – who authorised that and why was it authorised?”

The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing answered:

I’m afraid I can’t answer the question. I’ve tried to find that out but haven’t been able to do so. As far as I’m aware the fence would not be fit for use and was removed and destroyed?

“Could you find out for me please who authorised that and why was it authorised. Was it sold for example? I would just like to know the detail of that. Surely it must be available?”

I’ll do the best I can.

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

“What consultation took place in order to justify yet another policy change with respect to the Faraday Football Ground Asset of Community Value (ACV)?”

The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Wellbeing answered:

The questions about consultation have been answered before. It is not possible for the Council to publicly consult on every single decision. Residents will realise that this is simply not possible as the Council business would grind to a halt if this was the case. As far as we were concerned this was an operational decision and not a policy decision and was partly based upon representations from your own group which acted as a consultee on the proposal.

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 Paul Morgan asked the following supplementary question:

“You are right, we did give you feedback on that, but my question is, why does the Council not follow the same consultation policy? You consulted with us about the money - why did you not consult about the next stage? Why are you not following your own consultation policy, that’s my question”?

The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Wellbeing answered:

I think I’ve answered the question, we don’t consult on every operational decision, and in fact one of the complaints that was made was that we didn’t consult enough on LRIE and we didn’t do that because again we regarded that as an operational decision. You only consult where it really needs a policy and strategic decision.

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

“Can the Council confirm it still believes that Northcroft is a viable location for the re-provision of the existing Faraday Road football stadium, as it outlined at the Newbury Vision Conference in Oct 2018?”

The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing answered:

In my answer to Mr Morgan’s first question earlier I referred to the feasibility work into the potential location for the new provision of the grounds to replace Faraday. I can confirm that Northcroft is one of three sites which is being examined. How viable it is depends upon the outcome of the consultants’ evaluation.

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:

“In view of the fact that you are now stating that the ground will be relocated and there is obviously going to be time to go through the plans and develop plans and everything else. What is stopping the Council temporarily using the Faraday Road pitch, reopening the pitch so that it can be used until the alternative ground is available?”

The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing answered:

What is stopping us is the fact that the current ground needs a lot of work and we haven’t been able to do that work to make it safe for the public to use again and that has included preparing the playing pitch for football players, renewing fencing, making the ground safe, and that is what we are planning to do.

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

(a) **Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care by Councillor Owen Jeffery:**

"What was the average number of empty bed nights in West Berkshire Council care homes in December 2019?"

The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care answered:

Based on data covering the 4 weeks commencing 02/12/19, the average number of empty beds on a given day is 22.

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 Owen Jeffery asked the following supplementary question:

"If we have an average of 21 empty bed spaces through this period, can we please, and I'll make this just as a request, can we do a piece of work on finding a better utilisation of those empty spaces instead of buying in excess room in places like Swindon and so on because I think it would seem to me that we are missing a trick in being able to use our homes up to close to 100% rather than spending money on putting people in other locations."

The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care answered:

I think my answer would be of course you've got to interrogate the numbers to work out why bedrooms are empty. There's a story to be told about some of this, firstly so far as Willow's Edge is concerned one of the rooms which is included in the 21, is relatively unusable because it hasn't got space for a hoist. Five of the rooms at Willows were coming back in to use during this timescale, because there had been a burst pipe or a flooded boiler, which meant that 5 of them were out so we can actually suggest that because they were back in use by this point, but of course they can take time to get people in to them. And then of course you regrettably have periods of time where a room ceases to be used because unfortunately the occupant dies and therefore you have a period between a death and that room being used again. So it's not true to say that at all times, 21 rooms within the system are being unused. It's an average, we need to look at the questions as to, I am in fully agreement with you that I would like to see us utilising the spaces in our own care homes and certainly it's part of the modernising adult social care piece that we are looking at our care home provision and certainly want to move to. I would love to have 100% occupancy, it will never ever be 100% occupancy, and I am very keen to see us use the rooms we've got.

(b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by Councillor David Marsh:

“What is the current amount of tree cover in West Berkshire (in hectares, and as a percentage of the total area of the district), and how much of this is on council-owned land?”

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

Tree coverage will clearly be an important measure going forward and is something that the Council is actively calculating as part of the delivery of the new Environment Strategy.

Following the purchase of new software recently, we are in the process of mapping the amount of tree cover and this information will be available in line with the publication of the approved strategy.

Our intention is to be able to provide analysis split between the privately owned and Council owned land and as you have laid out, hopefully the measurements with hectares, the expectation is that it will be actually detail that we’ve never had access to before and I’ll happily share that information with you and everybody else at the earliest opportunity.

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 confirmed that he did not have a supplementary question.

(c) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by Councillor David Marsh:

“How many trees has or will the Council plant on an annual basis between 2015 and 2021?”

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

Historically tree planting has been less programmed and more opportunistic I think it’s fair to say; and dependent on the work of the Council’s Countryside team undertake in any particular year. Therefore data for previous years on the number of trees planted is not readily available. I am pleased to say, however that this financial year 2019/20 we are planting a total of 750 trees. Next financial year we are already planning to plant in excess of 1,000 trees and we will take all opportunities to increase this further as they arise. It’s fair to say that this has not been regarded as a key strategy historically, however as the strategy for environment developed, it was clear that this was a matter of focus that we want to take on exceptionally seriously and one that we are happy to develop. I should state however that our aim is to look more holistically at natural carbon reduction and not solely at tree planting. That might include for example wetland regeneration as well as afforestation or urban tree planting.

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 the following supplementary question:

“Just briefly, we note from the budget that you’ve set aside £40,000 for an urban tree project which we would welcome. I just wondered if you could say any more about your plan of wider aspirations, bearing in mind that you say it’s in the Environment Strategy which talks somewhat vaguely about more trees and the other things that you’ve mentioned. But I mean 1,000 is not a lot if you consider that Oxford City Council this week announced doubling tree cover and you’ve got a 40,000 hectare forest being planted in Cornwall, and these sorts of projects are happening all over and it seems that you’ve said really that in previous years we haven’t really had much ambition in this area, so just how imaginative and how vigorous can we be in terms of what we can achieve in West Berkshire both in the short term, and certainly by 2030 when as you know we’re aiming for carbon neutrality?”

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

What I would say is that within the KPI’s that were discussed earlier, there are a couple of elements there which would mean that we were being performance managed if nothing else the first steps of which are to make sure we can do feasibility studies and make sure we are in the right place, moving in the right direction and have a target which will deliver something more akin to those sort of numbers that you’ve come up with and those sort of projects that are being dealt with elsewhere. We know for example that the structure of bonds coming forward is something that financially will be able to support matters for the environment and I am certainly keen to put my hat in the ring so to speak to make sure that these sort of projects are fundamental as part of that development.

(d) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by Adrian Abbs:

“What is the council proposing to do about the maintenance program on drains which results in excessive flooding and long delays addressing reported issues, particularly on Monks Lane in Wash Common which took 3 months to address?”

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

I partly advised this at the Full Council meeting on 9th January to public questions, the Council undertake cyclic maintenance including gully cleansing on a risk based approach in accordance with current guidance. The roadside gullies on Monks Lane specifically are cleansed annually. The exceptionally wet weather over the last few months has brought to Officers’ attention a number of issues on the network, and Monks Lane was one of those. Following a lengthy ongoing investigation, Officers have discovered that a utility company had damaged the connection between the gullies on Monks Lane and the carrier drain which has meant this particular flooding issue has taken longer than we would have liked to have resolved.

A temporary solution is in place and the road is draining, although not at full capacity at the moment. Further investigation is currently under way to identify the utility company and enforcement action will be taken to ensure that they fix the damage they have caused. As I’m sure you can appreciate, there are hundreds of utility works on the West Berkshire network at any given time, and it’s impossible to micro-supervise each and every one of them. The kind of activity is not something utilities would do with West Berkshire Streetworks Officers present so we would expect them to behave when we were on site I suppose is another way of putting that. But certainly something that we are not going to be letting go of and we will continue to investigate that matter.

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:

“Thank you very much for that clear response. As I get in to my supplementary here, it sounds like you’re not really looking at increasing the frequency of maintenance on drains as standard and my question comes, given that there won’t be any increased maintenance, once a year I think you said in this particular case at Monk’s Lane, and given the reality of the climate change that’s upon us, doesn’t it become even more important to increase the frequency of this maintenance because we are way past the one in a hundred years events which most of these were set up for, and we’re almost every other year right now so could we see an increase in maintenance regular checking.”

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

I accept what you’re saying I think the key thing is that we are not straying from the guidance which is out there, if that guidance changes then clearly we will need to review and fall in line with it. Obviously we’ve got a wide area to cover and.

“It’s just the residents are suffering quite a lot that’s all.”

There are other measures that have been taken around and about the district as well. Such as Tull Way for example where you are able to take a different approach to dealing with flood water. I do accept the problem you’ve raised and it’s something certainly that I will review with Officers, but as it stands, as I say we are meeting the guidance that we are bound to.

(e) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by Councillor Adrian Abbs:

“What is the council proposing to do about the maintenance program for paths which results in dangerous walking conditions for pedestrians, especially at the bottom of Andover Road, Wash Common?”

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

Footway defects are identified as part of the routine safety inspections or are reported by members of the public which can be done via our online reporting system. The site will then be assessed and if deemed dangerous it will be made safe, or if more substantive work is considered necessary it will be added to the Council’s Capital programme for future work. You will be pleased to know that I have arranged for Officers to visit the Andover Road issue and thank you for bringing it to our attention. I’m not aware that this matter had previously been recorded, but I would remind all Members present and for dissemination to those that aren’t, that any such issues can be recorded via our website ‘Report a problem’ page and I’ve actually used that successfully myself just this morning.

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:

"It's encouraging to see action has been taken, so thank you very much for that for sending someone round. I think the supplementary becomes that the current state of play is, people need to report to you something that's wrong, and would you not consider or agree with me that in fact as we have many Officers, especially Parking Officers, out and around most of the time and other people visiting around the estate, should we not be more proactive and actually look for these things before they become reportable issues?"

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

I have nothing to suggest that those very people are not reporting via the Report a Problem page but that is certainly a communication that I'm sure we would be happy to put to all members of staff, certainly as I say from a Members' point of view. I'm sure we would all report irrespective of what the issue may be, but there's no reason why any member of staff out and about shouldn't be able to do exactly the same thing I would expect them to do.

"I know it's not normally allowed, but may I suggest just a small KPI for some of those people to encourage them to do it?"

Councillor Lynne Doherty answered:

We're happy to take on board those comments Councillor Abbs, but I notice your questions are very ward specific and as Ward Members they're core and part and parcel of our case work which we can all as Ward Members take to Officers, each and every one of us deals with different situations like this on a daily basis we don't need to bring them in to this forum to get those answers resolved. Councillor Somner said there is a reporting page, well if that isn't achieving what it needs to achieve then we all have that capability of going to sit and speak to an Officer, or emailing them and everything else and for me some of this ward specific stuff is really about what my role is on my ward and how we are interacting, I appreciate you are a new member and everything.

"I appreciate what you are saying Chair, but this was meant to bring out not just my particular ward's issues which seem to be suffering quite badly but as far as I do live in a separate ward to the one I represent, I'm right next door, and it's happening there as well so this is not a ward specific issue, this is a West Berkshire issue."

(f) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by Councillor Adrian Abbs:

"What is the council proposing to do about the enforcement of hedge trimming that is forcing people off of poorly maintained footpaths into the roads, especially at the bottom of Andover Road and Fifth Road in Wash Common?"

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

Firstly, the responsibility for maintaining hedges lies with the property owners where growing on their land.

However, Highway Officers carry out programmed safety inspections, based on the category of road, and where issues such as overhanging vegetation are recorded and enforcement action can be taken in accordance with legislation - that's part of the Highways Act 1980. This is a form of nuisance and obstruction so I would like it to be considered. Officers also rely on help

from the general public which we have already discussed in previous questions to alert them of these problems, which is always much appreciated.

Personally within my own Parish we worked with Officers to draft a letter which could be posted through the letterbox by Officers or by Wardens, and this letter advises the owner if they weren't aware previously or resident that there is an issue, that it's been noted and asked respectfully for them to take the appropriate action and deal with it. I have to say this has been successful on many many occasions within the parish. I would again therefore like to thank you for bringing this to our attention and advise you that appropriate action has been taken on this matter.

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:

“Thank you very much, that's very good to know. I think, before I get to the supplementary you see why I wanted to ask the three together because having separated them out, I can't actually make the point I was talking about, which was because we have flooding issues with the drains being blocked, which is now meaning paths will be blocked with flooding and then we have the hedges pushing people in to it. We have got to link those three things together as they are producing some very dangerous spots in West Berkshire, where I've seen it myself, where children and their mothers are having to go out in to the road effectively to get round these various things, and so without the proper maintenance programme and enforcement programmes and so on, West Berkshire wide, we're going to sooner or later find ourselves in quite a lot of trouble when an accident happens. So my supplementary is, can we not make this more proactive. We seem to be reacting to things that are important when I say I think we've got plenty of people out there with eyes on, there are Officers that could possibly give us a faster result/resolution on these issues.”

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

The issue is, it can be done on a wide scale. If you've got a particular issue which has been recorded, such as the ones that you've raised here, and they've not been dealt with, then I'm more than happy for you to come to me, to speak to Head of Service, or you're quite welcome to speak to the Officers yourself as the Leader said earlier on. We don't just rely on the public and it's important to note that we don't rely on the public, but we are grateful for any notices that the public bring to our attention. Our Officers can't be all over the place at the same time clearly. So where it's on a main road I totally accept what you are saying, it should be obvious, and it should be picked up and it should be dealt with. And that's a message that I'm happy to get put out to all.

“I know it's not normally allowed, but some of these things we are seeing are right outside schools, and the growth is many years of growth. I do appreciate what you've just said, we just seem to have got behind a curve a little bit on it.”

And in fairness, if it's a school hedge then it's the schools responsibility to look after it. So there's a crossover there which says it's not all down to enforcement from Officers to report it.

“That particular one was actually outside of the school grounds.”

Okay send me the details.

“Will do.”

(g) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment by Councillor Martha Vickers:

“In light of the recent allegations made by Clare Perry, the sacked president of the committee responsible for organising the Climate Change Conference in Glasgow this coming November, will this Council lobby the MP for Newbury who is vice chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on the Environment to challenge the Government on its commitment to Climate Change?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment answered:

Yes, thank you for this question Councillor Vickers – No. We are very fortunate in that our MP Laura Farris is as you say Vice Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on the Environment and she already has demonstrated very considerable access to various government departments because again, as you are aware, we need, this Council needs the support and the backing and the drive of government in a number of vital areas. And we are all aware of things like housing standards, and I’m keenly looking forward to the detail of the government’s very recent announcement around funding for additional bus and cycle routes which they made as part of HS2. But in terms of your wording to challenge the government, is totally wrong. This government has a very strong commitment to the environment and we look forward, as I’m sure everybody here does, we look forward to seeing details of how that develops in time.

Finally, I would like to thank you for using your remarkable – perhaps almost psychic foresight in allowing me to express delight that one of our MP’s - Alok Sharma is now of course responsible for the COP 26 climate conference – a hugely responsible post, and again we are fortunate in having close access to him.

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 Martha Vickers asked the following supplementary question:

“Yes, it was very liberating(?) to hear that Alok Sharma has just been appointed so thank you for your answer. I was hoping that proximity of Alok Sharma to Newbury constituency might make Laura Farris’s job of holding the government to account a little easier. But can I ask you, do you agree that a delay of two months in appointing a minister for organising the climate change conference and this question was about the climate change conference - a very, very important conference, that just shows a seriously worrying lack of urgency on the government’s part, this is meant to be an emergency – a climate emergency, and I don’t think the government is responding very quickly.. Do you agree?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment answered:

No, again, I do not agree. It is absolutely critical, and I share your expression that this is a critical conference, the key thing about this conference which will make it difficult for any holder, I can’t think of any opposition politician in this country who would have a decent chance of making a good fist of it, is to not only at the national but far more hard to pull in the Chinese, the Americans, the Indians, and everyone and to bring together a workable and possible agreement. So no it is not displaying lack of urgency, yes it’s an emergency, but there is no lack of urgency here, it’s just really critical that the machinery of that complex diplomatic effort,

is headed up by a high calibre and a strong politician, and again I'm looking forward to seeing Alok Sharma do well in the role.

Councillor Lynne Doherty added:

Before we move on, can I just pick up a point of order there with you, just that you mention that we would have Laura Farris to work through the Newbury Constituency but we are actually a West Berkshire local authority so Alok is actually one of our MP's who we already work closely with and we're very fortunate to have Members of Reading West sat with us on those decisions. So just that we're not purely Newbury centric, we are West Berkshire, so just a point of order there, this is not just about Newbury, actually Alok Sharma has been the Reading West MP that we have worked closely with for a number of years, so actually we would all like to extend our congratulations to Alok and we are all delighted with his appointment today just on a point of order there, thank you.

(h) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing by Councillor Martha Vickers:

"Why, despite the Leader stating at a recent meeting of OSMC that the proposed merger of local CCG's would be discussed at the Health and Well Being Board, was it given barely two minutes?"

The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing answered:

The short and simple answer to your question is that it was very poor chairmanship from the chairman given an hour and half and we're now out of time so you'll have to go at the end. We have to - given that we have senior partners from our partner organisations attending, we want them to be senior, we have a sole implicit promise that we'll keep meetings roughly to time. And we did overrun by 15 minutes, but that was as much as I felt we could have done. That's the answer to your question.

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 Martha Vickers asked the following supplementary question:

"Thank you Councillor Jones, thank you for your answer. I'm sure, and certainly from your answer, it shows that you would agree that this matter does deserve a proper public debate, can you answer me on relation to my question, can you answer me whether what from the Council's website is correct, where it states that OSMC is responsible for examining and reviewing the policies and services at West Berkshire Council, and in some cases, other organisations and partners, our CCG is a partner. So in the light of that statement, would you agree that possibly this matter should have been discussed at OSMC which is where I asked it to be discussed, and it would have been more timely and it would have had better discussion and fit."

The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing answered:

I can't answer your question about OSMC, I might refer to my colleague for that. Let me just break it up a little bit. In the October public meeting, there was a very full discussion of the

merger. I have to admit that the NHS is more fond of acronyms than we are. What we refer to as the BOB ICS, which is the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care System, which is governing our area and which has suggested the CCG merger. Their initial plan, their five year plans were discussed in full at that October meeting. Now I understand they didn't have detailed proposals at that stage. The detailed proposals were then discussed in the November informal meeting which is not public. But that produced a very detailed and robust response on the proposals at that stage. The January meeting occurred just after we had received the information as to how we structure the plan, and we did get an update from the CCG Chief Officer on what was being planned and her commentary around it. So the public were informed about what was happening, but I agree, I didn't allow enough time for a full debate.

This is not the last time the subject is going to be discussed and there will be future opportunity. I will say though in retrospect, and I was thinking about this afterwards? Given the nature of the public forum and the fact that we've only just got this information, I believe the decision has basically already been taken. So if we are going to respond to it as a Health and Wellbeing Board; a) I think we need other boards - we need our partners to be part of the same response, and b) I think we need to be really clever in terms of what we are asking for, because simply shooting from the hip and protesting, I don't believe will do any good. I think we have to go back with more detailed suggestions on how we can get the best out of it.

"Ok, I'll make those now. Thank you very much for that, that was a very complete answer."

(i) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment by Martha Vickers:

"Can the Council tell me what plans there are in place to reduce food waste and ensure that existing food recycling facilities are used correctly?"

The Portfolio Holder for Environment answered:

Yes and again thank you for your second question Councillor Vickers. So this Council is fully committed to achieving greater environmental stewardship going forward and we are supporting the reduction of food waste generated by households in a wide number of ways.

We have a frequent and regular social media posting – I can share details of the Facebook page if you are in to that and wish to share it further (@Westberkshirerecycles). There's a campaign using the moniker 'Love Food Hate Waste' (LFHW) and again, while there is a long way to go as you are well aware, we are determined to continue widening and repeating that message and encouraging residents to be more conscious and responsible with their food waste. We as you know, also distribute a newsletter with bins; there are hangers, and each of these are opportunities to repeat this message and the community groups who we work with on an ongoing basis we provide samples of food portion measures and fridge thermometers and things like this and we put adverts in parish and community magazines. So those are the ongoing communications tools that are currently used.

Stepping up a pace though we are planning soon to put stickers on all black bins, encouraging residents not to put food in there and food is the key recyclable element which again ideally, everyone should cease doing. So first it will be stickers to remind householders to separate their food waste collection and we are already exploring and wish to move as swiftly as is practicably possible, in to a separate household food based collection, ideally on a weekly basis. We are looking at a feasibility study and will be going through the detail options on this, but I do look forward to bringing back a detailed proposal on that as soon 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 Martha Vickers asked the following supplementary question:

“Thank you very much. I’m pleased to hear about the labelling, as I think that would be very useful and also you did mention ‘Love food hate waste’ I was going to just bring that forward for the supplementary. I really don’t think it’s publicised, do you agree it’s not really publicised enough? I’ve done this test myself and the idea is one goes out and spreads the message in one’s own community group, so I think it really is a very very important information that the owner puts forward in the ‘Love Food Hate Waste’ campaign. I think it does need more champions out there, so I hope their courses are ongoing and thank you for all the suggestions that we have a special bin for food waste. It’s a bit of a shame that a lot of people have stopped having their green bins which you could put food waste in to and which you already do, so, a lot of people have given up.”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment answered:

Sorry, is there a question in there, I appreciate the sentiment you’ve been saying but is there a question?

“So the food waste bin that you’re bringing forward, is that going to be, we’re not talking about reintroducing the previous green bin which was withdrawn. This is going to be a little bin?”

This will be a brand new bin Councillor Vickers, and we look forward to seeing the size and the shape and colour of it indeed.

“A new green bin?”

Indeed.

(j) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by Councillor Tony Vickers:

“What evidence does the Council have that Newbury Car Club has been a success (or otherwise) when considering that Council policy now requires most Newbury housing developments to contribute towards ensuring the continued existence of the car club?”

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

For clarity, the Council does not require most Newbury housing developments to contribute towards ensuring the continued existence of the car club. There are two main instances where contributions to the car club may be requested for Newbury residential developments. These are when they are delivering a number of units considered suitable for an extension of the existing car club (the Market Street development of 232 homes will be such an example). Or in very specific circumstances where a development cannot comply with the required parking provision and it’s considered that a contribution to the car club in lieu of full compliance with parking standards is acceptable. This, however, is not the norm and is not a way of developments justifying non-compliance with the Council’s tested policy on parking provision.

Turning to the evidence of the Car Club's performance. At the end of 2019 there were 103 members of the Newbury Car Club. The use of the car club has increased year on year since it began in 2016. Comparing data from the last two years, we can see that in 2018 there were 649 bookings and these journeys covered some 27,776 miles. It seems to be quite an exact figure as well. In 2019 this increased to 1,004 bookings covering 40,686 miles. These figures represent a 46% increase in mileage and a 55% increase in the number of bookings between the two years.

The question asks whether the car club has been a success - but I might suggest that defined success is relevant to the individual. The organisation that operates the car club, aims to achieve a utilisation rate of at least 20% so this is a good starting point against which we can measure Newbury's car club performance.

There are 5 cars within the car club. Their utilisation rates range from 9% through to 26% with a mixture of cars exceeding the 20% minimum target and others still heading in the right direction. Those utilisation rates are calculated using Co-Wheels' methodology and assuming an availability of the vehicles 24 hours a day.

We therefore have evidence that shows the car club is firmly being established in Newbury Town Centre and there is capacity for it to grow and be a great choice for more residents to replace a second car or car ownership altogether.

Further I can say that the evidence, supported by conversations held in some of our rural communities recently, suggests there is opportunity for further growth outside of Newbury and this is something that we are going to explore further.

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 Tony Vickers asked the following supplementary question:

"Thank you very much for that encouraging answer. My supplementary is as a person who persuaded the Newbury Racecourse developers to widen the net as it were when they were going to introduce the car club just for their residents. I was concerned when I read in a recent planning application officers report that certain Officers clearly don't feel that the viability of the car park is guaranteed and that was the reason why they didn't accept a car park contribution from an application which met the criteria that you described, i.e. it was town centre, no additional parking spaces on the site that the outcome was offering.

So I will ask you as a supplementary whether in the light of that single comment from one of our own highways officers, that you can reassure us that the Council is fully behind this and will publicise it more, because it's rather like the food waste issue that Martha was mentioning. I don't believe the car club is publicised nearly enough. I'm sure it will be a success, but five cars for the whole of Newbury doesn't sound like something that is generally well used or well known."

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

Points noted. I will certainly take the matter of unified understanding of what's being offered to all officers, is something that will be shared. I think where we are at the moment is as I said that we know we've got success, it's been slow growing potentially, but it does seem to be taking off. I think people are far more engaged now with the whole principle of car sharing, electric vehicles and moving away from those old mind-sets that we used to have. With regards

to advertising it more, certainly something that I'm happy to look in to. I know periodically we can put something out there, I'll accept that maybe that is something we can do more frequently.

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